Hillary Place Papers

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Hillary Place Papers Issue 6 (2021)

Welcome to Issue 6 of Hillary Place Papers!

Hillary Place Papers provides an opportunity for early career researchers to experience the peer review process as used across the world of academic publishing and the opportunity to see their work published under the auspice of a leading research university.

But HPP goes one step further by providing post-graduate students with the opportunity to experience the publication process from the editorial and publication perspective. So, in line with the previous two editions, the editorial team consists of post-graduate researchers working alongside faculty members of the University of Leeds School of Education. This approach is now an established feature of Hillary Place Papers and has been adopted to provide experience of the peer review process to post-graduates and provide authors with feedback within a relatively short period of time in order to expedite the process and support their development as researchers.

The experience of working as part of an editorial team of enthusiastic post-graduates working with and being guided by experienced academics provides a rich insight into the publication and peer review process. Every member of the editorial team would testify to the benefits of such a collegiate and friendly experience, and it is an opportunity that is open to all post-graduate researchers at the School of Education.

And it goes further than writing or reviewing papers! For example, it offers the opportunity to develop the website content and presentation, or to use social media to call for papers and promote the issues. It also provides experience of working as a team, managing the process and communicating with faculty members and authors, and much more. So, there is a range of ways in which you can contribute to the process.

If you are interested in getting involved in the next issue, either as an author or as part of the editorial team, our advice would be to keep an eye on the website and get involved at the earliest opportunity!

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The 2020/2021 Issue 6 of Hillary Place Papers

As we all know, the last eighteen months have seen the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and like all other parts of society, the day-to-day activities of university life have been disrupted. For those conducting research, timetables have had to respond, and approaches have had to be modified. But research has continued, and researchers have shown their resilience and creativity in developing or adapting revised methods to ensure their projects continued. The papers in this edition are a testimony to the resilience of the research community.

In this issue, the focus is on **Learning from the Pandemic: in Research and in Practice** so that we can share the experiences of how post-graduate researchers have responded to the demands and limitations of the pandemic to ensure that their respective projects continue and meet the demands of rigorous research.

In the first paper**, Gemma Carr** and **Karen Tatham** report on the way in which COVID-19 has transformed the qualitative interview process as remote video has become the modus operandi and challenged the dominance of face-to-face interviews. The paper explores how virtual access creates geographic freedoms but raises subjective risks from interviewing in the virtual space through a delineation of what is 'public' or 'private' as participants and researchers share their domestic spheres.

Eleanor Craig reflects on how in the second year of a PhD project, the impact of COVID-19 required continuous assessment of recruiting participants and research methods. Set in the field of researching Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), the author reflects on the use of charities as gatekeepers in helping to mitigate the ethical challenges in researching vulnerable people. However, at a time when the services of charities were experiencing even higher demand, the paper explores the challenges of recruiting participants through gatekeepers using the author's personal experience of researching CSA as a case study.

Laura Fox considers the challenges of researching the voice of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including language and communication needs, at a time of limited access to schools and face-to-face data collection methods. This necessitates the use of novel and remote ways of collecting data. The challenges faced because of COVID-19, including redesigning the study to accommodate the lack of school availability are discussed, along with the way in which technology can be used to assist in data collection during a pandemic. The paper provides an insight into alternative data collection methods and how this global crisis may have benefited data collection from hard-to-reach samples.

The paper by **Amal Basheikh** examines the use of smartphones in language learning before and after the pandemic and considers the influence of lockdown and online distance learning on students' use of electronic devices and their motivation. The findings of this study provide and insight into how external circumstances and relationships with technology affect the use of mobile devices in language learning.

In the fifth paper by **Lamya Alfadhel** and **Lamya Aloraini**, the authors present an insight into how students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) face the challenges of home learning during full or partial lockdown. The knowledge and the skills required by the family or caregiver suggests that they need to be trained and prepared to use the specific interventions and strategies used for their children in school.

Set in the context of the Algerian education system, the sixth and final paper by **Souhila Kebassi** reports on student's perceived relative values around secondary school scientific and literary pathways. The paper reflects on how COVID-19 impacted the qualitative research design in respect of two domains: first, site and participant selection and second, in terms of data collection methods. The paper highlights the author's experience of remote fieldwork during the pandemic with all its ups and downs, to encourage reflexivity and flexibility in conducting remote qualitative research.

Finally, our thanks again to all those who submitted papers, to all the staff reviewers and to those who worked on the editorial team reviewing papers, advertising the call for papers, and developing the content and appearance of the website at a time when they too were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

'Excuse me, I have a delivery'

The [re] construction of interview 'space' in the Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Covid-19 has transformed the qualitative interview process, as remote video methods have become mainstream, challenging the domination of face-to-face interviews. In the pandemic churn, researchers' focus was on ensuring participants' safety and care in the virtual interview environment. There was more limited consideration of what this 'new normal' meant for the researcher. This reflection draws on two qualitative research projects conducted during the 2020/2021 pandemic period in the UK. We propose that assumptions of 'space' in the qualitative interview process have been (re)constructed in remote interviews during Covid-19. To be present virtually creates geographic freedoms of participant access, but subjective risks from interviewing in the virtual space. Context can no longer be understood through the shared experience of an interview space. There is a delineation of what is 'public' or 'private' as participants and researchers share their domestic spheres. Using ethnographic reflections, we explore the changing notions of geographic, public and private space in the Covid-19 interview.

Introduction

Covid-19 has challenged our qualitative interview practice in the move to remote methods but provides a unique opportunity to reflect on long-held assumptive practices of value and researcher insight from face-to-face qualitative interviews (Mason, 2018; Silverman, 2005). There has been an extensive discourse of remote interview processes in Covid-19, expounding the ease of accessing participants and the gaining of time to create new parameters for sampling including geographic freedoms or possibilities of access (Lupton, 2020). The primary focus in the move to remote methods in Covid-19 was the care of participants. But the practical reality of virtual interviews created changes to our researching experience which we had not anticipated or planned for. Our retrospective analysis of remote interviewing in Covid-19 suggests that as researchers, our assumptions of geographic, public, and private space in the interview process have been tested, suggesting that remote interviews adjust or create new analytic possibilities. We propose that these changes are under-recognised or planned for in qualitative methodologies.

This reflection draws experiential reflections from two Covid redesigned PhD studies, utilising thirty remote qualitative interviews. Gemma Carr (GC) explores the challenges and barriers of Service parents choosing and accessing schools for their children; Karen Tatham (KT) explores how vocational education, employers, and policymakers plan for progression in vocational pathways. Participants were key stakeholders and parents, interviewed via Teams and Zoom platforms.

Howlett (2021, p3) suggests "fieldwork is a form of inquiry that involves researchers entering a new context, a 'field' site (or sites), to carry out their investigation". The pandemic necessitated rethinking previous research designs, utilising remote methods which had not been previously considered or trained for. Remote interviews are nothing new; telephone and Skype interviews have long been a staple of the qualitative researcher (Irani, 2019; Burnard, 1994). Empirical studies of remote methods suggest difficulties for the researcher in building participant rapport, non-verbal cues, tacit knowledge acquisition and interviewer reflectivity in a remote context (Howlett, 2021). Pre-pandemic, video-conferencing remained a niche, professional focus, rather than a mainstream experience for researchers and participants (Lobe et al., 2020).

We feel there are three areas worthy of further methodological exploration from using remote access rather than entry to the physical field. First, we argue that geographic virtual freedoms remove insights into our participants, their communities, and daily lives. Context can no longer be understood through the shared experience of an interview space. This has challenged our understanding of the partial view of researchers, and how physical presence ascribes knowledge about our participants (Mason, 2018). Secondly, assumptions of public and private 'space' in the qualitative interview process have been (re)constructed for the researcher. Remote methods in the pandemic context have constructed new forms of interview space, but also reconstructed previous social scripts and norms as Zoom and Teams become mainstream (Howlett, 2021; Lobe et al., 2020). Finally, to be present virtually creates subjective risks for researcher privacy, through the inadvertent sharing of our context. These three factors mean that in reflectively analysing our Covid-19 interviews, we reframed our notions of context and participant relationships in the virtual interview space.

Pre-pandemic face-to-face qualitative interviews

Face-to-face qualitative interviewing is perceived as the gold standard enabling the researcher to gather a much deeper source of data collection (Irani, 2019, p.3; Jenner and Myers, 2019, p.165). This is through three main factors: social-emotional perceptions of body language, and rapport building; tacit and contextual knowledge through experiencing a shared space and event; and geographic understanding from the interview location (Irani, 2019; Jenner and Myers, 2019; Mason, 2018). In essence, face-to-face interviews, and their execution follow extensively researched interview scripts and social norms (Mason, 2018; Silverman, 2005). The ability to ask questions face-to-face is said to facilitate the research process as the interviewer can build rapport, and read non-verbal signals, such as body language, and can therefore change the flow or focus of questions when required (Irvine et al., 2012). That said, telephone interviewing has been utilised pre-Covid-19 to ameliorate geographic distance (Irvine et al., 2012; Burnard, 1994). Scholars (cf. Holt, 2009; Irvine et al., 2012; Novick, 2008) recognise some limitations for the participant and interviewer when interviewing via telephone. These include a lack of rapport and difficulties in creating a personal interview connection, technical issues, misreading visual signals and cues, or misinterpreting tones of voice. These difficulties can affect participants and researchers (Irvine et al., 2012). However, there are well-documented constraints of face-to-face interviews. Geographic presence incurs high time and financial costs and limits the sample population and geographic reach of a study (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Participants can feel the intrusive nature of a face-to-face interview, and the need to find a relatively private space for discussion can constrain, or affect the interview dynamic (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

Nevertheless, when postgraduate researchers were challenged with moving face-to-face interviews online, it was considered that remote methods were complex and hindering for data collection (Lupton, 2020; Mason, 2018). The use of video conferencing in pre-pandemic research was a niche area. In Covid-19, video communication has become normalised, challenging previous social scripts and conventions of the virtual interview process. Remote methods create new barriers to interview interaction. Howlett (2021) argues online video interviews lose the *in-person* dynamics. Zoom fatigue is now entering the Covid lexicon (Lobe et al., 2020). These factors were under-recognised in remote methodologies from a researcher perspective.

Negotiating the interview space in Covid-19

To understand how as researchers, we are negotiating the interview space remotely, we draw on three lines of inquiry: how virtual geographic freedoms affect our partial view of our participants; how notions of the public space change and provide new insights into participants lives; and finally, how the boundaries of private space have become transformed in the shared space of a virtual interview that the interviewer and participant now share. These factors create a reflection of space where we

can explore our own and theoretical assumptive practice in how we frame and contextualize the qualitative interview experience (Mason, 2018; Edwards and Holland, 2013).

Geographic freedoms and boundary changes in the virtual world

In moving to remote interviews, there are unintended consequences of physical space that we have not previously considered because to be present in familiar communities was the norm in face-to-face interviewing. Mason (2018) argues that being present physically builds up a relationship with the community in which you are researching. However, remote interviews are challenging the notions of how we understand a community. Hughes et al. (2021) suggest the absence of previous norms provides analytic possibilities, yet as researchers during Covid-19, we are questioning how we capture a sense of place during remote interviews.

> In not travelling or visiting I am not 'living' the connectivity, the infrastructure, the geographic place, or the community of my participants. What is my participant's world? I do not know (KT, 2021)

This led us to reflect whether our perceptions of our participants geographic 'place' pre-Covid added a layer of subjective reflections. We understood these as *tacit knowledge*. In reality, Greene(2008) suggests researchers have limited empirical evidence for the insights they assume face-to-face interviews give into communities. We suggest that during virtual interviews, although we lose a visual triangulation to support contextualisation, we remove some potential researcher bias (Mason, 2018; Silverman, 2005).

Greene (2014) suggests researchers prefer to research communities that are already known. This is a form of bias to particular communities but can be argued to support participant access. Pre-existing connections and building relationships with gatekeepers can be key to engaging participants and communicating researcher trust and credibility (Greene, 2014). However, in the pandemic, the importance of prior networks and insider community knowledge was heightened as face-to-face networks and physical connections were removed through lockdowns.

> As a military community spouse, or an 'insider', I had pre-existing connections and community knowledge. My personal and academic network gave me credibility and I built trust quickly with participants despite being in a virtual interview. My knowledge of pandemic pressures as a parent provided empathy and insights when organising interviews (GC, 2021)

Here, despite geographic dislocation, the researcher-participant relationship was supported through insider connections, building rapport and trust. But this raised reflective questions of how we recognise the often complex networks by which we have gained access to participants, and our unique position in being able to research in this community at this time (Greene, 2014).

