



## Strategies for teaching kindergarten children English language skills through distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic: A future vision for education in the United Arab Emirates

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### Abstract

This study explores the use of distance learning (DL) strategies to support kindergarten (KG) children in acquiring English language skills in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a mixed-methods research design, quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 517 parents (464 females, 53 males), while qualitative insights were gathered from a focus group discussion with 60 parents. The findings reveal that English teachers effectively implemented digital learning strategies by integrating synchronous activities through educational platforms and assigning asynchronous tasks using various digital applications to enhance reading and writing skills. Additionally, teachers encouraged listening to songs and stories and reading simple books to develop listening and speaking abilities. Parents played a critical role in supporting their children's learning, contributing to the overall success of DL. However, the study also highlights challenges, including limited parental expertise and varying levels of digital literacy. These findings provide valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of DL in early childhood education and offer practical recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of remote English language instruction for KG children. Emphasizing the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents, the study suggests strategies to address the challenges and optimize learning outcomes in future DL environments.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Distance learning, Early childhood education, English skills, Strategies for teaching, Vision for the future.

**Citation** | Mohebi, L., Murshidi, G. A., Zaabi, A. A., & Hendawy, A. (2026). Strategies for teaching kindergarten children English language skills through distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic: A future vision for education in the United Arab Emirates. *Journal of Education and E-Learning Research*, 13(1), 64-76. 10.20448/jeelr.v13i1.8219

#### History:

Received: 12 February 2025

Revised: 30 December 2025

Accepted: 19 January 2026

Published: 23 February 2026

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**Publisher:** Asian Online Journal Publishing Group

**Funding:** This research is supported by United Arab Emirates University (Grant number: 12D049).

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The Ethical Committee of the United Arab Emirates University, UAE has granted approval for this study on 1 June 2020 (Ref. No. ERSC—2020-1066).

**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** Theoretical framework collection and organization, Laila Mohebi (L.M.); conceptualization, theoretical framework collection and organization, and research instrument development and application, Ghadah Al Murshidi (G.A.M.); theoretical framework collection and organization, Ahmed Al Zaabi (A.A.Z.); theoretical framework writing, statistical analysis, data interpretation, and writing—final version, Ahlam Hendawy (A.H.). All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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### Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study uniquely examines the development of English language skills among kindergarten children in the UAE through distance learning, emphasizing active parent-teacher collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing questionnaires and focus groups, it proposes a future framework tailored to early childhood education in emergency contexts, addressing pedagogical challenges and opportunities.

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to education, forcing a rapid transition to distance learning (DL) across all levels, including early childhood education. Kindergarten (KG) children, who typically rely on interactive, play-based, and social learning environments, had to adapt to online instruction. This shift raised concerns about the effectiveness of DL in developing English language skills among young learners, particularly in contexts where English is not the first language, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Studies have also examined how DL affects students with disabilities and inclusive education, emphasizing the need for structured support and digital accessibility (Alhammedi, 2024; Meda, Efthymiou, AlHammedi, Williams, & Fteiha, 2023).

Distance learning in early childhood education presents unique challenges, as young children require structured guidance, engagement, and parental involvement to achieve language learning outcomes. The sudden shift to online education during the pandemic placed additional responsibilities on teachers and parents to facilitate language acquisition through digital platforms. Research indicates that, while online learning can support early childhood education, its success depends on multiple factors, including teacher preparedness, parental involvement, and the availability of digital resources (Ford, Kwon, & Tsotsoros, 2021; Lau & Lee, 2021). Previous studies highlight that parents play a crucial role in helping children navigate distance learning, with many feeling overwhelmed by the dual responsibilities of parenting and teaching (Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020; Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020). Additionally, challenges such as maintaining children's engagement, ensuring effective communication between teachers and families, and managing screen time have been widely reported (Brom et al., 2020; Timmons, Cooper, Bozek, & Braund, 2021). Moreover, research on online language learning strategies highlights the importance of self-repair and interactional modifications, which influence second-language acquisition in digital settings (Al Maktoum, Abri, & Guirguis, 2025).

While much of the existing research on DL during COVID-19 has focused on higher education (Amro, 2022; Babb, Rufino, & Johnson, 2021), limited studies have examined its impact on KG children, particularly in the UAE. Given that English is the primary language of instruction in many Emirati schools, it is essential to explore how distance learning has affected young learners' acquisition of English language skills and the effectiveness of instructional strategies in this context. Additionally, studies have emphasized the need for teacher preparedness in fostering inclusive education, particularly during online instruction (Alhammedi, Meda, Efthymiou, Williams, & Fteiha, 2024). This study aims to evaluate the strategies used to teach English to kindergarten children through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UAE. It seeks to explore the roles of teachers and parents, the learning strategies employed, and the challenges encountered. By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how distance learning can be optimized for early childhood language education.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

### 2.1. Online Learning in the UAE: an Overview

The situation in 2020 forced online teaching across all levels of education. Consequently, young children had to attend kindergarten classes online. The term "online learning" can refer to various methods, but it generally involves using online technology to facilitate learning either synchronously or asynchronously, allowing students and teachers to be in different locations (Nani & Sibanda, 2020; Singh & Thurman, 2019). The online learning methods used in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) varied by school and student. Some schools utilized applications such as Dojo or Seesaw, while others employed platforms like Google Meet and Microsoft Teams to conduct online classes. Students received instruction through live lessons, complemented by pre-recorded videos and offline assignments. Most studies examining online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on higher education (Amro, 2022; Babb et al., 2021; Hussein, Daoud, Alrabaiah, & Badawi, 2020; Moussa & Ali, 2021), with little research on the online learning of KG children and their parental input.

