

# Exploring the Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on English Language Teachers

Sukirman\*

English Language Teaching, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palopo, South Sulawesi – Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study aims to assess how Indonesian Islamic higher education, specifically English language teachers, have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate the impacts of Covid-19 on English language teachers. Data were collected from ten participants, and thematic analysis techniques were used to analyze the data, including data familiarization, generating codes, grouping codes, generating themes, and finalizing findings. The study reveals that the pandemic has significantly impacted education, particularly English language teaching. It has led to a loss of interactive classroom experiences and obstacles to language acquisition. However, participants have benefited from increased accessibility to international seminars, workshops, and conferences. It has removed geographical and financial barriers, allowing participants to attend events at no cost and providing valuable educational advantages. Future research could benefit from larger-scale participation. In that case, a better understanding of the impact of valuable educational advantages gained from international events amidst Covid-19 on teachers' teaching performances in the post-pandemic needs to be developed.

**Keywords:** The Covid-19 Pandemic; Indonesian Islamic higher education; ELT teachers' experiences; negative and positive impacts of the Covid-19

## Introduction

At the end of 2019, the world community was shocked by the spread of the deadly Covid-19 virus in Wuhan, China (Wang et al., 2020), also known as the 2019 novel coronavirus, or '2019-nCoV' (Ali et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020; Singhal, 2020). The rapid spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic made

all countries across the globe overwhelmed to stop the spread. Till August 02 2, 2023, 1:56 pm CEST, approximately 768,983,095 confirmed cases with 6,953,743 confirmed deaths have been globally reported to World Health Organisation (WHO) from 216 countries across the globe (WHO, 2020). The absence of clinically approved vaccines to fight the spread of this virus makes most countries around the world

**\*Corresponding Author:** Sukirman  
(sukirmanmarshanelt@iainpalopo.ac.id), Jalan Domba Perumahan Fans Cluster No 6. Lorong SMP 5 Palopo, Balandai, Palopo, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia, 91914

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difficult to tackle this global health crisis (Krishnamurthy, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has devastated health and education sectors globally, including higher education institutions. It created uncertainty in dealing with the implications in educational sectors (Araújo et al., 2020; CNN, 2020), ending up with the closures of universities globally. During the pandemic, most countries were in a dilemma to decide whether to keep universities open for students to raise their academic and social lives or close the universities as an effective way to save students' lives. Considering the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education, most countries globally decided to close all higher education institutions as an effective way to tackle the spread of the virus in universities. For example, the Indonesian government closed all Indonesian universities to stop the virus spread. Based on the data presented on the official website of UNESCO on June 6, 2020, it is reported that this pandemic has affected about 8,037,218 Indonesian university students, with 4,213,779 females and 3,823,439 males (UNESCO, 2020). Such a condition drove Indonesia and other countries to close the universities. Moreover, some Indonesian higher education policy implementations must be delayed or canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The closures of Indonesian universities changed the learning process in Indonesian higher education institutions from face-to-face instruction to fully online learning. English language teaching (ELT) departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education canceled face-to-face classroom-based teaching and converted them to virtual teaching. This

disruptive shift truly put teachers, students, and parents in an unusual, disorienting, anxious, stressed, and among other emotional reactions how to deal with (Watermeyer et al., 2020). It should be noted that using digital technologies in education is still uncommon for those in developing districts or small institutions. Due to the lack of facilities and internet connections, teachers and students experience massive disruptions and problems in online learning. Such abrupt transformation is challenging for students and lecturers to adjust the use of digital technologies in the teaching and learning process (Burki, 2020; Krishnamurthy, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020).