Public and private space

The virtual world blurs the boundaries between public and private space. In considering how notions of public and private space change in the virtual interview, our research experience suggests that we are creating new forms of online scripts with our participants where we co-create and negotiate the virtual interview experience (Lupton, 2020; Mason, 2018).

Public space

Jenner and Myers (2019) observed the sharing of space with participants is considered to influence the interviewer participant relationship, insofar as, the milieu in which space is shared creates a form of intimacy between both. Nevertheless, they argue public face-to-face interviews do not generate the same data as those conducted within the private space using online methods (Jenner and Myers, 2019, p.169).

> In face-to-face interviews, the social script is often physical as well as verbal … the coffee, the physical signing of consents, the presence, the facial recognition, body language…. pauses…. time to think. But we don't pause on Zoom…

> Instead…. feelings of fatigue, detachment and rush characterise my online interviews (KT, 2021)

In the virtual pandemic reality, new public forms of social scripts for online conversations are emerging. The environment for the interviewer is at once familiar from hours spent on Zoom, and novel from the uncertainty of the virtual encounter:

> Am I in the right room? Are they turning up? Waiting to see if the 'admit' window shows…. What is the etiquette of late…do I email? The relief of connection as introductions are made, backgrounds examined, and small talk whilst checking 'recording' is on. Consent gained. Oh no… is my Wi-Fi stable …? (KT,2021)

We have found that a lack of technological or personal connectivity, is hard to pull back on screen. Lobe et al(2020) describe this as participants feeling an interview is playing out on a screen. 'Zoom fatigue' can lead to feelings of detachment from the interview process. This raises questions of whether participants recognise or are affected by this, or whether in reality, our data collection is unaffected because of the corresponding difficulties of participants 'reading' how the interviewer is feeling (Knapik, 2006).

Hanna (2012) illustrates the advantages of online methods with the key element being that of participant choice. Covid-19 has changed the constraints of choice in many cases the pandemic both removed choice of interview location and enhanced choice for participants. In the lockdowns, the majority of interviews took place in participants own homes, because travel was prohibited and working from home was the new normal (Howlett, 2021; Lobe et al., 2020). Working from home provides advantages for the interviewer and participant to *fit in* an interview. (Howlett, 2021).

As the remote interviewer:

> In my own home, I am familiar with the surroundings, I do not need to access the space or prepare hours in advance to familiarise myself with the location, my materials are easily available to access during the interview, and most importantly I am at ease within my own home (GC, 2021)

Pre-pandemic, participants who wished to attend a face-to-face interview would have been invited to attend a neutral location such as a coffee shop; a neutral public space or a private office (with employer's permissions) at their place of work (Edwards and Holland, 2013; Krueger, 1994). In selecting a neutral location, it is assumed in some cases that the relationship of power between interviewer and participant can be counteracted (Edwards and Holland, 2013; Krueger, 1994). However, this is not without other limitations such as the issues of confidentiality and privacy when public space is accessed (Elwood and Martin, 2000, p.651). We suggest that conducting interviews in participant's space has indirectly empowered participants in the research process:

> As a result, my participant posed the question 'how would you like to do this? Telephone or teams?' (GC, 2021)

This demonstrated that participants retained power in posing the question (Elwood and Martin, 2000; Hanna, 2012, p.239). In this regard, online methods facilitate the relationship of power insomuch as, interviewer and participant may appear as expert as essentially the private spaces they are occupying are neutral to one another. Similarly, this is likely to be a shared consensus from the participant as they too will be familiar with their space, and it is most likely that this facilitates uptake in participation (Howlett, 2021). The pandemic has forced many participants to work remotely from home and upskill during this process. This has empowered participants in remote interviews in a way that would not have occurred in education careers pre-pandemic.

Private space

Elwood and Martin (2000, p.649) illustrate that much of the detail in a socially shared space is determined by perceptions of the physical research location. In turn, they state 'the interview site provides a martial space for the enactment and constitution of power relations' (Elwood and Martin, 2000, p.649). This *power* refers to the notion that either the interviewer or the participant can be considered as the expert within the dynamics of the interview, depending on where the interview site is (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Removal of the interview site to a shared virtual space rebalances this power dynamic.

> The 'professional' workplace interview space has become domesticated. Participants would say 'I just need to …let the dog out…. get this parcel ….my (child) has brought a cup of tea …Professional participants share domestic detail (KT, 2021)

These interactions equalise relationships between participants and interviewers, as office spaces are replaced by dining rooms, and professional work attitudes tempered by working from home.

Insider tacit knowledge of participant lives from being part of that community can be reversed online. Interviewing within a private space as an insider researcher presents some issues when you are essentially inviting a participant into your home (Howlett, 2021). Dissimilar to accessing neutral space, when the researcher can maintain some level of anonymity, interviewing in a home does not provide such privacy (Edwards and Holland, 2013; Krueger, 1994).

> My interviews were conducted from my own office which is situated in the back bedroom of my military home. Military housing is distinctive. It does not take much guesswork from those who have occupied military housing to easily identify a military home. A quick scan of the various bright carpets and patterned curtains is the only requirement to open up a

> dialogue that ultimately enables participants to cross over into my private sphere. Although I have been open regarding my position as a military spouse, Covid denoted that in some respects I was inviting participants to *know* more about me through interviewing them in my home (GC, 2021)

Participants are likely to make some assumptions about us before an interview takes place, and during the discussion (Knapik, 2006). Researchers are likely to try and maintain and protect a level of privacy in their private domain. The use of social media can raise privacy issues for researchers, where the pandemic crossover of interviews into the researcher's home has increased forms of scrutiny.

> I am a community member of many social media pages in which I access informal information. My social media accounts are private but this does not deter individuals in the community from viewing photos, reading my posts or making connections through mutual friends (GC, 2021)

This means that the home-based remote interviewer, working in their community, faces increased privacy risks in the pandemic which need ethical consideration.

Remote interviews have always carried the risk of invisible participants (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Invisible participants are in effect those who are present in the background where interviews are undertaken online and this is something that is outside of both the researcher and participants control. In transferring to online methods from face-to-face, this was an area as researchers which we under-recognised until the interview process commenced. Enforced working from home, and the shutdown of face-to-face education led to family members being present at home during interviews, with interviewers having little knowledge of who else was in the interview space (Chung et al., 2020; Edwards and Holland, 2013).

> My participant smiles at someone off-screen…- who else is in this space-in my space? I don't know who is listening -or if responses are affected by who is there- and anyway, how would I know? (KT,2021)

This is problematic in terms of the information which can be unwittingly provided:

> For instance, if my participant engages in a conversation or is distracted by whoever is in the background whilst the session is ongoing, this opens up an insight into their personal lives. It may be the participant has a delivery or a contractor present and any conversations about this can be heard by me. Likewise, I may be interrupted in my office or my family may be heard in the background (GC, 2021)

In effect, this presents a crossover into the private space which goes beyond the parameters of polite conversation when an interview is conducted in a neutral space (Edwards and Holland, 2013; Krueger, 1994). Some other challenges such as interruptions could not be foreseen or addressed from interviewing in the home environment, in part because these situations had not existed pre-Covid, so there was no way of foreseeing them:

> "Excuse me…I have a delivery" …the conversation pauses as they go to answer the door
> …., there was no way in which I could foresee this, and I can hardly ask participants not to
> answer their own front door (GC, 2021)

> My interviews… building work…. fire alarms…. police sirens…. dogs barking (always dogs)
> …and the ubiquitous Amazon delivery (KT, 2021)

If the participant allows interruptions, this ultimately presents some issues with confidentially. As researchers, we are limited in some regards to what level of confidentiality we are offering (Wiles et al., 2012; Wiles et al., 2006). Confidentiality pertains to maintaining the privacy of information which is further enhanced with participant anonymity (Saunders et al., 2015). However, there is some argument regarding what confidentiality is within research and how this is maintained. When an invisible participant is invited into the background of the interview there are no assurances of confidentiality because the invisible participant has not consented to the terms of the research (Chung et al., 2020; Edwards and Holland, 2013). Therefore, there is no way of assuring that confidentiality and anonymity can be upheld in this respect (Tolich, 2009).

Concluding reflections

In the disruption of the pandemic on prior research plans, fieldwork has felt a rollercoaster of research design uncertainty, and constant adaptation to the Covid-19 context for our online interview approaches (Howlett, 2021; Lupton, 2020). It would be easy to focus on what has been methodologically lost in the pandemic reality. But as researchers, the removal of face-to-face approaches has forced us to consider in new ways our rationales for research design, and our assumptive practices in how we construct the interview space (Howlett, 2021).

We suggest that as researchers we have reconstructed the geographic, public and private space in virtual qualitative interviewing during Covid-19. This provides new insights as to our positionality, how we navigate this novel interview space and build and apply tacit knowledge in the interview process (Mason, 2018; Edwards and Holland, 2013). Methodologically, our research design needs to capture and reflect on how we form contextual insights through either geographic presence in face-to-face interviews or geographic absence in a virtual interview process (Lobe et al., 2020). How our community access, networks and insider knowledge affects our sampling, researcher positionality and possible bias need more explicit consideration in our research rationales (Greene, 2014).

We contend that remote interviewing has made prominent considerations of participant care, but consideration of the research space in terms of public and private space allows aspects of privacy and power balances to be more carefully considered for researchers as well as participants. In face-to-face interviews, the delineation of the public-private view is under-recognised but equally valid in ameliorating any harm through the interview process on participants and researchers. Reflecting on how as interviewers we construct our geographic, public and private interview space as a shared experience for participants and researchers can only strengthen our methodological approaches.

Acknowledgements

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Epidemic Academia:

The Challenges Faced when Conducting Research on Child Sexual Abuse During Covid-19

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Abstract

Covid-19 has seen additional pressures placed on already underfunded charities, which are forced to compete with one another for resources just as reports of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) during lockdowns are increasing. When researching CSA or other similarly sensitive subjects, researchers may decide to use charities as gatekeepers in recruiting participants, thus helping to mitigate the ethical challenges involved in research with vulnerable people. However, with charities facing higher demands for their services, it is often no longer possible for them to support research by acting as such gatekeepers. It is necessary, therefore, for researchers to be flexible and to adapt to these changes, whilst still prioritising the wellbeing of their participants. This paper, written and outlining experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, explores the challenges of recruiting participants through gatekeepers, using the author's personal experience of researching CSA as a case study, as well as the alternative steps taken to ensure that research aims are met.

Introduction

Research surrounding sensitive subjects such as Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) can be ethically challenging, especially when working with participants who have experienced such abuse (Bostock & Laws, 2017). This paper explores the challenges experienced when recruiting through gatekeepers, who, during Covid-19, have had limited resources and time to support research, and the alternative steps taken to help assist the recruitment of participants for research. It also looks at some of the positive impacts on research of adaptive and flexible recruitment strategies adopted and lessons learned as to how to potentially carry out research on sensitive subjects with participants in the future.

The emotional impact abuse can have on an individual's life may result in long-term emotional, physical and even financial challenges (Fergusson et al, 2013). With such a sensitive subject, it is of great importance to avoid causing undue distress to the participant or to re-traumatise them when discussing sexual abuse. The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (Bostock & Laws, 2017) states that throughout the research it is the obligation of the researcher to ensure that participants do not experience unnecessary emotional harm. Researchers may therefore opt to recruit participants through sexual abuse charities, acting as gatekeepers, to mitigate their potential distress.

A gatekeeper is a person who 'controls access to an institution or an organisation' (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016: 42). Gatekeepers can help researchers access hard to reach or vulnerable participants, and can help to protect participants, particularly when involved in sensitive research (Williams, 2020). With CSA being such a sensitive topic, it is often hard to identify those who have experienced sexual abuse during childhood, and thus they often remain hidden and can be difficult to contact. A gatekeeper, such as a CSA charity that works with victims and survivors of abuse may be able to help make contact with potential participants, as victims and survivors approach them. However, the use of gatekeepers in sensitive research, and the benefit to participants of using this method, is often missing from academic literature, despite its regular practice in research (Williams, 2020).

Research into sensitive subject areas has undoubtedly been impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic (Williamson, 2020). This impact can be seen in multiple ways, such as an increase in demand on

specialist charities (Williamson, 2020) and a recorded increase in sexual abuse and violence within the home (Gov.uk, 2020; NSPCC, 2020). Consequently, specialist charities are seeing an 'increased demand' (Gov.uk, 2020: no pagination) and have no spare time to participate in research.