Several interrelated factors influenced the online learning environment, including parents, teachers, technology, and time management. Although online learning during the pandemic was initially implemented as an emergency response, this mode of education demonstrated both positive and negative aspects, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Garbe et al., 2020; Lau & Lee, 2021).

### 2.2. An Overview of Online Learning

Many parents found that homeschooling had a positive impact on their relationship with their children (Dong et al., 2020) in that they could spend more time with their children during this period (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020; Timmons

et al., 2021). Online learning also provides children with opportunities to further improve their computer skills (Nani & Sibanda, 2020), aside from constructive activities to keep them engaged during lockdown periods (Brooker, 2002; Dong et al., 2020; Nani & Sibanda, 2020) (B. However, many studies found several drawbacks to the online learning method during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several parents had concerns about remote learning (Coppola, Immacolata, & Masullo, 2020; Garbe et al., 2020). Parents worldwide have expressed their concerns about the social isolation caused by nationwide lockdowns and distance learning (DL) (Bhamani et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Stites, Sonneschein, & Galczyk, 2021) and how it affected their children's social and emotional well-being (Brom et al., 2020; Timmons et al., 2021).

Children prefer online learning that supports social interaction over passive online experiences (Szente, 2020; Tung & Deng, 2006). However, this was not possible in most parts of the world during the pandemic. Nonetheless, in many countries, including the UAE, teachers attempted to encourage interaction through live lessons and online group work.

The various challenges in online education can be categorized into two types: internal and external. External challenges, which are beyond the control of parents, include factors such as children losing motivation to learn after exposure to online learning, the absence of an authority figure, and issues such as boredom, short attention spans, poor attitude, excessive workload, or insufficient work (Brom et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020).

Parents have used words such as “burdensome” and “time-consuming” to describe online learning (Dong et al., 2020; Ionescu et al., 2020). Studies have found that only 33.55% of the parents questioned (n=200) reported that their children were enthusiastic about learning online, while 15.13% found their children completely disinterested in e-learning.

Children thrive on routine, and for many, this meant a regular school timetable. The disruption to the school routine and predictable schedule disturbed parents (Bhamani et al., 2020), and it was particularly a point of frustration for parents of children aged three to five years (Coppola et al., 2020). Routine is also considered important for young children studying through DL (Babb et al., 2021; Ford et al., 2021).

The content of online lessons has not been studied in-depth; however, in a study by Bhamani et al. (2020), parents explained how teachers not only focused on children's academic skills but also taught them how to stay safe during the pandemic and encouraged them to remain active by engaging in indoor physical activity and playing games. Some parents stated that they would like more direct live online sessions for their children (Brom et al., 2020) that offer opportunities for socialization (Timmons et al., 2021). However, some studies also reported parental frustration with young children having to study via Zoom (Wang, 2020). Parents have also found children feeling stressed, afraid, and confused after moving to DL (Babb et al., 2021; Duraku & Hoxha, 2020).

The internal aspects of DL include factors related to parental capabilities, such as a lack of professional teaching experience to guide their children in online learning. Parents do not always possess the skills necessary to assist their children with schoolwork (Brom et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Nani & Sibanda, 2020; Timmons et al., 2021).

While parents may understand the importance of their role in their children's online learning, there are nonetheless challenges such as working from home and other commitments that affect the parents' level of involvement (Garbe et al., 2020; Stites et al., 2021; Timmons et al., 2021), further leading to parental anxiety about DL (Coppola et al., 2020). Undertaking the role of teacher and thus checking and explaining tasks (Brom et al., 2020) and also being the parent, combined with remaining at home with their children all day, can be stressful (Garbe et al., 2020). Moreover, the home environment is not always ideal for learning (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020). In addition, various studies have shown that factors such as lack of support, communication, instruction, and feedback from schools can contribute to the frustration experienced by parents (Coppola et al., 2020; Lau & Lee, 2021; Nani & Sibanda, 2020; Wang, 2020).

Balancing work with children's schooling is challenging for parents with more than one child to care for, which leads some parents to reject the idea of online learning (Brom et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020). Although parents supported school closure during the pandemic (Garbe et al., 2020), several studies have outlined the varying amounts of time spent supporting children in academic tasks during the lockdown (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020). According to a study by Garbe et al. (2020), 62.3% (n=122) of parents reported spending at least one hour daily assisting their children with homeschooling. In the Czech Republic, Brom et al. (2020) found that most of the children in their sample (1st–9th grade) studied online between two and four hours a day, with more than half (66%) of the parents stating that they were involved with the learning for more than half of the time. Timmons et al. (2021) found that younger children (K-2) required more parental input to complete their tasks. This is a considerable time commitment for any parent and can disrupt the schedules of not only children but also their parents, leading to negative responses from parents (Wang, 2020), many of whom work from home, adding to the difficulties in homeschooling (Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020).

### *2.3. Online Learning of Young Children*

Teaching younger children online has been found to be a challenging task (Ford et al., 2021). Teachers of children under five years have reported low levels of parental involvement in online education and difficulties in maintaining children's attention during online interactions (Ford et al., 2021). Similarly, most of the Kg students' parents interviewed by Lau and Lee (2021) found their children unable to independently complete their required DL activities, with the Kg and K-2 students' parents stating that lack of focus on the part of their children was the main issue (Lau & Lee, 2021; Timmons et al., 2021). They also found that the online activities used for kindergarten children were mostly asynchronous (Lau & Lee, 2021). In States (2021), parents preferred worksheets for preschool children and expressed a desire for more online social opportunities for their children. Lau and Lee (2021) stated that parents found the kindergarten online curriculum lacking in variety, with most children spending more than one hour a day on electronic devices. The lack of differentiation led some parents to believe that the quality of education for younger children had declined after transitioning to online formats (Timmons et al., 2021). Research has shown that teachers play a crucial role in designing effective learning experiences for young children, as their instructional approaches directly impact curriculum effectiveness (AlMohsen, 2024). Without teacher-driven adaptation and creativity, online learning risks becoming rigid and less engaging for early learners.