More recently, there has been a growing number of research publications and published opinions focusing on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic from several fields, such as health (see Ali et al., 2020; Clarke, 2020; Hagerty and Williams, 2020; Gasparyan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Griffin et al., 2020; and many more) economy (see Clarke, 2020; Goodwell, 2020; He and Harris, 2020; Sarkodie and Owusu, 2020; Sharif et al., 2020; Solomon et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020, and so on) and environment (see Sarkodie and Owusu, 2020; Wang and Su, 2020; and so on). However, while some research has been carried out on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education (see Araújo et al., 2020; Bao, 2020; Wang and Zhao, 2020; Watermeyer et al., 2020; Krishnamurthy, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020), surprisingly very few studies have addressed such issues on Indonesian higher education. There is a notable paucity of well-controlled studies describing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education, specifically for the English language

teaching context in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

To fill the gaps mentioned above, the primary aim of this study is to examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Indonesian Islamic higher education from English language teachers' perspectives. The study aims to shed new light on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on ELT departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions from ELT lecturer perspectives. In particular, this study seeks to elaborate on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on ELT departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

## Method

### Research design

The research design applied in this study was qualitative (Bell, 2010; Cheung, 2010). The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with the selected participants (Lei, 2019; Hoang & Ma, 2019). Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore participants' experiences on a particular issue (Cho, 2004; Cotterall, 2011; Sandy & Shen, 2019). In addition, it tends to be a more flexible research design because the researcher has opportunities to conduct in-depth conversations and follow-up questions. In other words, the researcher can ask additional questions to clarify certain points (Flowerdew, 1999).

### Research participants

This study involved ten ELT lecturers to investigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on ELT departments in Indonesian Islamic higher education. The potential research participants were invited to be research participants through Google Forms distributed

via ELT WhatsApp group, Facebook, Instagram, and e-mail. The participants were opted for based on some criteria, including being English teachers, having teaching experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching in Indonesian Islamic higher education, and experiencing the impacts of Covid-19 on their teaching. For the sake of clarity for the potential research participants, all fundamental information of the present study (i.e., research purposes, participants' confidentiality, and participant withdrawals) was clearly stated in the distributed Google form. In addition, ten ELT lecturers were also voluntarily and randomly selected after analyzing their basic personal information in the returned Google Form. Several potential participants who had filled out the circulated Google Form were excluded from the research participant list because they did not meet the criteria of targeted ELT lecturers who taught in Islamic higher education institutions.

### Research procedures

Due to the social distancing policy applied by the Indonesian government to tackle the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak, the researcher only conducted virtual semi-structured interviews via Zoom or Google Meeting (depending on participants' approval) in line with the appointments made with the participants. The interviews for three participants were rescheduled due to a technical internet connection problem. Before the interview, the researcher designed open-ended questions related to the abovementioned research questions. The time allocation for the interview session was 30 to 60 minutes for each participant, depending on their responses to the questions. Following the approval of all

participants, all interview sessions were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

### Data analysis

The researcher applied a thematic analysis technique to analyze the participants' interviews (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; O'Leary, 2017). To do so, the researcher played the interview recording and listened to it repeatedly to understand the data (O'Leary, 2017). While listening to the recording and reading the transcript, the researcher created categories

and codes to identify the responses to research questions. After creating the categories and codes, all identified keywords, such as words, phrases, and sentences in the transcribed interview recording, were highlighted and grouped into the applicable categories and codes. The identified keywords were re-checked to ensure the listed and grouped data belonged to the correct categories. Finally, the researcher carefully reviewed the categories and classified the selected data as the present study's findings.

**Table 1**

*Participants' basic profile*

Name	University (pseudonyms)*	Gender	Final Academic Degree	Academic Position
L1	Timurung	M	Doctor TESOL	Professor
L2	Lomponene	F	Ph.D. TESOL	Professor
L3	Timurung	M	Doctor TESOL	Associate Professor
L4	Labissa	M	Doctor TESOL	Associate Professor
L5	Pollawareng	F	Doctor TESOL	Associate Professor
L6	Pacciro	F	MA TESOL	Assistant Professor
L7	Pompanua	M	M. TESOL	Assistant Professor
L8	Labissa	M	M.Pd. (Master of Education)	Assistant Professor
L9	Pollawareng	F	M.Pd (Master of Education)	Assistant Professor
L10	Lomponene	F	M. TESOL	Lecturer

\*Names of countryside in author's hometown

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

#### *Positive impacts*

Amidst the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been unexpected opportunities that have emerged for the majority of the participants. One notable advantage experienced by all participants is the increased accessibility to international seminars, workshops, and conferences, which were once

restricted by geographical and financial limitations. The COVID-19 pandemic has inadvertently opened doors for most participants, enabling them to attend international seminars for free and reap significant educational benefits (L1, L3, L6, L7, L9, L10).