The second year of my PhD research coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, requiring me to continually reassess my recruitment and research methods. I adapted my intended research plan to involve online semi-structured interviews with victims and survivors of CSA, exploring their experiences and evaluations of CSA prevention methods and 'recovery'. Covid-19 has brought with it various issues which have affected my research. This included critical funding issues for the charities I had hoped to use as gatekeepers and increases in their CSA caseloads, often due to the intensity of service users' mental health struggles. Together, these challenges prevented recruitment of participants completely through my previously selected method, requiring me to look at additional alternative options.

The impact Covid-19 has had on charities has affected how researchers like myself are able to conduct research. Necessary adaptations in recruiting and ensuring sufficient support for participants during my own research have highlighted positive as well as negative implications of adopting alternative approaches to obtaining results for analysis. These implications will be examined below, along with what steps have had to be taken to continue with the research, ensuring I could find a satisfactory number of participants to complete my research.

The Challenge: Recruiting Through Gatekeepers

Since the start of 2020, Covid-19 has had an impact on research, with charities facing additional pressure from an increase in demand for support (Gov.uk, 2020). Charities are finding it hard to cope with supporting even existing victims and survivors of abuse and this struggle is exacerbated by additional cases of abuse seen during the lockdowns (NSPCC, 2020). Already thinly stretched, with resources frequently being cut, the £2.4 million the 2020 Conservative Government promised charities of sexual violence went to just eight charities: Safeline Warwick, National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC), Mothers of Sexually Abused Children (MOSAC), Mankind, Rape Crisis England and Wales, The Survivors Trust, Victim Support and Barnardo's (Gov.uk, 2020: no pagination), leaving over a further 112 sexual abuse charities without additional funding (The Survivors Trust, 2020).

Indeed, the NSPCC (2020) outlines how, during Covid-19, there has been an increase in CSA cases (Gov.uk, 2020). Meanwhile, MOSAC reports that their CSA helpline calls more than doubled during the first lockdown in 2020 (Gov.uk, 2020) and Childline states that it has seen three times more children contact them about CSA within the family since the start of the first lockdown on the 23rd of March 2020 (NSPCC, 2020: 1). These changes to society and the charity sector have resulted in the need for researchers into CSA to carefully consider alternative means of accessing participants and even conducting research, whilst remaining cautious in ensuring participants do not experience any triggering or harm. Simply, the financial support offered by the Government is insufficient to allow charities to support the volume of victims and survivors who contact them, let alone reach out to those in need but unaware of their services. This underfunding has caused additional challenges for charities, who are having to compete with each other for scant financial resources (Clay & Collinge, 2020; Third Sector, 2020).

One direct consequence I found that this situation had on my research into CSA is that charities have less capability to support research as gatekeepers. Of the 120 sexual abuse charities included in The Survivors Trust (2020) list, 84 met my gatekeeper criteria of working with victims and survivors of CSA. I emailed the 84 charities, asking if they could contact existing and former service users whom they believed would be able to participate in my research and inform them of my interest in their experiences. Of the charities contacted, 62 replied but, of these, 57 stated that they were unable to participate in my research as gatekeepers, on account of their already being overstretched with time

commitments and struggling to support all the victims and survivors who contact them. Two charities even stated that they were having to close down due to the lack of funding. Twenty-two charities reported being inundated with new CSA victim referrals on top of their existing clients, meaning that they were struggling to cope during Covid-19. Thus, since this intended recruitment method of relying on charities to act as gatekeepers had elicited insufficient participant commitment, I had to be proactive and quickly find a different recruitment method to utilise, potentially also adapting my research questions (Blaikie, 2009).

The Need for Adaptive Responses

Recruitment Method

The limitations of my previously adopted recruitment method of approaching participants through CSA support charities acting as gatekeepers (Henry, 1990; Blanton et al, 2006), exacerbated by the additional constrictions of Covid-19, impacted how many participants I could recruit. I considered all other possible alternative options, such as utilising connections already made through voluntary work and previous employment within the sector as well as recruiting through online platforms. Colleagues also working in the sector of child protection or victim/survivor support were experiencing similar challenges to the charities I had contacted, thus making this a nonviable recruitment method. Whitaker et al (2017) show how health researchers have successfully recruited hard to reach populations through social media and I thus decided to explore online recruitment further. Online recruitment may be done through social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook (Whitaker et al, 2017) or through support pages which state that they welcome researchers and recruitment.

Having identified CSA support pages online, I quickly learned that, although support pages for some subjects may welcome researchers, I was unable to find any CSA support website that allowed researchers to recruit through them. This is completely understandable, as members of such sites join them for community support and may find research traumatising or distressing. Using pages where victims and survivors were seeking support and advice for recruitment felt ethically questionable and I decided instead to look to social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook on which to put out a call for participation, since their service users were likely to be less vulnerable, the purpose of such sites not specifically being designed to support victims and survivors.

I decided against recruiting through Facebook. The two types of pages I came across on Facebook were, firstly, generic pages based on topic, activity or location and, secondly, support groups designed primarily for the support of victims and survivors. Facebook pages devoted to CSA survivors, like the CSA support websites above, specifically prohibited research recruitment and, due to the sensitive nature of CSA and the potential to distress Facebook users in generic group pages, I felt it inappropriate to put out a call for participants through these. Twitter, however, I found easier to recruit through, with the ability to 'follow' others with a similar interest area (Whitaker et al, 2017), creating a small network of people with a personal interest in CSA. I set up a Twitter account for the research, through which I put out a call for participants. This recruitment method proved a greater success, providing a satisfactory number of participants for my research (12 in total).

Sampling Criteria

My lack of success in initially attempting to recruit all my participants using CSA charities as gatekeepers appeared not only to do with their limited availability; it also reflected the limitations of the sampling criteria I had selected and the ages of victims and survivors when they first approach charities for support. I had anticipated interviewing young people, aged 18-24 years, but charities quickly came back to me to explain that their average service user's age was closer to 45, with people often not contacting support charities until later on in their lives (O'Leary & Barber, 2008). This was something I had not previously considered. I therefore deemed it advisable to widen my participant

criteria to victims and survivors over the age of 18 who had experienced sexual abuse as a child. Ensuring that the participant criteria was as broad as possible increased my opportunities for recruitment.

Listening to the reasons given by prospective participants for their turning down the invitation to be involved in the research as it was first presented to them enabled adaptations to then be made in order to make it possible for such excluded individuals to take part. Some participants had to cancel planned interviews on several occasions due to poor health, explaining that their physical or mental health challenges meant that they would be unable to provide a guaranteed time when they could participate. I had to take an adaptive approach to include these participants in the research and as such we agreed to delay the interview until such a time when they themselves felt well enough to undertake the interview, agreeing that they could contact me on the day, or even at the time, to be interviewed.

This more flexible approach, interviewing at a moment's notice, enabling the participants to determine the schedule, proved helpful, and was not something I had previously considered or seen in the literature. It demonstrated the importance of being willing to adapt to the needs of my participants rather than conform to traditional power-infused research practices, in which the researcher often states the necessity for themselves of a fixed time for the interview. Such an approach values the researcher's time and convenience over the needs of the participants. This power dynamic then follows through to the interview, impacting how comfortable the participant feels and how they respond to the power asymmetry at play (Anyan, 2013). Vähäsantanen and Saarinen (2012) found that the activities surrounding the interviews and the setting in which the interviews were held, affected how participants felt, what they were comfortable sharing with the interviewer, and thus the data produced. It stands to reason, therefore, that the lack of consideration with regard to the participant's time commitment needs may not only exclude the participant from the research but, if they are able to participate, also affects their perception of the power dynamics in the interview process and, thus, their entire contribution to the research and its data.

A Brief Evaluation of the Chosen Alternative Methods and their Impacts

Without the support of specialist CSA charities acting as gatekeepers to offer advice or assistance to participants while undertaking the research, it was more challenging to identify participants who could be deemed sufficiently resilient to be able to take part in the research. Therefore, extensive consideration as to direct participant support was given, maintaining the wellbeing of all participants throughout my research as an absolute priority (Bostock & Laws, 2017). To help mitigate potential harm and distress caused by the research, I provided all potential participants with a clear and detailed participant information form to help them assess for themselves whether the research was suitable for them to take part in or not.

Whilst CSA victims and survivors could be deemed 'vulnerable' due to the abuse they experienced, it is important to still allow them to assess the risk to themselves, as Alexander et al (2018) found when reviewing vulnerable people's experiences of participating in research (Bracken-Roche et al, 2016). Often extra precautionary measures can be taken to help protect vulnerable participants (Alexander et al, 2018). Potential participants were provided with all the information about the research and were thus able to make a fully informed decision about participating. Furthermore, it was established, prior to each interview, that the respective participant had access to support, should the interview, or memories triggered by it, prove distressing. This support was ascertained through discussion about support groups or therapy that participants currently attend, if necessary, providing them with a list of support charities which could offer continued support.

Twitter, as a recruitment tool, brought with it both additional challenges and unexpected benefits. The LSE (2017) found that 18-29 year olds comprise the largest age demographic using Twitter, narrowing

the likely age of participants recruited through this means. The use of Twitter to recruit participants also excludes anyone who does not use social media or prefers to use other platforms and therefore did not see my call for participation, which drastically limits the representation of my participants, with most being from a similar age group and racial background. Recruiting through Twitter also made it difficult to elicit potential participants' trust. Due to the sensitive nature of the research subject, and without the assistance of CSA charities acting as gatekeepers, it proved difficult to assure many potential participants of my credibility, which may have also impacted who participated in my research. However, the research being qualitative in nature and focussed on exploring individuals' experiences, these limitations of representation of varied backgrounds, whilst acknowledged, did not prevent my research achieving its goal of constituting a deep exploration of victims' and survivors' experiences to identify any repeating themes or experiences (Blaikie, 2009).

There were also specific strengths associated with using Twitter as a recruitment method (Whitaker et al, 2017). By using a 'call for participation' on Twitter, potential participants were able to contact me to state their interest in participating or for further information instead of potentially feeling pressured into participating in research, which may have been the case, had they been approached by a gatekeeping organisation. Using Twitter also allowed for the inclusion of participants who had not previously contacted CSA charities. This provided me with a chance to ask participants why they had not contacted a CSA charity, if, indeed, this was the case – a theme that I had not previously considered but proved illuminating. Additionally, as discussed above, the charities I spoke with often suggested that the average age of victims and survivors who contact them were 45 years, meaning that younger participants were less likely to be recruited through CSA charities, whereas Twitter offered a higher chance of recruiting younger participants.

Impact on the Findings

After realising the limitations of my previously planned recruitment method and adapting to these circumstances by also seeking participants through Twitter, I was able to recruit sufficient participants for my research (12 in total) to assure me that all possible themes and trends of victim/survivor experience had been successfully identified. My participants varied in background, experience, ethnicity and gender and the data produced more than adequately answered my research questions. I found that by ensuring a broader age range I obtained a more comprehensive understanding of victims'/survivors' experiences.

The adaptive approach I found necessary to apply to my recruitment method also carried over into the interviews I conducted. I conducted two sets of interviews with each participant and found that my interviews didn't feel rushed and my participants were able to talk about and explore areas that they felt were important. I originally envisaged using a semi-structured interview format, having some set questions and allowing participants to explore what they found relevant or interesting. But, by being more open during the interview, and not sticking to the semi-structured interview format but just letting participants talk, they felt freer and brought up important points which I had not previously considered. The informal structure created a more personal atmosphere and lent itself to opportunities for developing trust and sharing meaningful, deep-felt feelings and experiences which I had not previously seen in the literature relating to the field.

Conclusion

Research into Child Sexual Abuse and other similarly sensitive subjects has often relied on charities and other organisations to help support research, particularly when making contact with often very hidden communities (Williams, 2020), by acting as gatekeepers and ensuring that participants are supported. The pressures of Covid-19, however, have overstretched CSA charities' resources (Gov.uk, 2020; Third Sector, 2020) and necessitated the adoption of alternative participant recruitment

strategies. The personal recruitment of participants, via online social media platforms, offers the advantages of the increased convenience of home-based participation and the possibility of increased flexibility as to time and date, broadening the range of contributing participants and, thus, the inclusive scope of the research as a whole (Henry, 1990; Blanton et al, 2006; Whitaker et al, 2017).