#### *2.4. Parental Role in Children's Language Learning*

As studies have shown, parents played a major role in their children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for many, this was not easy. Parents also played a significant role in their children's English language development. According to Brooker (2002), the literacy practices of children at home before formal schooling shape their learning methods. Children engaged in literacy practices prior to starting school tend to succeed academically, while those with different learning styles at home may struggle in school. Therefore, since home practices have a lasting impact on children, schools should recognize the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their students and empower them to succeed in literacy development (De Jong & Leseman, 2001). This idea can be extended to parental influences during lockdown periods. Parental practices can vary widely. Yeo, Ong, and Ng (2014) found that adults' attitudes toward literacy can influence their children's interests. According to Baker (2003), supportive home environments can improve children's reading outcomes by boosting their motivation to do voluntary reading.

While studies have shown that parents play a vital role in children's literacy development, not all parents participate in their children's learning. To explain the factors influencing parental involvement in their children's learning and engagement at school, a study by Oswald, Zaidi, Cheatham, and Brody (2018) showed that parents with a high school diploma or higher education were more likely to participate in their children's learning. In addition, stay-at-home parents are more likely to participate in such practices than working parents. Regarding the influence of family structure, divorced families and step-parents are less likely to participate.

Interestingly, Stites et al. (2021) surveyed 166 preschool parents in the United States, to find that parents took up more activities with a focus on literacy, but the main issue was that children needed assistance to complete their activities.

#### *2.5. Theories of Language Development*

Different perspectives should be considered when examining the literacy development of children. Snow (2006) explains the componential and holistic views of children's literacy. This perspective sees literacy as a combination of different elements, whereas the holistic perspective views literacy as a whole. The constructive approach to teaching literacy pertains to children's abilities and interactions to achieve the outcome of acquiring a language.

Tomasello (2000) explains Piaget's and Vygotsky's dominant theories of language acquisition, considering their views on the relationship between language, cognition, and social life. Piaget's theory examines language acquisition as a comprehensive cognitive process. For Piaget, language use is akin to the use of tools, with the child experimenting with language to understand how it functions. While Piaget focused on the cognitive aspects of early language development, Vygotsky emphasized the more social and cultural factors that influence language acquisition (Michael Tomasello, 1996). Piaget noted the early beginnings of cognitive development and with this comes early language development (Moerk, 1975). Despite Piaget not directly dealing with language development, his overall research on child development, specifically cognitive acquisitions and development, all implicate language learning (Moerk, 1975). With Piaget, adult-child relations are vital (DeVries, 1997). Also, Vygotsky looks at language acquisition as a social process, arguing that children acquire pre-existing language through interaction with their surroundings. Amerian, Ahmadian, and Mehri (2014) noted that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is based on a child's meaningful social interaction with someone who is more skilled than themselves, with the zone of proximal development being the social setting where "scaffolding" of learning takes place, which moves the child's skills to the next level. Social interaction is foundational to Vygotsky's theory and is a collaborative task with a more capable other (Reunamo & Nurmilaakso, 2007). In education, it is often the teacher who is the more capable individual, guiding the learning (Amerian et al., 2014). Vygotsky noted the distinct difference between thought and language, which develop as a child grows (Fredericks, 1974). Reunamo and Nurmilaakso (2007) state that language initially functions as a communication tool, and subsequently, the child begins to internalize it. Knowledge first develops externally and socially, then internally within the child. This progression is evident in language development and the distinction between external and "internal" speech. Despite differences, Martini and Sénéchal (2012) and Michael Tomasello (1996) conclude that there are both cognitive and social processes that influence language acquisition, thereby supporting both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories.

#### *2.6. Teaching and Learning the English Language*

In terms of effective strategies for teaching English to children, Porrás González (2010) reported various benefits of storytelling. Stories increase children's motivation, participation, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension. Teachers have attempted to bridge the gap in storytelling within online learning by encouraging home communication to strengthen literacy skills (Giannakopoulou, 2021; Porrás González, 2010).

The school setting offers a variety of language opportunities for children, from listening to stories to engaging with texts all around them in the form of wall displays and books (Giannakopoulou, 2021). These extra stimuli are important for all children and can provide helpful opportunities for literacy development to those learning a second language (Giannakopoulou, 2021). Undeniably, languages possess unique features that should be considered when planning and implementing learning activities. Activities such as plays, dramatic play, songs, questioning, and structured reading and writing can aid in English language development (Banerjee, Alsalman, & Alqafari, 2016). Children in this study were being schooled online in English although their home language was predominately Arabic. Giannakopoulou (2021) noted that these children had fewer opportunities to practice their language skills outside the classroom, making online input particularly important.

The type and level of adult participation depend heavily on the child's needs, learning objectives, and the nature of the activity. These factors must be adapted to online learning environments to ensure effective engagement and support.

