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The Relevance of Doing Virtual Classes: A Study of Postgraduate Female Students' Attitudes and Perceptions

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes and perceptions of postgraduate female students towards attending virtual classes under the Applied Linguistics and Translation program at King Khalid University (KKU). So, the main question is what are the attitudes and perceptions of postgraduate female students? Moreover, the chief concern of this paper is not only to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual classes but also identifies the factors which affect the students' attitudes and perception towards using virtual classes. This paper is the first to investigate the postgraduate female students' attitudes and perceptions towards using the virtual classes in the master program at KKU. Twenty-three postgraduate students participated in this study. This study uses an electronic questionnaire to collect data. Moreover, it employs Microsoft (Excel) to produce percentages and mean scores from the questionnaire's closed questions. Also, it analyzes the questionnaire's opened questions by using content analysis. The results show that there are positive reactions (3.91 mean scores) from the students who use the virtual classes. Furthermore, the findings reveal that students faced some difficulties, such as technical problems (Internet connection (75%), sound problem (12.50%), and KKU blackboard problems (12.50%). Moreover, students' perception of interaction (12.73 mean scores), usefulness, and ease of the use (26.78 mean scores) of virtual classes differ significantly. Also, many positive and negative factors affect the students' attitudes and perceptions through using virtual classes. Finally, the results of this study will be useful for academic society and any person involved in using virtual classes.

Keywords: attitudes, online learning, perceptions, Saudi female student, virtual classes

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Introduction

Stiff and Mongeau (2003) define the word '*attitudes'* as the reactions of people regarding a situation or an object. While Scott, Hiatt, Mcilroy, and Worthamm (2012) define the word '*perceptions*' as the action of the mind which makes human beings to be aware of anything. Both of these concepts are part of students' behavioral characteristics which are affected by using technology in the learning process (Johnson, 2010).

The technology takes its way in education to enhance learning and teaching processes. Also, teachers and students start using computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in education all over the world (Bin, 2013). Furthermore, the virtual worlds are one of the CALL's features. Also, teachers adopt them as an online way of teaching (Perren, Kelch, Byun, Cervantes, & Safavi, 2018). So, this paper aims to study the students' attitudes and perceptions towards virtual classroom, its utilization and its characteristics: synchrony (which means connecting users at the same time (Gillmore & Warren, 2007 as cited in Parker & Martin, 2010, p. 137), sense of community (which means the relationship of students with each other and their experience of using virtual classroom (Parker & Martin, 2010), interactivity (which means the interaction which was described as the engagement in learning (Northrup, 2002 as cited in Parker & Martin, 2010, p. 137), usefulness (which means the functioning of technology (Parker & Martin, 2010), and ease of use (which means the degree of simplicity that it takes to become skillful in using technology (Parker & Martin, 2010).

The study also investigates the advantages and disadvantages of using the virtual classroom along with the factors that affect the students' attitudes and perceptions towards using the virtual classes at KKU.

The purpose of the present study

This study aims to achieve the following goals: (1) to study the attitudes and perceptions of female students towards virtual class and its characteristics in their master's program at KKU; (2) to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual classes; and (3) to identify the factors which affect the female students' attitudes and perceptions towards using virtual classes.

Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of female students towards using virtual classes in their master's program at KKU?
2. What is the level of female students' perceptions of the characteristics of virtual classes?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual classes for postgraduate female students at KKU?
4. What are the factors which affect the female students' attitudes and perceptions towards using virtual classes at KKU?

The significance of the study

This paper is the first to study and investigate the different attitudes and perceptions of the postgraduate female students at KKU towards the using of virtual classes in the master program. So, the findings of this study will be beneficial to the academic society (teachers, students, and program designers), considering the significant use of technology in the learning process (Ali, Miraz, & Kunasekaran, 2014). When we know the students' relationship with technology, especially their attitudes

towards the virtual classes, we can meet their expectations and provide an authentic learning experience for them. If the results of this study are used to develop the process of using the virtual classes, there will be a massive increase in student intake and the educational process as a whole. To future researchers, this research provides a baseline for further study of virtual classes. Furthermore, it can be used as a reference when the virtual classes are used, designed, or chosen as a tool of communication and learning.