Researchers need to offer their prospective research participants flexibility in order to ensure that they are able to adapt to the ever-changing experiences of victims and survivors. I found it necessary to consider how the social environment was impacting my recruitment and research, having to adapt accordingly through widening my sample population and introducing a new recruitment method whilst still ensuring that I was able to answer my research questions. Sensitive research topics require creative and adaptive recruitment methods while prioritising the wellbeing of all participants, allowing for more robust data from participants who may have been excluded from contributing to research by more traditional methods of investigation.

Researching CSA during the Covid-19 pandemic forced me to be creative and more flexible with my approach due to charities' time limitations and their resources being brought to breaking point. This process, however, has taught me the importance of being reflective throughout my research, continually asking what is best for my participants and adapting to their needs, especially during the interview stage. Conducting qualitative research has allowed me to be as flexible as I felt was appropriate and to respond flexibly to the social challenges which have affected both my gatekeepers and my participants, allowing for continuous shifting and adaptation throughout the research. This new approach has allowed me to gather the in-depth data I was aiming to produce, as well as revealing new themes I had not previously discovered in the literature surrounding CSA. These positive outcomes of a creative and sympathetic response to the challenges of Covid-19 have taught me valuable lessons which I will be applying to my future research.

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Researching Children's Experiences in a Global Pandemic

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Abstract

Researching children's voices and experiences can be a difficult task to navigate, even in the absence of a global pandemic. This can be even more challenging when studying children with special educational needs and disabilities, including language and communication needs. With researchers having limited access to schools, and face-to-face data collection methods being unviable during the pandemic, novel and remote ways of collecting data have become necessary. In this paper I will reflect on the challenges I faced when designing data collection methods for my PhD study exploring how children with special educational needs and disabilities experience friendships, and how those experiences differ between mainstream and special education schools. The challenges faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including redesigning the study to accommodate lack of school availability, will be discussed, along with the way in which technology can be used to assist in data collection during a pandemic. I discuss the benefits and possible challenges of one of my major changes, a switch to using parents as interviewers. The paper will aim to provide an insight into alternative data collection methods and how this global crisis may have benefited data collection from hard-to-reach samples.

Introduction

My PhD aims to investigate how children with special educational needs and disabilities (SENDs), specifically those with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) or Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), experience friendships. It also aims to examine whether these experiences differ between children in UK mainstream and specialised educational settings. In order to explore the individual experiences of children with SENDs, I wanted to pay close attention to enabling children to have a voice and ensure that they were asked how they felt about their friendships, as opposed to using observations or parent and teacher reports. This paper discusses my experiences of designing a PhD study during a global health pandemic, and the creative methods adopted in a hope to gain understanding of children's experiences via remote data collection methods.

Background

Friendships can be described as social relationships between two individuals (Bukowski et al., 1996) and they can play an important protective role as children navigate their social worlds (Bollmer et al., 2005). Mutual friendships have been found to be a source of social support (Brendgen and Poulin, 2018), and high-quality mutual friendships have been found to act as a protective factor against bullying in typically developing children (Bossaert et al., 2015; Vaquera and Kao, 2008).

Unfortunately, there is growing evidence that children with SENDs have, on average, significantly fewer mutual friendships than their peers without SENDs, and having a diagnosed SEND can not only make it difficult to make friends, but to maintain them (Schwab, 2015). Children with SENDs make up 15.5% of the school population in England and 3.3% of all school pupils in schools in England have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (*Special educational needs in England, Academic Year 2019/20.*, 2020), therefore it is important that we understand how these children experience friendships if we hope to provide suitable support to them.

Children in England with an EHCP have the option to attend either a mainstream or specialised educational setting. It could be suggested that school type may influence the number and/or quality of friendships an individual has, and studies have shown that children tend to show preference towards those who are similar to themselves: that is that typically developing (TD) children often chose to make

friends with other TD peers, and children with SENDs show a tendency to favour other children with similar needs (Bateman and Church, 2008; Hoffmann et al., 2020). This could have implications for SEND students, especially those attending mainstream education, as they may find themselves in an environment that is predominantly occupied with TD peers, resulting in fewer similar children to make friends with.

Although previous literature has highlighted that children with SENDs have increased difficulties making and maintaining good quality, reciprocal peer relationships, very little is known about how these children actually feel about their friendships, or lack of them. Children's rights to be considered as 'persons' are increasingly recognised, and the prominence of children's rights and social studies of children has challenged conventional thinking (Nations, 2006). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children capable of forming their own opinion should be provided with the opportunity to express those views (Unicef, 1989), which has resulted in an increase in qualitative studies which aim to give children a chance to have their voice heard. However, children's voices are not always truly heard, especially in the context of SEND research (Tangen, 2008).

Whilst qualitative methods are becoming more popular in childhood studies, the method is not as common when researching children with SENDs. Qualitative data collection methods often rely on oral language via interviews or focus groups, something which may not be suitable for participants who have lower levels of language proficiency or difficulties with attention. This reliance on oral language during data collection may act as a barrier when using qualitative data collection methods with SEND children.

Though additional barriers are present when using qualitative methods with children with SENDs, that is not to say there are no successful qualitative research studies in this area. Data collection techniques that focus on non-verbal tasks such as drawing, scrapbooking (where individuals can use craft materials to document their experiences or memories) or taking photographs, have been successfully used in research with children who have Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), and have been effectively used as prompts to facilitate discussions in semi structured interviews (Hambly, 2018; Lyons, 2014; Merrick and Roulstone, 2011). Building on ideas from successful studies, I wanted to ensure that my data collection methods enabled children to express their opinions in an accessible way, and in a way that they felt comfortable with, in order to gain an insight into their individual experiences.

The Impact of COVID-19

In March 2020, residents of the UK were required to stay at home and observe physical social distancing rules as a consequence of the COVID-19 health pandemic, changing the way in which we work, teach, learn, and socialise. For many doctoral researchers, it has not only impacted where and how we work, but has halted data collection and forced many to move to remote methods of data collection (Lambrechts and Smith, 2020). Sadly, my research was no exception and a year and a half into my PhD I found myself redesigning my project.

Initially I had hoped to gain access to English primary schools in which I could carry out in-depth, in-person semi-structured interviews with children. Children were to be provided with scrapbooks ahead of the visit to the school, which would be used as a springboard for discussion points in the interviews, and a variety of craft items were to be available to ensure that the children had the opportunity to play and feel comfortable. Children would have the opportunity to go over their responses to ensure that they had been correctly interpreted and child data would be triangulated with teacher and parent questionnaires.

However, it became clear that it was unlikely that schools would be accepting external visitors and that data collection would need to be adapted to take this into consideration. It was hoped that as opposed to me visiting the school, a teaching assistant could facilitate the interview, with myself calling in via video call. Unfortunately, this would require a lot of time and resources from the school, something

which was not in abundance during a global health crisis. It was also evident that schools were closing and even those children with EHCPs, who were entitled to a place, were often being taught at home or engaging with virtual classes, further impacting on my ability to collect data via schools.

Remote Data Collection

The move to home-schooling, and news that face-to-face research would not be accessible for research students, resulted in my study being redesigned so that data collection could be done remotely. To facilitate this, a pack would be sent home containing activities that could be completed by the child independently. Initially, the scrapbook was going to be used as a prompt only. Children would be invited to complete some brief activities that related to the study's research questions. These activities would then be used as a springboard in interviews, but the scrapbook data itself would not be analysed. An example of how key questions were linked to scrapbook activities and original interview questions are provided in the table below.

Key Question	Scrapbook Activity	Example Interview Q's
What do you think makes a good friend?	Draw a friend (page 8) – a stick figure outline will be provided with space for children to draw on features of what they think makes a good friend. Stickers will be provided with traits on, such as naughty, nice, kind, funny, for children to place onto the stick figure. There will be sections for children to explain what they like about this friend and what they would like to do with this friend. An alternative task using playdough will also be provided for those children who would rather 'make' a friend than engage in the drawing activity.	Discuss scrapbook activity. Why do you think x is important? Can you tell me about this friend? Do you think you are a good friend? Why?

With COVID-19 meaning that data collection would be remote, it seemed sensible to change the importance of this scrapbook data. The children in my study were likely to have lower levels of oral language proficiency so therefore they may express themselves more comfortably through arts-based methods, such as drawing or using crafts, so the decision was made to analyse the writing and drawing that children have provided to further understand their experiences.

By this point, the main study felt worlds away from what I had initially set off to do. It was a strange experience accepting that I would not be able to engage with children as I had initially hoped, and it was, to an extent, saddening when I began designing remote data collection methods. However, upon reflection, this shift may mean I am able to gather more honest data from the children involved as they would not have to engage with a stranger, they could engage with the study at home with their family. The move to remote data collection also meant that I would be able to recruit a sample of parents from across the UK, and not just in the local area which may increase the overall sample size of the study.

With all this in mind, a scrapbook was designed for children in Key Stage 2 (7-11 years) which allows them to express their experiences of friendships in a way that is hopefully enjoyable for them. Each activity is related to a research question and the activities can be completed via written words or

drawings, and in one activity playdough can be used to make 'a perfect friend'. The activities are designed with the hope that children can complete them on their own, for the most part, and are chunked into units so that it does not have to be completed in one go, something which may be important for children with attention difficulties or lower levels of language proficiency. Children are also reminded at the beginning of each activity that if they are not comfortable with the task or are not enjoying completing the book that they are able to stop at any point. The scrapbook is chunked into two sections: all about me, and all about my friends. The first section allows for children to write or draw about their favourite activities in order to establish a form of ownership over the scrapbook, and the latter aims to explore the experiences children have with their real-life friends, and what a perfect friend would look like from their perspective. Guidance on how to complete the scrapbook is provided to children via 'how to' pages at the beginning of each activity, and an information sheet was provided to parents to explain what each task was aiming to investigate and prompts for completing the task if children became stuck.

As stated previously, the importance of the scrapbook data gathered shifted as a result of COVID-19. The activities were, prior to the pandemic, going to be used solely as a springboard activity and not analyses. I decided that, given I may have shorter interviews that originally planned, that the drawings and writing children provided in their scrapbook would be analysed along with interview transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of the children's experiences. The focus of my study had also become much more honed in on the experiences of the children, and therefore my overall analysis moved away from reflexive thematic analysis to interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore each individuals experiences in detail.

Technology

Once the scrapbook was designed, I faced the difficulty of remote interviews. I wanted to ensure that children were able to talk about their scrapbook and their friendships as I believe this is important in accurately capturing their experiences. When making adjustments to my data collection to accommodate COVID-19, I had originally planned to carry out interviews myself via video call, with parents asked to send in photographs of the scrapbooks ahead of time so that the activities could be discussed with the children. Though this seemed like a good alternative to in person interviews I was aware that children, especially primary aged children with SENDs, may not be eager to engage with a stranger via a video call and may also be tired of online learning due to the shift to home schooling. Video calls would also make it difficult to build a rapport with the child and there was a risk that the power balance between researcher and child may become even more prominent.

Although COVID-19 has brought many challenges, it has encouraged or required people to rely more heavily on technology. Parents are now more aware of video calls and online teaching, and services such as speech language therapists have taken to remote assessments and therapy sessions. This uptake of technology could be seen as positive to those involved in researching harder to access participants or those that wish to observe children in a familiar setting, without their presence impacting on the child's behaviour. With this in mind, I decided that parents would be asked to interview their children about the tasks, following an interview script, and to record this conversation for the researcher via video. I was aware anecdotally that some child development professionals had taken this approach during the pandemic, with good success. In my study, parents are asked to discuss each section of the scrapbook with their child, and to encourage them to explain why they have chosen certain friends or activities to ensure that what the child has intended to say has been accurately captured. The video recording, along with scrapbook data, will be analysed to explore the children's lived experience and understanding of friendships. Parents are provided with an information sheet on how to complete the interviews, a script to follow and instructions on how to securely upload the video data via a drop box service. An example of the interview script for a task is shown below.

All about my friend:

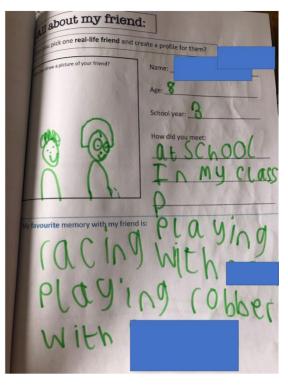This bit was all about a real-life friend. Can you tell me about who they are?

Can you remember where you met them?

Can you tell me about your favourite memory with this friend?

What makes this memory special?

What is your favourite thing to do with your friend?

Can you tell me why you like doing that with your friend?