### **3. Research Design**

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of distance learning strategies in teaching English to kindergarten children. The quantitative aspect involved a structured questionnaire distributed to parents to gather

statistical insights, while the qualitative aspect was explored through a focus group discussion to gain deeper perspectives on parents' experiences and challenges during distance learning. This dual approach helped validate the findings and provided a holistic view of the research problem.

## 4. Research Methods

### 4.1. Research Questions/Study Aim

This study aimed to evaluate the factors affecting the teaching of English to kindergarten children through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UAE.

The study raised the following research questions:

1. What role did the teacher play in distance learning to enhance children's English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What was the relationship between teachers and parents in teaching children English language pandemic skills during the COVID-19?
3. What was the role of parents in distance learning supporting the teaching of English language skills to kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What home-based routines did the parents adopt to help teach their children English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What were the learning strategies used to teach kindergarten children English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether through synchronous or asynchronous distance learning?
6. What were the educational techniques used to teach English language skills to kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### 4.2. Participants

This study collected data via an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The questionnaire was completed by 517 parents of kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic, who had spent time educating their children through distance learning in English. The majority of participants were female ( $n=464$ ), while 53 participants were male.

The participants were from various Emirates within the UAE: Abu Dhabi (415), Ajman (8), Dubai (32), Fujairah (11), Ras Al Khaimah (24), Sharjah (21), and Umm Al Quwain (6).

Most parents were in the age group of 23–30 years ( $n=307$ ). The next most common age group was 31–40 years ( $n=152$ ), followed by the 41–50 years group ( $n=48$ ), and the 51-and-above age group ( $n=10$ ).

Most of the participants held a bachelor's degree ( $n = 334$ ), while others possessed either an associate degree ( $n = 128$ ), a postgraduate degree ( $n = 34$ ), or a Ph.D. ( $n = 28$ ).

Participants were asked to rate their English skill level; 147 classified themselves as beginners, 280 evaluated their level as intermediate, and 90 considered their level as advanced. Furthermore, they rated their technology use level as follows: 131 for beginners, 279 for intermediate, and 107 for advanced. A total of 371 parents had children in government schools, while 146 had children in private schools.

### 4.3. Ethical Approval

#### 4.3.1. Institutional Review Board Statement

The Ethical Committee of UAE University, UAE, granted approval for this study on June 1, 2020 (Ref. No. ERSC—2020-10661).

### 4.4. The Questionnaire

The first part of the online questionnaire consisted of closed questions related to parents' demographics, their education levels, how they rated their English proficiency, the type of school their children attended, the amount of time their children spent learning English through distance learning (DL) per day, and the time parents spent supporting this learning.

This was followed by a series of 39 statements, where parents rated each statement using a five-point Likert scale (always, usually, sometimes, rarely, and never). These questions aimed to establish the roles played by teachers and parents in teaching English to kindergarten children through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Following this, parents answered two closed questions regarding the strategies and techniques used to teach English to their children online.

### 4.5. Validity

The validity of the questionnaire was assessed by presenting it to 10 professors specializing in education and technology. Discriminant validity was also calculated, with a  $Z$  value of 3.71. Additionally, the stability of the questionnaire was confirmed through mid-term segmentation analysis, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85.

The focus group discussion with parents aimed to describe the environment in which children learn English language skills through DL during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Stages of implementing focus groups:

Preparation: This includes preparing lists of participants, communicating with them to set appointments, examining them by the registration officer, and preparing discussion group questions (group guide).

During the discussion, the focus group explained to the participating parents the objectives of the focus group, how to conduct the discussion, the role of the focus group in achieving the research results, and the rules of the discussion. Participants were given the opportunity to respond, and the proceedings of the focus group were recorded.

After the focus group discussion, the parents' answers were analyzed and interpreted in the focus group.

Focus Group Discussion Guide: This guide consists of six questions regarding the role of the teacher, the role of parents, the logistical measures taken by parents to create an appropriate learning environment, and the strategies employed to teach children English language skills.

#### 4.6. Data Analysis

A quantitative approach was adopted for data analysis, and descriptive statistical methods including frequency of responses, response percentages, average responses, standard deviation, and significance testing were used to examine each of the 39 statements. Additionally, qualitative statistics were employed to analyze the responses of parents during the focus group discussion.

### 5. Results

Parents were asked to specify the amount of time their child spent learning English skills online and the duration of assistance provided by the parents. As Table 1 shows, most of Kg children spent one to two hours a day on English language skills.

**Table 1.** Time children spend learning English online.

Time	N
Less than 1 hour	82
1-2 h	214
2-3 h	133
4 or more hours	88

As shown in Table 2, most parents spend between one to two hours daily helping their children learn English online.

**Table 2.** Shows the time parents spend assisting their children with online English language skills.

Time	N
Less than 1 hour	97
1-2 h	237
2-3 h	100
4 or more hours	83

The next section of the questionnaire presented a total of 39 statements, and the parents were asked to rate them on a five-point Likert scale.

The statements concerning the role of teachers in teaching English skills to kindergarten children through distance learning during the lockdown period in the UAE.

The parents' responses clearly indicated that most of them observed teachers using electronic applications to some extent, with a percentage of 91.3%. However, the frequency of this usage varied, with the majority of parents stating that teachers used these applications either "always" or "usually." Teachers also employed various applications to assess their children's English skills remotely, with a reported usage rate of 90.14%. Parents agreed that teachers applied a diverse range of activities aimed at developing children's English skills, with 58.03% indicating that these activities were used either "always" or "usually." Furthermore, most parents surveyed reported that their children enjoyed the provided activities either "always," "usually," or "sometimes," accounting for 81.24%. Only 25.15% of parents mentioned that the teacher's instruction was "rarely" or "never" helpful in enabling their children to independently complete distance learning activities in English. Additionally, 78.92% of parents stated that teachers "always," "usually," or "sometimes" focused on developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills through distance learning activities. However, parents expressed less confidence regarding the quality of distance learning, with 32.69% feeling that teachers "rarely" or "never" managed to facilitate a good level of learning. Moreover, 29.01% believed that teachers were "rarely" or "never" interested in listening to children during these activities.