Hypothesis

First, if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will form some attitude towards it. Second, if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will have different perceptions levels of interactivity, synchrony, usefulness, ease of use, and sense of community. Third, if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will have some advantages and disadvantages of using it. Finally, if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will have some factors which affect their attitudes and perceptions.

Review of literature

Generally, students have positive attitudes towards using virtual classes (Ku & Lohr, 2003; Knowles & Kerkman, 2007; Parker & Martin, 2010; Huss & Eastep, 2013; Mosquera, 2017). There are many reasons behind their positive outlook towards virtual classes such as easiness of interacting and accessing classes at any time and everywhere (Ku & Lohr, 2003). Unfortunately, the use of virtual classes "Took more time than they [students] expected" (Knowles & Kerkman, 2007, p. 76). Besides that, some students feel isolated and frustrated because of using virtual classes (Ku & Lohr, 2003).

Parker and Martin's study (2010), find some of the characteristics of the virtual class do not yield significant results. For example, the sense of community "Was not statically significant" because of the students' preference to work individually (Parker & Martin, 2010, p. 144).

Canchala (2010) focuses on the background of the students and their learning process on the use of virtual programs. The previous studies in this research did not mention this aspect. She also reveals that students were uncomfortable when they use virtual classes because of the "Level of English is very high" (Canchala, 2010, p. 146). Besides that, Mosquera (2017) find that students who use virtual classes face digital and time management problems, but still, show interest in using virtual classes for future studies.

Hussain (2007) covers the most crucial aspects which are related to the students' attitudes and problems. His study reveals that "The virtual education enhances the performance level of the learners (Hussain, 2007, p. 74). Also, students have enough knowledge of using virtual classes in their learning since they are "Highly qualified and accepting the E-Learning" (Almarabeh, 2014, p. 31).

There are some disadvantages (such as the distraction which is made by social networks and other entertainment sites (Mosquera, 2017) and advantages (such as being in a familiar environment) of using the virtual classes (Ku &Lohr, 2003; Mosquera, 2017; Indreica, 2014; Bogdan & Brindusa, 2018).

There are many positive factors (such as the flexibility to learn anywhere (Bogdan & Brindusa, 2018) and negative factors (such as the difficulty to follow the online courses (Bogdan & Brindusa, 2018) that affect the students' attitudes and perceptions (Bogdan & Brindusa, 2018).

So, all of the previous studies investigate the exhibited behavioral characteristics towards using the virtual classes (attitudes and perceptions), the advantages and disadvantages of using the virtual classes, and the factors which affect the students' attitudes and perceptions. The researchers describe and analyze the factors, advantages, disadvantages, attitudes, and perceptions in association with the effect of the virtual classes. They all agree that the use of virtual classes affects the students' attitudes and perceptions, either positively or negatively.

Research design and materials

The researcher designs an electronic questionnaire (Google forms) to collect data of the present study. It is a post-course questionnaire which is handed to the participants at the end of the fourth semester after initiating them to experience virtual classes and their uses.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire consists of eight fixed questions to test the level of agreement and nine open-ended questions to seek opinion and collect data on students' perceptions of the virtual class and its characteristics (synchrony, sense of community, interactivity, usefulness, and ease of use). The second part of the questionnaire consists of 11 fixed questions and four open-ended questions to collect data about students' attitudes towards using virtual class. In total, there are 32 questions in the questionnaire. All of the fixed questions will follow the scale values, as shown in Table 1. The participants cannot select more than one item. Each one of the participants is assigned a code, instead of using their names.