It is hoped that some positives may come from this switch to remote data collection. Remote data collection methods may be more convenient for children and parents. Not only does it allow for the interviews to be carried out at a convenient time for the participants, as they do not need to arrange a time with the researcher, but it also removes the distraction of the researcher being in the child's home or school and removes the pressure of meeting a new person. This will hopefully allow for more naturalistic data and a nicer experience for all involved, especially those children who may find talking to a stranger stressful. There is no need for travel with remote data collection, reducing costs and allowing access to a wider range of participants that would have previously been restricted. Furthermore, it requires very little technology and can be done via a smartphone or tablet, with parents transferring the video file to a secure drop box programme, making the research accessible to most families.

There are, as with any study, some limitations. Firstly, there is a risk that those who are less comfortable using technology may be deterred from participating, though hopefully the current climate may mean that more people are open to using technology. There is also a chance that members of society that are not fortunate enough to have access to such devices or stable internet at home may be excluded. Finally, there are limitations to using parents as interviewers. Children may feel much more comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions to a parent compared to a researcher but there is a chance that they will not be comfortable discussing sensitive topics with them, or even a topic as personal as friendships. Parents are also not trained interviewers, and therefore may not deviate from the semi-structured interview script to explore topics that are linked to research questions as often as researchers may do in face-to-face interviews.

Summary

Exploring the experiences of friendships in children with SENDs can be a difficult task even in the absence of a global pandemic. It requires novel data collection methods that take into consideration the wide spectrum of abilities that participants may have. Combining written accounts with drawings and (remotely conducted) interview data may be one way of allowing researchers to explore these experiences in more detail.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it many challenges, the experiences of designing a PhD amidst a global health pandemic have been rewarding. It has forced me to think outside of the

box with regards to data collection methods and has highlighted the power of using technology to gather data remotely, possibly improving our ability to reach participants that we could not reach in the past and providing a more convenient way of gathering data going forward.

Redesigning my study has also helped me to immerse myself in designing a qualitative study containing visual data which I may have otherwise overlooked. It has brought me much closer to some of my colleagues who have helped me with countless drafts of scrapbooks and interview schedules, and it has proven the resilience and drive that we, as postgraduate researchers, have to keep moving forward with our research, even when normal avenues are closed to us.

The struggles we have faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have been extremely difficult and are still ongoing and I believe that this challenging situation will continue to impact on the way in which we carry out research for many years to come, allowing us to embrace positive elements of remote data collection. I hope that the strengths and skills I have gained as a result of these difficult times will encourage me to think creatively about how I design my research going forward to ensure that the voices of those who need to be heard, are heard.

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Smartphone Use for Language Learning

Before and After the COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract

Smartphones have massive potential for supporting language learning as they provide access to various resources, enable language practice opportunities, and facilitate interactions with other speakers in the target language. This article draws on an ongoing PhD project that investigates how some university learners in Saudi Arabia utilise their smartphones to develop their English language proficiency. The data for this research were collected through interviews with a group of female foundation-year students at a university in Saudi Arabia. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2019 and 2020 before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper considers the influence of the lockdown and online distance learning on students' use of devices and their motivation to use them to learn English. The findings of this study offer insight into how external circumstances and relationships with technology affect the use of mobile devices in language learning.

Introduction

Smartphones assume a significant role in daily life. The human-machine relationship has advanced to the level of dependency and personal intimacy due to reliance on their applications and functions (Godwin-Jones, 2017). In early 2020, schools and universities closed as part of a nationwide lockdown in Saudi Arabia to combat the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result, universities shifted to an online model of learning, and digital technologies have become critical tools for establishing connections between socially distanced people during the lockdown as well as facilitating online education and digital meetings (Shah et al., 2020). Especially under the current circumstances, the widespread usage of smartphones raises questions regarding the implications and considerations of how these devices can benefit language education. Many studies have suggested that, in contexts where English is a foreign language (EFL), technological advancements seem to have advantaged learners to be exposed to the target language as well as to use it in a range of applications and in various ways outside of formal language-learning environments (Hossain, 2018; Metruk, 2020). Despite the myriad of opportunities for English language learning and practice that are facilitated by mobile devices like smartphones, it is unclear in general – especially in Saudi Arabia – how students perceive these resources and interact with them for English language learning as well as whether they are realising and exploiting their full potential.

This paper derives from my doctoral research project, which seeks not only to understand how female university students in Saudi Arabia use their smartphones to learn English but also to identify the perceived values and challenges of smartphones in fostering language learning and self-directed learning from the learners' perspective. In this paper, I briefly discuss two data samples from the data set that illustrate how Rameez and Ameera (both pseudonyms) employ their smartphones for English language learning. Overall, this paper aims to share findings from an exploratory investigation of how Saudi youth have informally utilised smartphones to engage in language learning before and after the COVID-19 lockdown, and the way in which COVID-19 has impacted the research project.

Literature Review

Online Informal Learning of English

Sockett (2014) has employed the term 'online informal learning of English' (OILE) to describe the phenomenon of accessing technology and making use of the expanding resources for English language learning. Notably, 'online' does not refer strictly to online activities (i.e., connected to the internet), as such learning activities could be delivered offline through the use of digital devices. In addition, according to Reinders and Benson (2017), 'informal' is a relative term that suggests that the learning could be motivated by a teacher, an institution, the initiative of the learner, or a combination of these factors, such as in the case of a learner's choice to take an online language course. Toffoli and Sockett (2015) have framed OILE as a process that is driven by the intention to communicate, wherein language learning is a by-product. Although learners may, for example, choose to use English to communicate via social media, they might also intentionally plan to acquire new vocabulary along the way and possibly use a dictionary to promote that process (Lamb and Arisandy, 2019). In this regard, when learners recognise the benefits of applying technology in English language learning outside of the classroom to develop and engage their language skills, "learning stops being a negligible by-product and becomes a deliberate, even if usually secondary, aim" (Trinder, 2017, p. 406). Business university students in Trinder's (2017) study demonstrated awareness of technologies that could foster language learning and used them accordingly. They recalled reading online news in English for the specific purpose of expanding their vocabulary. They also purposefully watched television series and films to enhance their language skills, although they may have primarily consumed such content for the subject knowledge and entertainment. In view of these results, the study has concluded that "informal learning involves an element of language choice and is intentional, rather than implicit" (Trinder, 2017, p. 410).

Mobile-assisted Language Learning

Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) is a form of language learning that is assisted or enhanced by the use of a handheld mobile device (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Students can learn more quickly by utilising mobile devices as they enable rapid internet access, easy retrieval of the required information, and language support. The literature has defined many dimensions of mobile devices in the context of language learning. For instance, Lai and Zheng (2018) and Sung et al. (2015) have identified the following aspects of MALL: mobility, which permits students to learn whenever and wherever they choose; authenticity and social interaction, through which students share, interact, and communicate with others; individuality, which allows for personalised learning and support for a range of teaching and learning styles; and timely help and feedback. The category 'mobile devices' encompasses any type of handheld device (e.g., smartphone or tablet) that supports this procedure; however, the present study only examines smartphones.

Learning a language is a complex process that many scholars have attempted to explain via language learning theories. This section discusses how input, output, and social interaction relate to the use of smartphones for language learning. According to Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis, humans learn languages through exposure to 'comprehensible input', wherein they process linguistic data that is slightly above their current level. Input for language learning is gained by listening and reading the target language. However, it is not the only element that contributes significantly to language learning. Swain (1985) argued that verbal production (i.e., output) is also needed to enhance language accuracy and fluency. This output hypothesis dictates that interactions in the target language promote language acquisition through production and comprehension. Long (1996) later formulated the interactionist hypothesis, which predicts that the most significant element of language learning is not what the learners hear but rather how they interact. From the interactionist perspective, language learning takes place in conversations through conscious error repair and clarifications (Cook, 2013). The social element of learning stems from the work of Vygotsky (1978), who has emphasised the influence of cultural and social factors on language development. His sociocultural theory maintains that learning is a social process that occurs when people interact. This theory underlies the role of input and interaction in language learning.

Various smartphone platforms have created possibilities for language learners to practise their English skills and interact in the target language. Sockett (2014) claimed that technology can enhance the rate of language input and therefore improve learning. As indicated by previous studies, learners use mobile devices to gain language exposure (input) through entertainment, including films and social media, information from documentaries and news channels, and language learning platforms like language applications and social media language pages (Mindog, 2016; Lai et al., 2018; Luef et al., 2020). Mindog (2016) and Lai et al (2018) have implied that learners utilise some of these resources for exposure to the casual vocabulary of everyday life. Through social applications, such as social media platforms, students can engage in English conversations and befriend proficient English speakers. Sockett (2014) has highlighted that social media platforms encourage language learners to react to written and oral stimuli by writing comments or participating in an interaction. In this regard, Mindog (2016) investigated the utilisation of smartphone applications by four Japanese university students to support EFL. The study found that social media platforms were the most popular, and learners used them to improve their communicative abilities and interact with English speakers (Mindog, 2016). However, in a study by Lai et al (2018) in Hong Kong, many university students who were learning foreign languages avoided engaging in social technological experiences for various reasons, such as concerns about their language proficiency and fear of humiliation. Smartphones also assist learners with technological and non-technologically mediated language learning and communication activities using online dictionaries and translators like Google Translate. In the research by Lai et al (2018), learners used their devices to, for example, understand a text or song lyric.

Methodology

Participants

In the present research, I adopted purposive sampling in which selection of the individuals can purposefully gain understanding of the research problem or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Merriam (2002) argues that to begin purposeful sampling, the researcher must first determine the selection criteria for the study participants. The target population for this study were a) foundation-year female university students in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, who b) volunteered to take part in the study, and c) use their smartphones for English language learning. In this article, I discuss only two data samples from the eight cases. The article's objectives led to the choice of these two cases. Rameez and Ameera answered in length questions about the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on their use of smartphones for language learning in the second interview and presented different backgrounds and practices. Both participants were in their foundation year at the time of their first interviews but had already started to study their chosen majors (organic chemistry and medical physics, respectively) by the time their second interviews were conducted.

Research Procedures and Data Collection

This study used qualitative design to gain an in-depth understanding of Saudi female university students experiences with using smartphones to facilitate English language learning and self-directed learning before and after the COVID-19 lockdown. Creswell (2007) and Hennink et al., (2011) report that qualitative research approaches are ideal for researchers who seek detailed and contextualised data. To interpret the phenomena and understand participants' perceptions, I collected data using semi-structured interviews. I planned for two face-to-face interviews that lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour to ensure I could fully explore their life experiences in context and closely examine their smartphone usage in relation to language learning (Seidman, 2006; Dörnyei, 2007).

To recruit participants, I visited several foundation-year classrooms at the target university. In the classroom visits, I explained my research goals and how the students would be part of it and then asked them to fill in the online survey shared with them through their teachers in the class WhatsApp group. The online surveys were administered to secure background information about the potential

participants and to obtain their contact details. After the students filled in the online survey and agreed on participating in the interviews, I selected eight participants from the online surveys who showed various educational backgrounds (e.g., private and state schools) and language learning experiences (e.g., English courses and self-study). I contacted each participant via WhatsApp to arrange interviews. In preparation for the interviews, I booked a meeting room in the university in the same building where the students take their foundation classes so it is convenient for them.

Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Data Collection

In the first few weeks of my fieldwork, I contacted potential participants and conducted a couple of interviews. However, in the middle of my data collection process, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the university to close and the country to enter a lockdown. Consequently, I could not carry on with my fieldwork for a while, as the unprecedented circumstances revealed themselves to be particularly challenging and affected research participation, instruments, and timeline. Some participants withdrew or were not responding, so I had to recruit a few new participants. Conveniently, I was able to share the same online survey with my colleagues and asked them to send it to their classes WhatsApp group[1] only after changing the last questions details where it asked about the time and date of the interview as this had to be more flexible with the online interviews and was arranged later personally via WhatsApp messages unlike in the face-to-face interviews where it was planned during their breaks and I had a meeting room booked for limited hours. I also had to adjust the interview structure and questions. For example, in the face-to-face interviews, I asked the participants to demonstrate how they used their smartphones for learning, and I captured videos and screenshots to understand which tools they use and how they operate. However, due to change in the interview medium to online interviews, I had to replace the method of capturing a screen recording of participants' smartphone screens with that of a detailed description of use, and I asked them to share the platforms they mentioned in the interviews as we were talking or immediately upon completion of the interviews. Most importantly, I had to be patient, as the process of planning and performing online interviews was more time consuming than I had expected. It was sometimes challenging to talk to participants when they had unstable internet connection or did not offer as much information as they would have in face-to-face meetings. Still, it was thought-provoking to observe how some students talked freely over the phone about their frustrations with the educational system or the lockdown, though others barely answered questions when human eye contact was missing.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis process started by reading through transcribed interviews, identifying emergent recurring themes, commenting on them in text using MAXQDA software, and colouring them differently to unite common themes (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Using MAXQDA for the data analysis provided me with the means to sort the data and easily access the coded segments of data, form categories, edit them, and identify themes. The data were analysed inductively through a cyclical and evolving process of coding and recoding. Driven by a constructivist-interpretative paradigm, this study tends to focus on considering the practices from the perspectives of those who live them (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Such research aims to understand and present the learners' experiences, the meanings they give to their actions, and how they get along in a particular educational EFL context.