Question 1: What role did the teacher play in developing children's English language skills during distance learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

To analyze this question, the study used the average response as shown in Table 3 to generate the average evaluation never = 1, rarely = 2, occasionally = 3, often = 4, and always = 5 and determined the frequency of responses, percentage of responses, average responses, standard deviation, and significance.

**Table 3.** Parents' perceptions of the teacher's role in supporting children's English language development during distance learning in the COVID-19 pandemic.

N.	Item	Percentage					Average	Standard deviation	Percentage	T-test	Direction	Rank
		Always	Usually,	Sometime	Rarely	Never						
1	The teacher uses electronic applications to train children in writing skills.	30.95	27.08	23.21	10.06	8.70	3.62	1.26	72.30	11.10	Usually	3
2	Diversity of the teacher in the activities of developing the English language skills of the child.	29.98	28.05	21.28	13.93	6.77	3.61	1.24	72.11	11.10	Usually	4
3	The teacher's instructions help my child to independently complete the distance learning activities for the English language.	28.24	27.66	18.96	13.54	11.61	3.47	1.33	69.48	8.10	Usually	6

N.	Item	Percentage					Average	Standard deviation	Percentage	T-test	Direction	Rank
		Always	Usually,	Sometime	Rarely	Never						
4	The teacher applies the activities that my child enjoys while learning English skills from a distance.	31.91	24.18	25.15	7.74	11.03	3.58	1.3	71.64	10.18	Usually	5
5	Various applications are used to assess a child's learning of English language skills remotely.	28.82	30.37	25.15	5.80	9.86	3.62	1.23	72.50	11.55	Usually	2
6	The teacher implements activities to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.	36.75	28.63	13.54	10.64	10.44	3.71	1.34	74.12	11.98	Usually	1
7	The teacher is eager to achieve the quality of distance learning.	18.96	18.38	29.98	23.02	9.67	3.14	1.24	62.79	2.55	Sometime	7
8	The teacher is interested in listening to my child through distance learning.	15.09	16.83	39.07	18.57	10.44	3.08	1.17	61.51	1.47	Sometime	8

The findings demonstrated that English language teachers played a variety of functions, with the average score ranging from 3.08 to 3.71 points.

Activities aimed at developing children's listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are categorized at the first level, with a mean score of 3.71. The second level encompasses various applications used to assess a child's English language learning skills remotely, with a mean score of 3.62. The third level includes electronic applications employed by teachers to train children in writing skills, also with a mean score of 3.62. The fourth level involves diverse activities designed for teachers to enhance children's English language skills, with a mean score of 3.61. The fifth level comprises activities that children enjoyed while learning English skills remotely, with a mean score of 3.58. The sixth level includes teacher instructions that help children independently complete distance learning (DL) activities, with a mean score of 3.47. The seventh level involves activities where teachers actively strive to achieve quality in DL, with a mean score of 3.43. The eighth level pertains to how teachers listen to children during DL, with a mean score of 3.08. The questionnaire results indicated that parents' responses aligned with the first focus group question, which asked, "Did the KG teacher have a role in teaching your children remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic?" Seventy percent of parents agreed that teachers played a role in teaching their children language skills during this period. The COVID-19 pandemic led to various forms of this role, such as activities with children those scheduled, planned, and implemented by teachers with children and activities involving the participation of parents, with instructions to ensure the implementation of these activities or to send instructions to parents for them to carry out activities with children independently. The activities included stories, songs, and worksheets aimed at developing children's reading and writing skills, accompanied by instructions to assist children in carrying out these activities. Fifty percent of parents reported that their children were interested in and enjoyed the activities, while the remaining portion of the sample indicated that their children found it difficult to adapt to the distance learning experience (Porras González, 2010).

Question 2: What was the relationship between teachers and parents in teaching children's English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 4 illustrates the nature of the relationship between parents and English language teachers in supporting kindergarten children's language development during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the second question, which explored the parent-teacher relationship in online schooling, the most common response from parents to the statement "I feel sufficiently supported by the English teacher in teaching my child English from a distance" was "sometimes," with "rarely" being the second most popular answer. While 12.96% of parents reported that they always found it difficult to teach their child English, the majority (52.03%) indicated that the English teacher provided helpful tips to assist them with teaching. Additionally, 7.74% of parents stated they had no regular contact with teachers, and 10.06% reported not receiving feedback on their child's progress. A significant 69.64% said that the English teacher "always," "usually," or "sometimes" helped them check the timetable. Regarding the parents' responses to the second question of the focus group, "What are the aspects of support provided by the English language teacher to help parents teach their children English language skills from a distance?" 60% of parents found it difficult to benefit from the support due to their limited English proficiency. However, 65% confirmed that WhatsApp groups facilitated communication with the teacher by allowing them to send schedules of meetings, instructions, activity details, and updates on what the children did.