#### *Virtual Seminars: Breaking Down Geographical Barriers*

Before the pandemic, attending international seminars involved significant costs

associated with travel, accommodation, and visa expenses. However, the shift to virtual platforms for educational events has eliminated the need for physical travel, allowing the participants to participate in international seminars without distance constraints (L5, L7, L9, L10). This newfound accessibility enables teachers from around the globe to access valuable professional development opportunities at no cost (L2, L4), fostering a global exchange of ideas and expertise (L5, L6).

*I got many invitations to attend international seminars online from my friends during the Covid-19. Distance does not matter ... mmmm being borderless is completely real (L7).*

*I attend many virtual workshops for free, where I learn valuable professional developments ... really amazing opportunities (L4).*

*I really enjoy virtual seminars amidst the Covid-19 because it facilitates a global exchange of ideas and expertise among scholars across the globe (L6).*

The virtual format also promotes inclusivity, eliminating the limitations imposed by 'visa restrictions' (L4, L6) and 'travel logistics' (L2, L3, L5). Teachers who may have previously been unable to attend seminars due to visa limitations or travel restrictions (Aquino, 2023) can now engage in 'professional development' (L2) alongside their international counterparts. This global collaboration facilitates the sharing of 'innovative teaching methodologies' (L7), 'best practices' (L3), and 'cultural experiences' (L6), ultimately enriching the field of English language education.

*Regardless of the negative impacts of Covid-19, I should also say that it eases me to join many international conferences and seminars without leaving my bed. I am really happy because visa restrictions are not an issue for me. Believe it or not, I can join three to five virtual seminars in one day in different countries ... thank God (L6).*

*Because of Covid-19, I freely join some virtual workshops where I learn innovative teaching methodologies in ELT (L7).*

### **Diverse Perspectives: A Wealth of Cultural Exchange**

Attending international seminars virtually exposes English teachers to educators, researchers, and professionals from 'diverse cultural backgrounds' (L8). This cross-cultural interaction offers many opportunities for cultural exchange and understanding (Samarji & Sengupta, 2023). Some participants point out that engaging in discussions with a global community of educators broadens horizons and nurtures a deeper appreciation for multiculturalism in the classroom (L1, L4, L5, L8, L10).

*The participants have diverse cultural backgrounds, which enriches my insights (L8).*

*The discussion about multiculturalism in ELT classrooms is really fascinating to me (L4).*

*Interacting with educators worldwide online during the Covid-19 time expanded my perspectives and fostered my understanding and*

*respect for multiculturalism within the ELF classroom (L10).*

By embracing diverse perspectives, English teachers can gain insights into different 'teaching methodologies' (L3), 'innovative approaches' (L6, L8, L10), and unique challenges faced by educators in various regions. L7 stated that the exposure enabled him to adapt his teaching strategies to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population. Moreover, as experienced in L9, exposure encourages him to integrate global perspectives into the curriculum, fostering an inclusive and globally-minded educational environment.

*I learn several teaching methodologies in Indonesian ELT classrooms (L3).*

*Some innovative approaches to teaching English are presented at international conferences (L6).*

### **Enhanced Networking: Collaborations Beyond Borders**

The virtual seminar format encourages interaction among participants through *chat functions* (L2, L4), *Q&A sessions* (L8), and *virtual networking events* (L7). English teachers can leverage these opportunities to 'connect with professionals' (L5) in their field worldwide, building 'valuable relationships and potential collaborations' (L6). The ease of digital communication enables ongoing dialogue, fostering the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices long after the seminar concludes, as experienced by L2, L4, L7, and L9.

These expanded networking opportunities enable the participants to establish connections with experts and practitioners they previously had not had access to (L2, L5, L6, L8).