Findings

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[1] In the foundation year in Saudi universities, students usually have WhatsApp groups for each module/subject with or without the teacher.

This section first provides an overview of the types of online informal learning of English activities in which Rameez and Ameera engaged. The data contain some indications of the ways in which these learners process the input and achieved new language uptake. The second part of the section describes the potential influence of the COVID-19 lockdown on the use of smartphones by these participants in relation to language learning.

Smartphone Usage for English Learning by Female Saudi University Students

In their interviews, Rameez and Ameera highlighted the role of films, series, music, and social media platforms in generating opportunities for language exposure and interactions for language learning.

Films and Series

Some young Saudis, including Ameera, prefer American entertainment and drama over Arabic equivalents. Ameera shared that she would usually spend an hour in bed every night watching English-language films or series with English subtitles before falling asleep. She believed that such continuous consumption of film and series was helpful in improving her oral skills and vocabulary. On the other hand, Rameez stated that she would watch films in English because exposure to the target language facilitated her learning of English. She noted, "I sometimes watch with Arabic subtitles, and I try not to see the subtitle and only listen". Both learners found that watching series and films was beneficial for improving their listening skills. Notably, both participants preferred to watch films on a smartphone – as opposed to a device with a larger screen – because they liked to hold the device in their hands, and they could carry it with them at all times.

Songs

Participants also reported engaging with music as an English language activity. Rameez and Ameera often attempted to understand the theme or meaning of a song based on the lyrics or by focusing on the words that they could understand. Both participants frequently listened to English-language songs and often simultaneously searched for the lyrics online to better comprehend their meaning or to be able to sing along. Ameera explained:

> "I try to find what that singer says because, you know, they talk too much, and I do not understand. Sometimes, I challenge myself that I get what they say without seeing the lyrics. And if I don't, I just see the lyrics."

Rameez would also listen to songs repeatedly, recite them, and translate them to Arabic to determine their meaning and learn new words. She explained that she would use English-language songs for the purpose of language learning:

> "I want to learn! I listen because I want to practise. I prefer Arabic songs; I don't love English songs…their songs are without feelings! I listen for language and fun."

Use of Subtitles and Lyrics for English Learning

Subtitles in foreign films, series, and television programs can either caption the spoken language or translate the dialogue to the native language of the audience. Arabic television channels present foreign entertainment with translated subtitles. However, with smart televisions and the use of a range of devices to consume media, viewers have a choice between, for example, English and Arabic subtitles. Ameera opted for English subtitles to allow her to monitor the speech whereas Rameez preferred to use Arabic subtitles to better understand the dialogue. Interestingly, their choices of subtitle language mirror their respective approaches to using songs for language practice which seems to reflect their English proficiency. Ameera would use English subtitles and read song lyrics to acquire

new vocabulary or phrases that she could not hear otherwise, while Rameez would try to focus on the audio of English films while using Arabic subtitles to immediately determine the meaning of the dialogue, and she would translate song lyrics into Arabic to understand them more clearly.

Social Media Platforms

Popular social media platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram. However, Facebook is no longer commonly used by younger generations in Saudi Arabia. Rameez would use Snapchat to listen to English speakers by watching their stories; in contrast, Ameera perceived it as a private platform for having fun and socialising with family and friends – "not for learning". This section discusses how the participants primarily used the Twitter and Instagram smartphone applications to support them in learning English. They shared that they would check these two applications regularly throughout the day to scroll through images, read captions, and watch brief videos.

Ameera and Rameez reported using social media platforms to seek out English-language content either for general language exposure or to learn everyday language. They followed the accounts of celebrities they admire or of random users they encountered who post in English. Rameez stated that she followed many celebrities on Twitter and Instagram to read and listen to English. Ameera commented:

> "Well, I follow some people because they always, always tweet
> positive things. And I know every time I open my Twitter, I see English
> words and English sentences, so I keep reading English every day."

Both participants mentioned following language learning accounts to improve their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Ameera claimed that the accounts would help her revise what she had learned in class, while Rameez shared that she could learn new sentences and words every day from language learning accounts on Instagram. Both women appreciated that many of these accounts were created by Arab speakers, as they would explain the meaning of the words in Arabic, the difference between the two languages, and their usage in context. Ameera clarified:

> "Sometimes they give a phrase that, if you translate in Arabic, it has a
> different meaning. This is one of the things that I really like because
> sometimes you understand something, but it means other things."

Use of Social Media Platforms to Practise English Interactions

Both Rameez and Ameera sought opportunities outside of the classroom to practise English. The former would attempt to use English with waiters in restaurants and with her family's foreign driver, while the latter would speak in English with her brothers who studied abroad in the USA. They also use the language online and try to understand its usage by posting on social media, chatting with friends via instant messenger, and conversing with English speakers and tutors. In general, social media platforms facilitate the social experiences of Saudi students in the EFL context.

The participants in this study stated that they used Twitter and WhatsApp to develop their language skills. Ameera occasionally preferred to express herself in English when posting on social media. She recalled an experience where, after posting a film review on Twitter, a Canadian user messaged her to agree with her tweet. Their relationship developed, and they discovered many commonalities between them; now, they regularly talk via Facetime (video call, audio) and WhatsApp (texting). Ameera believed that she enhanced her English fluency, accent, and word choices by talking to her Canadian friend because she encouraged her friend to correct her when she made mistakes. In addition, Ameera and her friends would send English voice messages in their WhatsApp group to practise the language. Often, they would listen again to the recordings and laugh at their mistakes. Rameez shared that she would post English quotations and sentences with pictures on Twitter and Instagram. When she liked a sentence that she read online, she would save it and then translate it with the Google

Translate application to understand it before posting it in English. Rameez would also practise by chatting in English with her family's driver, who could not speak Arabic, via WhatsApp.

Translation Applications

Both learners used online translation tools to understand, revise, and learn the target language vocabulary. Interestingly, Ameera would use English-to-English translation in these applications to obtain definitions and explanations of words in English. She clarified this choice by explaining that some words have different meanings in the two languages. Rameez would translate words and phrases into Arabic for comprehension purposes and into English for production purposes. Both women elaborated on the ability of smartphones to provide immediate help with understanding unfamiliar vocabulary and resolving communication breakdowns in a fast and convenient fashion.

In summary, Rameez and Ameera utilised their smartphones to practise receptive skills and learn vocabulary from films, songs, and social media platforms. They also used social media and other platforms to practise speaking English and engaging in written interactions. Remarkably, the two participants did not address language applications or websites beyond their use for exam preparation (e.g., IELTS); therefore, these are not discussed here.

Impact of COVID-19 on Smartphone Usage for English Learning by Saudi Female University Students

This section examines the possible effects of the lockdown and the shift to online education on the participants' self-initiated use of smartphones for language learning. Many individuals have increased their use of smartphones during the COVID-19 lockdown. Both Ameera and Rameez relied on their smartphones more heavily to chat with friends, check social media platforms, watch films, series, and YouTube videos, and attend classes or meetings. In her second interview in October 2020 (the first interview was in February 2020 – pre-lockdown), Rameez shared the realisation that her English learning activities had declined during and after the COVID-19 lockdown. She shared that she did not do language learning activities with her smartphone or check the language accounts that she followed because her 'eyes hurt' from constantly focusing on her smartphone screen to use social media during the lockdown.

The respondents' technology usage was affected by the new circumstances. In her first interview, Ameera said, "I actually learn everything on my phone" and, as illustrated above, she explained that she would improve her English by using her smartphone. However, when the lockdown ended, she started to leave her phone at home when going out, and she no longer accessed social media platforms or actively used her phone as she previously had, in general and for language learning. Ameera hated being attached to her smartphone, as she used it all the time during the lockdown for "things that are not useful and wasted her time, like Tiktok." [2]Rameez also described how the nature of online education changed her motivation to use her phone for learning:

> "I feel that I don't want to use my phone for learning as I used to
> because, before, we had books and technology for support, but now
> it is all on our devices, and that is not really nice."

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[2] Ticktok is a social network for sharing user-generated videos, mostly of people lip-synching or dancing to popular songs.

Ameera and Rameez realised that their English-language abilities were diminishing because they had stopped practising their English during the lockdown period. Therefore, they tried to find ways to improve their language skills. Ameera was frustrated by the feeling that her English abilities declined due to a lack of exposure and practice, and she needed to identify means of developing her English. In the first interview, she said, "reading books is not for me" and that she never read books either in English or Arabic. However, in her later interview, she stated that she had "started a new habit in the lockdown" – reading – because she wanted to learn English by reading books. She started to read physical books that she borrowed from her brother, and she downloaded PDF versions of books to read on her phone. She noted that this new hobby was inspired by Twitter academic and language learning accounts. In addition, Rameez had started watching English vlogs and challenges on YouTube without subtitles and only used translation applications if she could not understand a particular word.

In summary, the data from the two participants in this study indicate that the lockdown influenced their smartphone usage in general and for language learning activities. Both participants reported that their heightened smartphone usage during the lockdown period had a negative impact on them both physically (e.g., screen fatigue) and emotionally (e.g., attachment to their smartphones). Moreover, they disliked the shift to online education, as they believed that technology should support learning rather than serving as the primary medium of learning. These perspectives, along with the pandemic-induced stress, led Rameez and Ameera to discontinue many of their smartphone-enabled language learning activities, such as browsing social media language pages. However, upon recognising the importance of maintaining and improving their language skills, Ameera started a new habit of reading e-books, and Rameez began to watch YouTube videos.

Conclusion

The findings in this article evidence that learners employ smartphones to enrich their language learning, and the nature of their usage varies depending on individual preferences and circumstances. These findings illustrate how EFL learners in Saudi Arabia derive benefits from their devices when learning a language, as these devices enable them to gain language exposure, practise a range of skills, and interact online in English. Furthermore, the research highlights possible influencing factors in the use of technology for learning, which include the relationship of learners with their devices, the surrounding circumstances, and the nature of formal learning.

It is important to acknowledge that my doctoral research is merely exploratory and still ongoing, and the presented data reflect only some instances of smartphone usage by two key participants. This data sample can be viewed as a glimpse into the informal use of smartphones by Saudi youth to support their English language development. Furthermore, it delivers interesting insights regarding how their self-initiated use of technology for learning has changed with the transition to online education due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic affected my research project timeline and process. Due to the lockdown and stressful times, completing the data collection process took nine months instead of the initial plan of three months. However, participants were able to answer questions and share their experiences learning English with the support of their smartphones through the adjusted instruments.

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Family roles in their children's education:

A critical discussion of the future roles of families in educating their child

with special educational needs and disabilities.

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Abstract

One of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic is partial or whole school closure, which requires students in all age groups to study from home in some countries. For students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), distance learning can be a challenge in terms of meeting all the students' unique profiles of needs. The parent educator has been highlighted in the literature as an important part of successful practice. However, the response to the current pandemic has included an emphasis on the family being more engaged in the formal education process. For instance, with respect to the family or caregiver's knowledge and skills, this suggests that they need to be prepared and trained for using specific interventions and strategies used for their children in schools (Stenhoff et al., 2020). Therefore, this paper discusses how parents' roles in their children's education need to be considered by educators now and in the future. This is supported by the experiences of one of the authors who has a child with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) to give an authentic picture of their role in educating their children during the pandemic. This paper is useful for SEND parents and workers in the education field.

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly changed the world, causing people to change the way they carry out their lives, whether at work, school, or in social settings. It is difficult for children to understand the need for the sudden changes brought by the pandemic, more so for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), such as those with intellectual disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (Buchnat and Wojciechowska, 2020). In this paper, we will discuss how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted education practices for children with SEND and their families globally and the importance of family involvement in children's learning. This will be followed with a reflection from a family of a child with ASD. This paper is helpful for SEND families and teachers in the education sector.