**Table 4.** Relationships between the parent and the English language teacher in supporting the development of English language skills in kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

N.	Item	Percentage					Average	Standard deviation	Percentage	T-test	Direction	Rank
		Always	Usually,	Sometime	Rarely	Never						
1	I feel sufficiently supported by the English teacher in teaching my child English remotely.	20.12	11.80	28.82	26.11	13.15	3.00	1.3	59.92	-0.07	Sometime	5
2	I find it difficult to teach my child's English language skills from a distance.	12.96	14.70	33.08	29.01	10.25	2.91	1.17	58.22	-1.73	Sometime	6
3	The English language teacher provides me with tips that facilitate teaching my child English from a distance.	23.02	29.01	15.09	25.34	7.54	3.21	1.4	64.14	1.16	Usually,	3
4	I maintain regular contact with the English teacher during my child's distance learning.	23.60	16.44	26.11	26.11	7.74	3.22	1.28	64.41	3.92	Sometime	2
5	The English teacher provides sufficient feedback on my child's progress in learning her skills remotely.	19.73	18.76	27.27	24.18	10.06	3.14	1.26	62.79	2.51	Sometime	4
6	The English teacher helps me check the timetable for my child's remote learning to enhance her skills.	31.14	12.19	26.31	21.28	9.09	3.35	1.35	67.00	5.90	Usually,	1

Question 3: What was the role of parents in distance learning supporting the teaching of English language skills to kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 5 shows the role played by parents in teaching their children English language skills through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 5.** The role of parents in teaching children English language skills through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

N.	Item	Percentage					Average	Standard deviation	Percentage	T-test	Direction	Rank
		Always	Usually,	Sometime	Rarely	Never						
1	I translate into Arabic when my child does not understand a word in English.	22.82	12.57	33.27	23.02	8.32	3.19	1.25	63.71	3.38	Sometime	3
2	I ask my child to translate stories and songs into Arabic to ensure he understands them.	15.28	15.09	36.17	25.73	7.74	3.04	1.15	60.89	0.88	Sometime	6
3	My child provided instructions to carry out the activity in Arabic.	16.83	14.70	37.91	23.40	7.16	3.11	1.15	62.13	2.10	Sometime	4
4	Tell my child the answers to the questions.	11.22	11.80	41.01	26.31	9.67	2.89	1.1	57.72	-2.36	Sometime	8
5	I encourage my child to work independently. If he needs help, I listen to him and give him direction, not answers.	20.50	15.28	22.63	35.40	6.19	3.21	2.36	64.26	2.05	Sometime	2

N.	Item	Percentage					Average	Standard deviation	Percentage	T-test	Direction	Rank
		Always	Usually,	Sometime	Rarely	Never						
6	I watch my child for signs of frustration or anger. If I see these, I will let him take a break.	15.47	17.60	36.36	23.02	7.54	3.10	1.14	62.09	2.08	Sometime	5
7	I follow the development of my child's performance in learning English language skills from a distance.	17.79	11.80	35.01	24.76	10.64	3.01	1.23	60.27	0.25	Sometime	7
8	I commend my child for his good efforts and behavior towards learning English at home.	23.98	19.25	33.66	15.86	7.35	3.37	1.22	67.31	6.81	Sometime	1

Parents' responses to the third question indicated that most of them translated their children's work into Arabic when their children did not understand English; they also asked the children to translate the work back from English to Arabic to check their understanding. While 35% of the parents stated they "never" or "rarely" gave answers to their children, 37.78% "always" or "usually" encouraged children to work independently and provided directions when needed. Parents are aware of the frustration their children experience due to distance learning (DL), and a vast majority of them commended their children's English learning via DL to some degree. However, 10.64% of the parents responded that they had "never" followed the development of their children's English skills. From the parents' responses to the third question of the focus group discussion, "What was your role as a parent in teaching your child's English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic," designed to clarify the parents' involvement in educating their children, 75% of them played a role that included singing with their child, reading stories together, explaining instructions for activities, encouraging them to use the language at home, and watching cartoons in English with them.

Question 4: What were the home-based routines of parents to help teach their children English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 6. The home-based routines of parents to help teach their children English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic.

N.	Item	Percentage					Average	Standard deviation	Percentage	T-test	Direction	Rank
		Always	Usually,	Sometime	Rarely	Never						
1	There is an area in my house that motivates and welcomes my child to learn English language skills.	19.34	17.79	32.69	10.64	10.64	3.16	0.84	63.13	4.24	Usually,	1
2	My child follows a regular routine when studying English language skills from home.	16.63	21.08	35.20	6.96	6.96	3.20	1.15	64.06	4.02	Sometime	2
3	I try to do some of my personal tasks, such as paying bills, reading, or writing while my child is studying English.	13.93	15.67	39.46	8.90	8.90	3.04	1.36	60.74	0.61	Sometime	3

In response to Research Question 4, which explored the home-based routines adopted by parents to support their children's English language learning during distance learning, the results in Table 6 indicate a moderate level of implementation, with mean scores ranging from 3.04 to 3.20. While many parents attempted to establish supportive routines, these practices were not consistently applied across households.

Specifically, 32.69% of parents reported that having a designated learning space occurred sometimes, whereas 21.28% indicated that they rarely or never had such a space (M = 3.16). Similarly, children's adherence to a regular learning routine was reported as sometimes by 35.20% of parents, compared to 37.71% who indicated that a routine was always or usually in place (M = 3.20). In addition, balancing personal tasks while supervising children's learning was reported as occurring sometimes by 39.46% of parents, with a mean score of 3.04, reflecting competing parental demands during distance learning.

Overall, these findings directly address Research Question 4 by showing that parents adopted home-based routines related to learning space, daily scheduling, and supervision; however, the moderate and variable implementation of these routines underscores their potential influence on children's engagement and continuity of English language learning during distance learning.