'Collaborative projects' (L1), 'research initiatives' (L3), and 'joint publications' (L2) can result from these connections, further 'enhancing professional growth and promoting international collaboration in the field of English language education' (L1). Connecting with diverse professionals empowers teachers to broaden their knowledge base and create a global network of support and inspiration (L3, L7, L10).

*I discuss some potential collaborative projects with the participants with similar research areas. Such discussion seems to bridge my networking, enhance professional growth, and promote international collaboration in English language education (L1).*

*During the Covid-19 time, I gained the power to enrich my knowledge and establish a global support and inspiration network by connecting with diverse professionals (L7).*

### **Professional Growth: Access to Expertise and Research**

International seminars often feature renowned English language teaching experts, researchers, and thinkers. By attending these seminars, the participants gain direct access to cutting-edge research, new pedagogical techniques, and evidence-based practices (L3, L4, L7, L10). L5 stated that the knowledge and insights gained could be applied to her teaching methodologies, ultimately 'enhancing my classroom instruction and benefiting my students' language learning experiences' (L2). The virtual seminar format allows the participants to learn from leaders in the field

without travel and associated cost barriers (L2, L5, L6). They can engage in 'live sessions' (L3), 'participate in workshops' (L7), and 'access resources' (L5) that would have otherwise been inaccessible.

*Through attending online seminars, I can access sophisticated research publications, innovative pedagogical methods, and practices grounded in evidence (L3).*

*The knowledge I gain from conferences and seminars is beneficial in enhancing my classroom instruction and benefiting my students' language learning experiences (L2).*

### **Negative impacts**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant educational disruptions, and English language teaching has not been spared from its negative impacts. The following section explores the effects of the pandemic on English language teaching, highlighting the challenges teachers face as experienced by the participants. These findings shed light on the loss of interactive classroom experiences and hindered language acquisition.

#### *Loss of Interactive Classroom Experiences*

Most participants stated that the shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a loss of interactive classroom experiences in English language teaching (L1, L3, L4, L7, L9, L10). Traditional classroom settings provide opportunities for 'authentic communication' (L5), 'collaborative activities' (L2), and 'immediate feedback' (L8), facilitating 'language development' (L1). However, the transition to online platforms has 'limited face-

to-face interactions' (L4), impeding 'students' engagement and inhibiting their language acquisition process' (L2). L8 reported a significant decrease in student participation and engagement in virtual classrooms, leading to a less dynamic and interactive learning environment.

*The students do not interact well in online teaching, resulting in no language development (L1).*

*Virtual teaching tends to be boring because there is no interaction like in-person teaching. I mean limited face-to-face interactions (L4).*

*Teaching in the classroom eases me to design authentic communication with students (L5)*

*It is quite easy for me to design collaborative activities in the classroom – completely different in virtual meetings. Covid-19 truly hampered students' engagement and inhibited their language acquisition process (L2).*

The absence of physical presence and non-verbal cues has made it difficult for teachers to gauge students' understanding and tailor their instruction accordingly. The vibrant and spontaneous exchanges that occurred in traditional classrooms, such as 'discussions' (L3), 'debates' (L10), and 'group work' (L6), have become 'challenging' (L4) to replicate in the virtual environment. As a result, students may feel 'less motivated' (L2) to actively participate, resulting in 'decreased language practice' (L7) and 'limited opportunities for oral communication' (L10). Additionally, technological barriers, such as 'poor internet connectivity' (L7)

or 'limited access to devices' (L8), further hinder students' ability to engage in the online learning experience fully, exacerbating the loss of interactive classroom environments (L4, L10).