Covid-19 and online remote learning

In terms of education, one of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic is the discontinuity of providing formal education in the traditional way where students are physically present in school. Countries have reacted differently towards the circumstances, and education provision has been affected in various ways (Jeste et al., 2020). One of the widely used approaches was to switch to online remote learning, wherein students use technology to assist them with learning and interacting with teachers and peers. However, the use of this approach is highly dependent on the quality of internet services (Parmigiani et al., 2021), the availability of electronic devices, and the ability of students, families and teachers to use them (Buchnat and Wojciechowska, 2020). Teachers who are less adept with the use of technology may encounter many challenges with online teaching (Smith, 2020). Further, families carry the load of responsibility for their children's learning at home, and if they designate insufficient time for online remote learning or have less understandings of children's learning processes, the equality of education could be adversely affected (Greenway and Eaton-Thomas, 2020) especially for the students with some complex needs that require parent or caregiver supervision (Asbury et al., 2021). Thus, regardless of the challenges of moving to online teaching for

teachers, they need to provide clear instructions for families to support their children at home (Stenhoff et al., 2020).

The consequences of Covid-19 on children with SEND and their families can be profound compared with non-SEND children (Asbury et al., 2021). In spite of the difficulties in identifying the relation between the effects of the pandemic and the increase of issues facing children with SEND and their families during unexpected periods of disruption (Bailey et al., 2021), there are many concerns regarding the move to online remote learning for children with SEND and their families. Such concerns include students' and families' mental health, transition challenges, and reduced social and learning opportunities. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

Questions have been raised regarding the negative impact of the pandemic on the mental health of children with SEND and even their families (Asbury et al., 2021). The children's wellbeing and the family as a whole tend to be negatively affected by losing access to in-person services such as educational and therapeutic interventions (Neece et al., 2020; Jeste et al., 2020). Parents and other guardians tend to be anxious about the consequences of Covid-19 on their children and the difficulties of adjusting to the new situation (Mutluer et al., 2020). They show a level of dissatisfaction and anxiety as they lose social support from other families and friends (Bailey et al., 2021) and their children miss the psychological and mental health support from other people (Greenway and Eaton-Thomas, 2020).

Another consequence of children being required to study at home is the environmental change for students with SEND. Generally, children with SEND have transition plans to help them adjust to changes in their lives and reduce the likelihood that any changes in behaviours or delays in their learning development would arise. This includes transitions for changes in daily routines, from school to home learning, and in moving from one task to another. For instance, children with ASD and intellectual disabilities can display changes in their behaviours and moods because of changes in their routines which can be extremely challenging for their parents (Parenteau et al., 2020; Bailey et al., 2021). Students with SEND need more time to properly transition from learning in schools to moving to the home setting. Nevertheless, adequate time for transition seemed not to be possible during the beginning of the pandemic (Stenhoff et al., 2020).

Students with SEND require special services from professionals in schools such as therapies and behavioural supports to help them with their learning developments (UNESCO, 1994). Those with severe, moderate, or multiple disabilities who are used to having 1:1 learning in schools are more likely to be negatively impacted by the changes. Although they can participate in online remote learning with their family's or carers' intensive support (Parmigiani et al., 2021), teachers have found that it is especially challenging to provide online education for students who have multiple disabilities (Smith, 2020). With limited teaching resources available online, they may not suit some students' skills (Stenhoff et al., 2020).

In addition to learning challenges, social skills can be highly affected by the pandemic. Children with SEND are less likely to be socially accepted and have relationships with their peers (Broomhead, 2019). Making friendships contribute to developing the emotional and social skills of children (Bauminger-Zviely and Agam-Ben-Artzi, 2014), thus, improving social understanding is highly important for SEND children. However, given the lockdown and shift to online remote learning, it has been difficult for children with SEND to engage in social interactions (Neece et al., 2020; Parenteau et al., 2020) even for students who attend mainstream school with non-SEND students. It is challenging to implement inclusive learning through an online platform, especially with limited preparation and resources (Parmigiani et al., 2021). Families noted that the fewer social contact opportunities and less social interaction could have an impact on their children's mental health (Greenway and Eaton-Thomas, 2020). The influence of online interaction on the friendship and social skills for children with SEND is

a new area that could be addressed in future research.

However, on a more positive note, the pandemic has given families the chance to understand their children better, have more awareness of their children's education (Beaton et al., 2021), and for children with SEND, they have had the opportunity to spend more time with their families and improve their relationships (Neece et al., 2020). Families who have been practising home-schooling before the pandemic show positive and enjoyable outcomes with their children with SEND (Parsons and Lewis, 2010). While it is not the focus here to compare families who had chosen to educate their children at home with families who found themselves home-schooling because of the current circumstances (Greenway and Eaton-Thomas, 2020), it is important to consider whether or not online remote learning is suitable for children with SEND especially for those who receive extensive support or intensive intervention that includes data-based processes. This issue raises questions about the capabilities of parents or carers to effectively help teach the students at home and the extent of their involvement with their children's learning before the pandemic. According to Greenway and Eaton-Thomas (2020), parents of students with SEND indicate that they were less prepared to teach their children at home because they had not received adequate information and guidance to support their children's home learning. The next section will explain this in detail.

Family involvement

Home education, also known as home-schooling, means that parents or guardians teach their children at home and in different places (Martin, 2020). There are numerous reasons why parents would lean towards home-schooling. One possible reason may be that they are not happy with the available school places or because their children are not learning effectively in conventional schools. Ray (2015) highlighted that home-schooling is currently one of the adopted modalities with guidelines for application, in addition to being strongly received by parents of children with disabilities. The number of children with disabilities experiencing elective instruction at home has essentially expanded since the rise of home education (Cook et al., 2013). As the parents are fully responsible for educating their children at home, involving them in the whole learning proses is essential.

Students and stakeholders have recognised the benefits of family-school partnerships (Turnbull et al., 2015). Family involvement has been related to a number of positive results for children with ASD, including higher levels of academic achievement (Jeynes, 2011), lower levels of challenging behaviours, and improvement in social emotional skills (Sheridan et al., 2013). This involvement is highly important for families of children with ASD. Given the cross-setting nature of support for children with ASD and the potential for lifelong involvement with benefit providers, family involvement is likely to extend the effectiveness of the intervention (Matson et al., 2009).

Family and teachers' relationships have been studied over a considerable period of time (Minke et al., 2014). Recent studies have shown that effective parent or carer and teacher relationships can support children's academic and behavioural outcomes (Garbacz et al., 2015) and can be strengthened through family-school collaborations. For families of children with ASD, parent and teacher relationships are especially important during the move from early education to school, which incorporates the shift from specific family benefit plans to individualised educational programs (Murray et al., 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to explore factors that anticipate family involvement, and parent and teacher connections that affect families of children with ASD.

There are several factors that affect parents' involvement and the relationships between parents and teachers. This includes the characteristics of their children, maternal education, sources of support, and satisfaction with services. Walker et al,. (2005) explained that parents' beliefs about their role in

educating their children and their decisions about taking part in their children's learning program can be impacted by a number of factors. This includes the children's needs, behaviour, language and communication skills, hyperactivity, adaptive behaviour skills, severity of the behaviour, and social interaction difficulties (Wang et al., 2011).

Cook et al,. (2013) emphasised the significance of the family's role and having proficient experts for the home education of children with ASD. However, Rose et al,. (2020) expressed concerns about achieving such parent-teacher collaboration midst the Covid-19 pandemic when families of children with ASD were subject to unavoidable stress because most social services were in critical demand. There is a challenge for the collective effort of many families to home teach children with ASD. Moreover, the more extreme behaviours the individual with ASD is detailed to have, the greater the detailed degree of stress experienced by the caregiver. Studies even before the pandemic (Hall and Graff, 2011; Rivard et al., 2014; Manning et al., 2020) have illustrated a higher level of stress on caregivers of older individuals with ASD compared with caregivers of younger individuals with ASD.

The effect of Covid-19 pandemic on families with children with ASD: personal reflection

In this section, one of the authors shares her experience as a mother in educating and training her 9-year-old autistic child and how they faced difficulties and challenges in undertaking his education and training during the lockdown and school closures in the pandemic.

> "What helped me at the beginning, was having received pre-training to support my child, continuous communication with his specialists before the pandemic, in addition to awareness of the goals included in his educational and training plan. When his education and training became remote, I became his specialist at home. His counsellor directed me remotely via ZOOM or FaceTime as I offered an entire session daily for not less than 5 hours. It is crucial for me to adhere to and continue the training so that my child does not lose the essential skills for learning, the most important of which are self-care skills, going to the bathroom, communication, language, and speech skills.
> I have faced many difficulties, especially challenging behaviours and the loss of some skills my child had already acquired, which I attribute to changing routines and sitting at home for extended periods. Further, some skills, such as toileting and self-care, cannot be sufficiently explained through distance learning, so I needed a specialist to help me understand the goal more clearly. It is a stressful experience for parents, especially with no support during the pandemic. I have experienced stress and pressure, especially in balancing my work and my child's education. This pressure varies daily based on my son's behaviour and readiness to learn. During school closure in the lockdown, I was thinking about other families with ASD children around the world who did not receive any training for their children. To sum up, from my experience, I have concluded that it is best to prepare and train parents to educate their children to reach the best possible results. In addition, it is vital to have professional support for families and inform them that they are not alone in facing any difficulties and they can request help at any time they wish. It is also important to focus on the parents' mental and psychological health to help them cope with stress during critical periods and in times where their child's progress is interrupted."

In conclusion, this paper has discussed the impact of Covid-19 on education, specifically on students with SEND and their families, as well as the consequences of moving to online remote learning. It also demonstrated the importance of involving families in the education of children with SEND and effectively engaging with their children's learning. This pandemic has shown how challenging it is for families to teach their children at home without adequate skills and sufficient support. The family, as

the first teachers of their children, needs to play a substantial role in their education in order to support their learning at home (McKenzie et al., 2021). Families and teachers need to know and share the capabilities and goals of their children and to anticipate any possible emergencies so that the children do not lose their acquired skills or have their conditions deteriorate. Considering these factors will contribute to improving educational services for students with SEND and their families.

Furthermore, having a particular institution that would offer on-demand assistance at any time, providing families with psychological counselling or counselling related to children's behaviour and how to intervene would directly increase the families' sense of safety and would reduce parents' stress levels in return. This will not only help families mentally, but also impact the quality of training they offer to their SEND children. Moreover, there is a need for effective training for parents in order to make them an essential part of their children's education and training. Also, assessing the families' performance and their cognitive and professional ability for the purpose of developing their skills in order to deal with all types of behaviours children may or may not project is highly recommended. Equipping parents with the necessary knowledge and training in addition to offering regular assessments of their abilities will help them to overcome any obstacles they may face in their daily lives. Researchers can also help in that matter via conducting comparative studies, for example to compare the performance and progress of SEND children living with families that received training and those who live with families that did not receive any training or assistance at all. It would be interesting to discuss which factors impact the children's progress (whether positively or negatively) other than their parents' training or the lack thereof, in addition to comparing stress levels between parents who received training and those who did not. Such information would be valuable to parents and specialists as well.

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Implementation of remote data collection methods for qualitative research in a global pandemic: reflections from fieldwork in Algeria

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Abstract

A wealth of empirical and theoretical literature has shown that different school subjects and disciplines have different importance (Kususanto and Fui, 2012; Resh and Benavot, 2009; Fransis, 2002; Ayalon and Yogev, 1997; Bleazby, 2015). In the Algerian education system, students, at the age of 15, have to choose either a science pathway or a literary pathway to study at secondary schools. I employed a qualitative study to explore how the relative value students have around secondary school pathways shapes who they think they are and how they feel about themselves, and how these self-perceptions and feelings are influenced by broader socialising forces inside and outside the school. This study was conducted by carrying out a students' focus group and interviews with students, teachers, pedagogic counsellors[3] and parents. The COVID 19 outbreak has major impacts worldwide, including on the research community. My research was influenced by this pandemic at many levels. In this reflective paper, I address how the emergence of COVID-19 impacted my qualitative research design in terms of two domains: first, site and participant selection; second, data collection methods. I will highlight my experience of remote fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic with all its ups and downs, to encourage reflexivity and flexibility in conducting remote qualitative research.