Question 5: What learning strategies were used to teach kindergarten children English through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether via synchronous or asynchronous methods?

Table 7 summarizes the parents' responses regarding the teaching and learning strategies employed by English language teachers to enhance the English language skills of kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 7. Strategies for teaching a kindergarten child English via distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

N	English language skills	English language learning strategies										
		English conversation	Interaction	Group activities	Dramas	Reading stories	Talk about a book	Recorded books	Open questions	Songs and rhymes	e-learning (app)	Art activity
1	The teacher develops listening skills for English sounds, words, and sentences through:		50%			15.5%				15.5%	15.5%	
2	The teacher develops the skill of speaking the English language through various instructional methods and practice activities.	50%	50%	58%	15.5%	15.5%	15.5%	15.5%	11%	15.5%		
3	The teacher develops reading skills through various instructional strategies.			50%	15.5%	15.5%	15.5%	15.5%		11%	15.5%	
4	The teacher develops writing skills through										58%	50%

In response to Research Question 5, which examined the learning strategies used to teach kindergarten children English through synchronous and asynchronous distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings presented in Table 7 indicate that teachers employed a varied set of instructional strategies, with a strong emphasis on interactive and synchronous approaches.

For listening skills, parents reported that interaction was the most frequently used strategy (50%), followed by reading stories, songs and rhymes, and e-learning applications (each 15.5%), highlighting the importance of auditory exposure and real-time engagement. In developing speaking skills, teachers relied on a wider range of strategies, including English conversation (50%), interaction (50%), and group activities (58%), in addition to dramas, storytelling, recorded books, songs, and open-ended questions (ranging from 11% to 15.5%), reflecting an emphasis on active language use and participation.

With regard to reading skills, the most frequently reported strategy was group activities (50%), complemented by dramas, reading stories, talking about books, songs, and e-learning applications (each 15.5%), suggesting a balance between collaborative and multimodal approaches. For writing skills, parents indicated that teachers primarily used e-learning applications (58%) and art-based activities (50%), demonstrating a reliance on asynchronous digital tools and creative tasks to support early writing development.

Overall, the results of Table 7 directly address Research Question 5 by showing that English language instruction during distance learning integrated both synchronous and asynchronous strategies, with a clear focus on interaction, communication, and digital resources. This strategic diversity reflects teachers' efforts to adapt instructional methods to the developmental needs of kindergarten children and the constraints of distance learning.

Question 6: What educational techniques were used to teach English DL to kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Table 8. Techniques for teaching a kindergarten child English language skill through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

N	English language learning strategies	English language learning strategies						
		Educational platforms	Educational Apps	Pre-recorded lessons	WhatsApp	Recorded movies	Recorded songs	Electronic children's books
1	English language conversations with the children	50%		15.5%		15.5%	31%	
2	Interested in stimulating interaction between children in English	50%						
3	Group activities with children	50%			15.5%			
4	Dramatic games	50%				15.5%		
5	Reads stories	50%						
6	Encourages the children to talk about a book	50%	15.5%					
7	Books recorded	50%				15.5%	15.5%	
8	Open questions	50%					15.5%	
9	Songs and rhymes						31%	
10	Encourages children to e-learning.							15.5%

From Table 8, the breakdown of responses is as follows: English language conversations with children include educational platforms at 50%, prerecorded lessons at 15.5%, recorded movies at 15.5%, and recorded songs at 11%. Interest in stimulating interactions between children in English is primarily through educational platforms at 50%.

Group activities with children are conducted via educational platforms at 50% and WhatsApp at 15.5%. Dramatic games are facilitated through educational platforms at 50% and recorded movies at 15.5%. Reading stories is mainly done using educational platforms at 50%. Encouraging children to talk about a book is achieved through educational platforms at 50% and educational apps at 15.5%. Recorded books are accessed via educational platforms at 50%, recorded movies at 15.5%, and recorded songs at 15.5%. Open questions are posed through platforms at 50% and recorded songs at 15.5%. Songs and rhymes are primarily delivered through recorded songs at 36%. Lastly, encouraging children toward e-learning involves electronic children's books at 15.5%.

From the parents' responses to the sixth question of the focus group, which asked, "Which electronic applications were used to teach children English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic?" 73% of the parents highlighted the use of educational platforms provided by the Ministry of Education. The most frequently used technological applications, with usage rates ranging from 20% to 40%, included recorded songs, recorded books, short films, and apps (used by 69%) to teach children alphabets and words.

## 6. Discussion

This study explored the factors influencing the teaching of English to kindergarten children through distance learning (DL) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UAE. Parents of kindergarten children were asked to respond to an online questionnaire. An online focus group was conducted to ask parents specific questions, and their responses were collected. Various queries were raised to ensure that the questions were fully understood by the parents. The study found that both parents and teachers played significant roles in the development of children's English language skills via DL during the pandemic. The results highlighted three main themes: learning strategies, the role of parents, and the role of teachers.

### 6.1. Learning Strategies

This study found that teachers targeted the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills of kindergarten children during distance learning. This reflected the range of English language skills that would normally be taught in a face-to-face class. Electronic applications were used both to teach and assess the English language skills of kindergarten children. This is relevant to 21st-century kindergarten children, as many are already proficient in the use of information and communication technology.