*Students always have good discussions with their friends in the classroom (L3).*

*Before Covid-19, my students were always active when they had group work (L6).*

*I got stressed in teaching via Zoom because the students were less motivated because they were used to being (L2).*

*... It really decreased language practice since they cannot speak together like in the classroom. ... Sadly, most students have poor internet connectivity because they live in the countryside (L7).*

### **Hindered Language Acquisition**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created obstacles to language acquisition in English teaching (L1, L2, L5, L7, L9). One of the primary hindrances to language acquisition during the pandemic has been 'reduced opportunities for social interactions' (L3). Most participants agreed that with social distancing measures and lockdowns, children, and adults had limited face-to-face interactions with peers, teachers, and native speakers (L2, L3, L6, L9, L10). The absence of regular conversations, discussions, and group activities hampered the development of essential language skills, such as vocabulary expansion and fluency. Language immersion and exposure play crucial roles in language acquisition. However, due to travel restrictions and the closures of educational institutions,

many individuals have been deprived of the chance to immerse themselves in foreign cultures or attend language courses abroad. As a result, the immersive language learning experiences that promote linguistic and cultural understanding have been significantly disrupted, impeding language learners' progress.

Language acquisition heavily relies on real-time interactions, immediate feedback, and non-verbal cues, which are not always effectively conveyed through virtual platforms. L1 stated that the absence of in-person classroom environments has hindered language learners' ability to engage in authentic, spontaneous conversations, inhibiting 'their progress in acquiring a language' (L2). Also, the increased reliance on digital devices during the pandemic has led to a surge in screen time for individuals of all ages. 'Excessive screen time can negatively impact language acquisition' (L4), often leading to reduced attention spans, decreased motivation, and increased distractions (L7, L10). The constant exposure to myriad distractions online may divert learners' focus from language learning activities, impeding their ability to concentrate and engage effectively in language acquisition exercises.

Further, the pandemic has affected individual's mental and emotional well-being. The stress, anxiety, and uncertainty associated with the global crisis can impact language learning negatively. Elevated stress levels may hinder learners' ability to concentrate, retain information, and effectively practice language skills. The emotional toll of the pandemic can further undermine learners' motivation and enthusiasm, hindering their progress in language acquisition.



*Online learning does not provide students with authentic conversations. It negatively affects their progress in acquiring a language (L2).*

*Based on my personal experiences, excessive screen time can negatively impact the language acquisition of my students because the screen distracts their concentration... really awful (L4).*

## Discussion

The impact of Covid-19 on the loss of interactive classroom experiences has been significant. With the pandemic leading to widespread school closures and the shift to remote learning, students have missed the traditional face-to-face interactions with teachers and peers (Rasmitadila, et al., 2023). Interactive classroom experiences are crucial for effective learning as they allow students to actively participate, ask questions, engage in discussions, and collaborate with their classmates. These experiences foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and social development. However, remote learning, while necessary for safety reasons, often lacks the same level of interactivity. Virtual classrooms may limit opportunities for real-time interaction, group activities, and hands-on experiences. Technical issues, such as poor internet connectivity or limited access to devices (Erarslan, 2021; Kandati & Tatipang, 2021), can further hinder students' ability to engage fully. Efforts have been made to mitigate these challenges, with educators incorporating online collaboration tools, breakout rooms, and interactive platforms. However, the transition to

remote learning has undeniably disrupted traditional classrooms' dynamic and interactive nature (Rasmitadila, et al., 2023).

The negative impact of Covid-19 on interactive classroom experiences has also hindered language acquisition among students. Language learning often thrives in interactive environments that provide verbal communication, listening comprehension, and cultural immersion opportunities. The limitations imposed by the pandemic have disrupted these crucial aspects (Ben Salah et al., 2022; Watermeyer et al., 2020). In traditional classrooms, students engage in conversations, practice English pronunciation, and receive immediate feedback from teachers and peers. They benefit from real-time interactions that help develop language fluency, confidence, and cultural understanding. However, remote learning and reduced in-person contact have diminished these opportunities. Virtual classrooms may present challenges for language acquisition, as online platforms may not fully replicate the immersive experience of in-person communication.

