Mind the Gap: An Autoethnographic Critique of Hegemonic Narratives in Emergency Remote Teaching

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Abstract – When the pandemic disrupted traditional classroom teaching-learning activities in March 2020, the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka prescribed the shift to online platforms. The use of online platforms was limited and specific within tertiary education in the pre-pandemic context. This study explores the reflections of five academics teaching English as a Second Language in a Sri Lankan State university in the context of emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It addresses a perceived gap in emergency remote English Language teaching and utilises teacher experiences to critique the dominant narratives shaping the sudden shift to online teaching. Autoethnography, the methodology used in this research, was utilised to reflexively analyse the teaching journals of the participants. The researchers' experiences of online teaching were used to deconstruct online classroom spaces. Thereby, the study explored the conversations and silences resulting from the competition of hegemonic narratives within these digital spaces. The findings in this study are as follows: the researchers observed that the adoption of multimodality and new literacies in education necessitated through globalization widened the digital divide in the teaching-learning context; online teaching enabled alternative engagement for students in the form of anonymous communication which was impossible in the traditional classroom setting; and the assumption that the productivity of academics would not alter within the work-from-home context was not universally applicable. Thus, this paper argues that the identification of such gaps in narratives leads to a more holistic understanding of online teaching and its potential sustainability.

Keywords: online learning, emergency remote teaching, autoethnography

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