The English language learning strategies employed by teachers were appropriate to the nature of each language skill. However, the percentage of application of these strategies, based on an analysis of the questionnaire results, ranged from 11% to 50%. The most frequently applied strategy was synchronous learning with the teacher. This aligns with theories proposed by Vygotsky, who noted that for effective learning to occur, the child should interact with someone more skilled than themselves (Amerian et al., 2014). This approach stimulated interaction among children and between children and teachers in English, primarily due to the children's limited English language skills. Teachers used distance teaching strategies to develop English language skills, which required specific training. For developing writing skills, most children needed parental intervention through artistic activities such as copying, printing, and shaping with clay. Some parents enrolled their children in private schools or considered transferring them to public schools or private schools with lower tuition fees, as they believed that their children benefited less from distance learning compared to direct in-person instruction.

The teachers employed various techniques to teach children English. The percentage of techniques used, as observed from the questionnaire results, ranged between 15.5% and 50%. The use of educational platforms played a significant role in distance learning during the pandemic, followed by electronic applications, stories, songs, and recorded books. This approach was necessary because children needed to communicate with teachers to learn English effectively. Parents' responses in focus group discussions aligned with these findings; they emphasized that teachers primarily relied on educational platforms to develop children's English language skills. This method enabled children to see each other, observe the teacher, listen attentively, and participate in language activities through songs, paper work, stories, and other resources. Additionally, this approach facilitated parental involvement in monitoring their child's progress and encouraged child-to-child interactions, which Piaget suggests promote cognitive development (DeVries, 1997).

### 6.2. Parental Input

Most of the parents spent one to two hours a day helping their children with DL English for durations similar to those reported by Garbe et al. (2020) and Brom et al. (2020). This contrasts with the findings of Ford et al. (2021) who reported low levels of parental engagement with children under five years of age. One to two hours per day was the most frequently used duration for children to learn English online. KG children cannot be expected to undertake DL tasks alone; therefore, more parental input is needed for this age group (Timmons et al., 2021). Parents are a vital resource to support the online learning experience of KG children and for its success (Ford et al., 2021). Kalina and Powell (2009), considering the social aspect of language development, it was pointed out that children develop their language skills initially through routines by associating repeated behaviors with specific words. In this context, parental input during DL is vital. Our findings indicate that, although most parents had Arabic as their first language, many of them experienced little difficulty in assisting their children with English.

From these findings, parents encourage their children during English learning, and most of them promote independent work. Emirati parents need to continue this mindset because studies have shown that children might lack enthusiasm when studying under distance learning (Ionescu et al., 2020). Moreover, parents can face challenges in getting their children to undertake DL (Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020). According to Black, Ferdig, and Thompson (2021), for academic success in online learning, students should be motivated, organized, and supported. Most of the parents in the present study recognized, at least sometimes, the importance of having a dedicated space for children to carry out their online English lessons, besides having a regular routine for this learning, which was noted to be important by Ford et al. (2021). Teaching strategies, parental involvement, and the home environment contribute to a child's sense of motivation and support.

### 6.3. Role of Teacher

Teachers played a role in assisting parents with timetables, and most parents attempted to maintain regular contact with teachers to some extent. This is a positive development, considering that other studies have indicated that a lack of communication with teachers can lead to parental frustration (Coppola et al., 2020; Lau & Lee, 2021; Nani & Sibanda, 2020; Wang, 2020). Parents also noted the assistance that teachers provided in helping them teach their children English through distance learning. Teachers should not underestimate their connection with parents, as COVID-19 has compelled many parents with limited teaching skills to assume the challenging role of educators (Brom et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Nani & Sibanda, 2020; Timmons et al., 2021). This is even more pronounced in the UAE because many of those assisting their children with English had English only as their second language.

However, this study presents some negative findings, with many parents perceiving the quality of the teaching they observed as inadequate, as the teacher did not always demonstrate interest in listening to the children. Additionally, other studies, such as Timmons et al. (2021), have also reported that parents expressed concerns regarding the quality of distance learning provided to their children.

## 7. Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

This study found that, although parents believe that good-quality education cannot always be achieved through distance learning (DL), they acknowledge that teachers employed a variety of activities to target a range of English language skills. Teachers were consistently helpful in assisting parents through effective communication. Parents were always ready to encourage their children for their efforts and recognized the importance of a dedicated learning space as well as maintaining a regular routine.

This study has several limitations and presents multiple opportunities for further research. Although the study examined various factors, one limitation is that it did not explore the underlying reasons for the findings. Future qualitative analyses should investigate parental experiences and perceptions regarding involvement in the English language learning of kindergarten children through distance learning (DL) in the UAE. While this study was conducted in the UAE and its findings are specific to this context, the overarching themes may be applicable to other settings as well. Additional research could compare these findings with parental responses from other countries that have faced similar challenges in teaching English to children whose native language is not English. Furthermore, a mixed-methods study exploring teachers' perceptions of teaching English language skills via DL in the UAE could be conducted to triangulate the current results, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

From the findings of this study, which examined the factors that played a role in teaching English to kindergarten children through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UAE, the researchers offer the following recommendations:

### 7.1. For Teachers

- Prepare a guide for teachers on how to teach children English via DL and how to support parents in this endeavor.
- Encourage and equip teachers to deliver high-quality distance learning lessons by providing them with training and support.
- Emphasize the need to maintain good communication with parents.
- Since KG children will need considerable parental input to complete their tasks, keep the DL tasks short, motivating, and achievable.

### 7.2. Suggestions to Catalyze the Role of Parents in Teaching Their Children English through DL

- Prepare a detailed guide for parents on their daily tasks to teach their children English.
- Design electronic applications along with instructions for parents in every educational situation to help them understand their role.
- Provide training programs for parents to develop their English language skills, enabling them to assist their children effectively.

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