The reliance on technology-mediated communication has its limitations. Technical issues, such as audio quality problems or time lags, can hamper effective language practice. Furthermore, limited interaction time and reduced non-verbal cues make it difficult to pick up on subtleties and nuances of language. Language acquisition also relies on authentic exposure to native speakers and cultural contexts, which may be limited during the pandemic. International travel restrictions and reduced opportunities for cultural exchange programs have hindered students' access to immersive language experiences. Also, online

platforms may not adequately replicate the nuances of face-to-face communication, making it challenging for learners (Thomas & Rogers, 2020) to develop effective communication strategies (Vanderpool et al., 2023), body language interpretation (Küchenhoff, 2019), and pragmatics. Furthermore, technological constraints, such as audio and video quality issues or time lags, may further hinder students' ability to engage in meaningful spoken interactions. The lack of non-verbal cues and immediate feedback in online environments also hampers learners in accurately gauging their language production and progress, impacting their confidence and motivation to use English (Darvin & Norton, 2023).

Regardless of the aforementioned negative impacts, one of the positive impacts of Covid-19 has been the increased accessibility to international conferences, seminars, and workshops. The shift to virtual events during the pandemic has eliminated the travel, cost, and time constraints that previously limited participation in such events. Individuals can attend worldwide virtual conferences and seminars without needing travel arrangements, visas, or physical presence. It has opened opportunities for a broader audience to share knowledge, network, and professional development (Aquino, 2023; Bray et al., 2022). The reduced cost of virtual events, such as registration fees, accommodation, and transportation expenses, has made participation more affordable and accessible. Individuals who may have been unable to attend in person due to financial limitations can now benefit from the expertise and insights of renowned speakers and experts (Le et al., 2020).

Virtual platforms also offer the advantage of flexible scheduling. Participants can attend sessions from different time zones, allowing for greater flexibility in managing personal and professional commitments (Bray et al., 2022). Recordings and materials are often available for on-demand access, enabling attendees to revisit sessions or explore content at their own pace. Furthermore, virtual events have encouraged inclusivity and diversity by eliminating physical barriers. People with disabilities or health conditions can now participate on equal footing. Additionally, individuals from countries with limited resources or travel restrictions can actively engage in global academic, scientific, and professional communities (Mohamed et al., 2020; Guimón & Narula, 2020).

The accessibility provided by virtual conferences, seminars, and workshops has the potential to democratize knowledge and facilitate collaboration on a global scale. It broadens opportunities for learning, networking (Guimón & Narula, 2020), and staying up-to-date with the latest research and industry trends. Even as in-person events resume, the virtual component is likely to persist, offering a hybrid model that combines the benefits of accessibility (Borg, 2015) and the value of face-to-face interactions. The exposure to a wide range of ideas and approaches empowers teachers to refine their teaching practices, incorporate new techniques, and stay abreast of the latest developments (Borg, 2015) in English language education.

## Conclusion

The current study evaluates the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on Indonesian Islamic higher education as experienced by English

language teachers. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the field of education has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and English language teaching has also suffered from its negative consequences. The findings indicate that the harmful effects of the pandemic on English language teaching include the loss of interactive classroom experiences and obstacles to language acquisition. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, several unexpected opportunities have arisen for most participants. One noteworthy advantage that all participants have enjoyed is enhanced access to international seminars, workshops, and conferences. In the past, these events were limited by geographical and financial constraints. However, the pandemic has inadvertently removed these barriers, allowing most participants to attend such international gatherings free of charge. As a result, they have been able to gain valuable educational benefits.

Although the study has successfully demonstrated the impacts of Covid-19 on English language teachers in Indonesian Islamic higher education, it has certain limitations regarding the generalisability of the findings. With a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be generalized to the whole context of English language teachers across Indonesia. Despite its limitations, the study certainly adds to our understanding that English language teachers can gain valuable educational benefits amidst the huge disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In other words, the unforeseen impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has created opportunities for English teachers to freely access international seminars, gaining valuable

educational advantages in the process. If future researchers can incorporate large randomized controlled samples, exploring the implications mentioned would be a promising avenue for further investigation. It would help obtain more conclusive evidence regarding the effects of Covid-19 on English teachers in a broader context. Additionally, to advance the debate, it is essential to understand how the valuable educational advantages gained from international events during the Covid-19 pandemic impact teachers' teaching performances in the post-pandemic era.

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