Research Context and Aim

The educational system in Algeria is composed of three main cycles namely primary, middle and secondary (Bulletin official de L'Education Nationale, 2008). The management of these three levels is entrusted to the Ministry of National Education (Bulletin official de L' Education Nationale, 2008). The main focus of this research study is secondary schooling which is three years in length. At the age of 15/16, students can choose either the academic stream or vocational stream. If they choose the academic stream, they can further choose between the Science pathway (SP) or the Literary pathway (LP). The subjects taken for the pathways are approximately the same, (Technology as a subject is only taught in SP), but the weighting system and the taught content of these subjects are different. That is, the Literary subjects weighting is higher in LP than SP and the Scientific subjects weighting is higher in SP than LP. There is a set of standards through which students are streamed to their assigned pathway (Radio Algérienne, 2015):

- the results of the *Brevet d'Enseignement Fondamental* exam (at the end of middle schooling, students should take a national test that grants them access to secondary education);
- the directions of their counsellors;
- the overall performance in their fourth year at middle school;
- the number of available places in each pathway.

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[3] Pedagogical counsellors are responsible for streaming students either to the literary pathway or science pathway. The criteria through which the pedagogic-counsellor streams students to either of the two pathways is dependent on the students' preference, their overall performance in their 4th year at middle school and the directions of the counsellor him/herself (Radio Algérienne, 2015).

It is worth noting that while first-year science students are allowed by the secondary school education policy to change the pathway to the Literary pathway, LP students do not enjoy the same right to transfer. Not only that, moving to the post-secondary sector, SP students can choose any humanities related fields; however, LP students do not have such an option. Their program enrolments are exclusive to humanities fields. Furthermore, to secure a place in the Science pathway, students need to achieve high grades not only in science subjects but also literary subjects, while there is no prerequisite for getting into the Literary pathway.

In the Algerian education system, this situation calls into question whether secondary school pathways possess the same perceived importance and whether students in both pathways have equal access to different educational opportunities and local labour markets. This, in turn, raises the question whether a degree in sciences is worth more than a degree in humanities. This may lead to the impression that the outcomes of the inequality of these two educational pathways would not only affect students' future educational and job opportunities, but also their learning experiences, and how they see and value themselves as learners. Therefore, this study explores how the educational pathways relative value feature in the Algerian education system in terms of three school contexts and how they are perceived by a different range of people, namely students, teachers, pedagogical counsellors and parents. The central focus of this research is first-year secondary school students. I want to understand how the perceived value of pathways influences the students' self-perceptions.

Research design before the emergence of COVID-19

I designed a multiple case study. The choice of case study is based on the logic that this study will collect and analyse data from several cases (Merriam, 2009) to provide different perspectives on the issue under study (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the explanatory approach allows the researcher to explore a given phenomenon or issue of interest in a greater depth and more richness.

The study was planned to take place in three schools: one urban, one suburban, and one rural. The choice of research location is based on the reviewed literature, which showed that social structure surrounding students plays an important role in influencing students' choices and perceptions of school subjects (Kususanto and Fui, 2012; Eccles, 1993; Eccles, 2009; Cuff, 2007). Therefore, including three schools in differing locations may bring different social contexts, backgrounds, and social structures into play.

Based on common observation, there are notable contextual differences between rural and urban environments in terms of school resources (such as class size, technology access, teaching staff), parental education, practices and socio-economic background. All these factors may have an influence on the way students' value different school disciplines.

The participants of this study were students, teachers, parents, and pedagogical counsellors. The rationale of selecting participants from different roles was to establish a comprehensive picture of how pathways are valued by different stakeholders (schools and society at large). Different social views may have an influence on how students negotiate who they are through social interaction with significant others, and how these significant others shape students' self-perceptions (Vignoles, 2017).

I selected a set of data collection methods that would be separated into three phases. I employed semi-structured interviews with teachers, pedagogical counsellors and parents, students' focus groups, and finally, two rounds of semi-structured interviews with students.

Fieldwork staging

The school year in Algeria starts in September and ends in June. We have three school holidays during the year, which are nationally determined by the Ministry of Education. The first holiday is the winter holiday, which lasts for two weeks and is held in December. The spring holiday also lasts for two weeks and is held in March. Finally, the summer holiday is at the end of May and lasts for three months. Therefore, data collection was planned to be done during school holidays when schools are closed, and students and teachers are away for a holiday.

I decided to stage the three schools (urban, suburban and rural) in two data collection phases. The chosen plan was to gather data from two schools starting from January 2020 until June 2020, and leave the third school until September 2020, as it was not feasible to work with three schools in one go.

Research Design after the emergence of COVID-19

In January 2020, I travelled to Algeria, and I first started contacting some schools. I decided to start with a suburban school first because I have a family relative who is a teacher at the school, and which made access to participants easier. It took around three weeks to finalise the official approval necessary for ethical conduct of the research in the school. After I had the approval to start my fieldwork, I attended the school quite often to converse with my participants, as I wanted to build rapport with them, and explain the purpose of my study to them. This was mainly done in the school yard during the students' mid-day break. Those moments were so fruitful, especially at the level of field notes.

At that time, COVID-19 started to emerge in China and even some other parts of the world, but it was nothing more than reported news that one would hear on TV and how the situation would unfold was unclear.

In early February 2020, I gained official authorisation from the Academy of Education Province of Batna (where the fieldwork was conducted). When I formally started my fieldwork, there were no significant infected cases in Algeria or in the city where I was doing fieldwork. Everything was moving very well as planned. I conducted one focus group with students and three further individual interviews with students and the school pedagogic counsellor.

In late February 2020, COVID-19 was confirmed to have spread to Algeria: there was one case in Algiers, the capital. With no idea that schools would be shut down, I thought of gaining access to an urban school while still carrying out fieldwork in the suburban school. The process of school access and approaching potential participants was easier in the urban school than in the first suburban school, as all the paperwork needed for the study was already finalised. It took me two weeks to approach potential participants and have personal contacts. When I was about to start fieldwork formally by conducting a focus group with students, the pandemic was beginning to impact countries across the world. As a result, the Algerian government declared a national lockdown on March 17th, that included all places of social gathering and schools.

At the beginning of the nationwide lockdown, I struggled to keep the same level of motivation to work on my thesis. It was hard for me to be in the role of a doctoral student while staying at home all the time. Prior to COVID-19, I used the university office space where I could fully function as a doctoral student. However, as time went by, I adapted to the new reality of lockdown and self-isolating measures.

I was put in a dilemma of whether to amend the whole research design. Therefore, I started to think of the best ways to adopt remote data collection as an alternative to face-to-face data collection for my research. There were a few questions that I tried to take into consideration such as:

- thinking through what closest remote data collection methods were alternatives to the original research tools of this study;

- how long would they take and whether these methods would have any implications on the timeline of the research;

- I had also to figure out whether participants would be able to be involved within the new context of COVID-19.

In response to all these questions, I decided to carry out the same research design of focus groups with students and interviews with all participants, but I would move to online research. I therefore needed a video-based online platform.

Technology in use: participant recruitment and research methods implementation

Technology has been proven to be more than positive during the pandemic period. Using internet chats and phone calls with participants enabled my fieldwork to run smoothly even during lockdown, which was useful to me and the study participants as all the chats and interview scheduling were planned through the internet.

My plan was to pursue the same processes as I had planned prior to the pandemic in terms of sampling and data collection methods. While I was lucky in the former, I was not so in the latter.

Firstly, my original sampling included various participants (students, teachers, pedagogic counsellors, and parents). I could maintain the same sample of participants. I was lucky to have approached, taken personal contacts and built a rapport with the participants of both two? schools before the lockdown. It is possible that I spent better quality time with the suburban school (especially students) as I used to visit them in the school often. I would talk to them after class, or in the backyard during their mid-day break. All these factors helped me and them to get to know each other and made it easier for them to trust me.

Although teachers and pedagogic counsellors were not the main focus of the research, I faced no difficulties in recruiting them to participate in this research. They were so welcoming and willing to help. However, one of the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic brought to my data collection was recruiting parents. I approached parents on the 'phone twice. The first time was about having their approval to interview their sons and/or daughters (students). The second time was about seeking their participation in the study. The parents I approached refused to participate. One reason for their refusal might be the fact that we never met face-to-face. The virtual recruitment hinders establishing trust: if it were not for COVID- 19, I would have been able to invite them to the school for face-to-face discussions, where we could build a rapport. However, after a couple of trials, I did manage to convince four parents to participate in this research project.

Second, having done a face-to-face focus group with students in the suburban school, I wanted to follow the same research design for the urban school. At first, I considered an internet-based focus group either synchronous or asynchronous (Lijadi & Schalkwyk, 2015; Reid &Reid, 2005; Fox, Morris & Ramsey, 2007). In this situation of a global pandemic, virtual methods are the best alternative to traditional face-to-face methods. At first, I planned to conduct an online synchronous group, but it was difficult to maintain a high-quality internet connection, so I had to think of an online asynchronous

focus group where a private Facebook group would be created and students would be invited to join the platform to answer the posted questions and communicate amongst each other. Careful consideration of ethical issues when research is conducted in an online setting is crucial as safety and confidentiality of participants should be highly ensured (Rodham and Gavin, 2006). Given that participants know each other, and they can access the platform any time where personal and sensitive information is shared, I was not sure that this method would ensure the total confidentiality of the participants and that their written responses on the comments section would not be disclosed with others.

Therefore, due to these technical and ethical issues, I dropped the idea of conducting a focus group. I decided to turn to individual online interviews as the main and only data collection method in both schools with all participants. The first technological platform I thought of was Facebook. I knew it was not the best interviewing platform, but I chose it for two reasons. Firstly, Facebook was the only medium of communication between my participants and me. Secondly, it is the most used platform in Algeria, especially amongst teenagers.

As soon as I started interviews with my participants, Facebook did not sustain a stable, good connection. Therefore, I thought of asking participants to download one of the other advanced technological platforms, such as Zoom, Webex, GoToMeeting or Skype (LOB & Morgan, 2020) where we could access better audio and video forms of communication. However, the participants have different backgrounds and ages, and not all of them are well acquainted with the recent technological platforms. I did not want to add a burden on them or put them under pressure. Besides, I sensed that they did not quite welcome the idea of facial interactions of video interviews. Therefore, I had to abandon this idea.

Phone interviews as a data collection tool

The final best practice I was left with were "Phone Interviews" (Shury, 2002; Gillham, 2005; Hanna & Mwale, 2017). I asked the participants kindly if we could move to speak on the phone; all of them approved. Although phone interviews may sound old-fashioned compared to more advanced technological platforms, it was efficient and practical. Using the Algerian national network, phone interviews were used with the rest of the participants in the schools. Although the absence of visual cues was a downside of phone interviewing, it did not result in a loss of contextual or non-verbal data (Novick, 2008). I could interpret a lot from my participants' tone, intonation, laughs, moments of silence. Besides, using this method allowed my participants to feel more comfortable and relaxed especially when speaking about their own experiences. Overall, phone interviews proved to be a positive experience of fieldwork during the lockdown.

According to the University of Leeds' ethics policy on COVID-19, I did not have to resubmit an ethics amendment form for a second time because the way in which I interacted with participants was safe in terms of COVID-19 restrictions, and besides, no substantial amendments were made to the original research such as recruitment methodology.

Final Reflections

This article discussed my fieldwork experience regarding the transformation of data collection processes after COVID-19 disruption resulted in lockdown, which presented challenges as well as some positive aspects of this research project.

Looking on the positive side, I was lucky in the respect that my study was online adaptable. I did not have to pause the data collection phase, like some of my peers, or drastically alter my methodology. I

was even luckier in that I had approached potential participants before the lockdown. I cannot imagine what it would have been like if I had not; the whole process of building trust and recruiting would have been very challenging and time-consuming.

With regards to the use of a remote data collection method, which was via phone interviews, it proved to be a promising and feasible alternative to online and in-person methods in conducting qualitative research. While limitations exist, my experience showed that the use of remote data collection methods sped up the process more than the traditional methods would ever do.

The COVID-19 pandemic became an essential topic of discussion in the interviews with participants. It served as a critical element through which participants discussed the relative value of the SP and LP.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, my original research design stated the implementation of three schools, namely, urban, suburban, and rural schools. While I did manage to conduct fieldwork in the first two schools. It was impossible to fully engage with the rural school, as after the national lockdown of the schools I only had contacts with the urban and suburban schools. Schools closed until further notice, and there was no online teaching. Therefore, I had to adapt to the imposed situation and consider only urban and suburban schools as part of the study.

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