Table 1. *Scale Values*

Level of Agreement	**Scale value**
SA (Strongly agree)	5
A (Agree)	4
UNC (Uncertain)	3
DA (Disagree)	2
SDA (Strongly disagree)	1

The researcher analyzed the collected data from the questionnaire's fixed questions by using Microsoft (Excel) to produce percentages and mean scores. Also, each level of an agreement in the students' answers has a scale value ranging from 5 to 1, as shown in Table 1. The frequencies of strongly agreed responses, agreed responses, uncertain responses, disagree responses, and strongly disagreed responses are calculated. Finally, this research follows the content analysis to analyze the data which were provided from the open-ended questions.

Explicit rules of coding were used to compress more words into fewer content categories (Huss & Eastep, 2013). To do this analysis in detail answers were written (on Excel to produce percentages) for each question and a theme was chosen related to a category that can be used to organize the answers under areas such as technical problems, reasons behind feeling lonely, and improved performance. After that, a code (such as "E" for the theme "Enhanced time management") was chosen for each one of them. So, each answer had a theme and code. Then, each question had statistics and portions depending on the number of codes for each question (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017)**.**

Participants

The participants of this study are 23 postgraduate students who are studying Applied Linguistics and Translation (class of 2018/2019) at KKU. All of them are females. They participated voluntarily in the study. Also, all of them use the virtual classes at the end of the final semester in their master's program.

Procedure

First, the questionnaire was sent to the participants by emailing the link to them at the end of the second semester in 2019. Also, the questionnaire sent via Whatsapp to the participants who do not have emails. The participants completed the questionnaire and sent it to the researcher by using Google forms. Each participant took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The data collection took six days in total.

Results

Results of students' perceptions towards using virtual classes

In Figure 1, we can see that the statement "using virtual classes reduced my time than attending classes face-to-face " is rated highly (57%) by the students as most strongly agreed response in synchrony, while the statement "I had technical problems while using the virtual classes" is rated 30% as the most disagreed response (see Figure 1 for the rest of the questions of synchrony & Table 2 for the mean scores of synchrony in Appendix A).

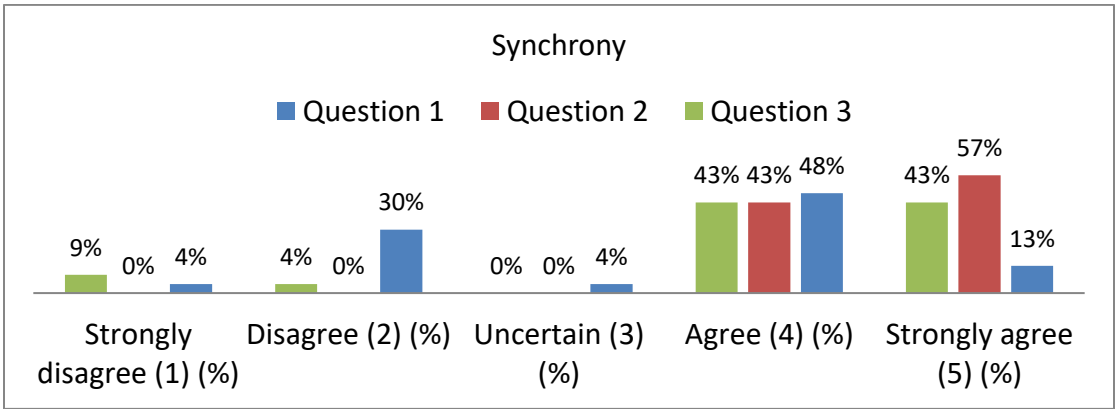


Figure 1. The percentages of students' responses in synchrony

In the sense of community, the statement "I worked individually for most of the projects" has a 39% response, which is the most agreed upon response. On the other hand, the most strongly disagreed upon response (30%) is the statement "I am isolated and lonely" (You can find in Figure 2 the rest of the questions about the sense of community & in Table 3 the mean scores of the sense of community in Appendix A).

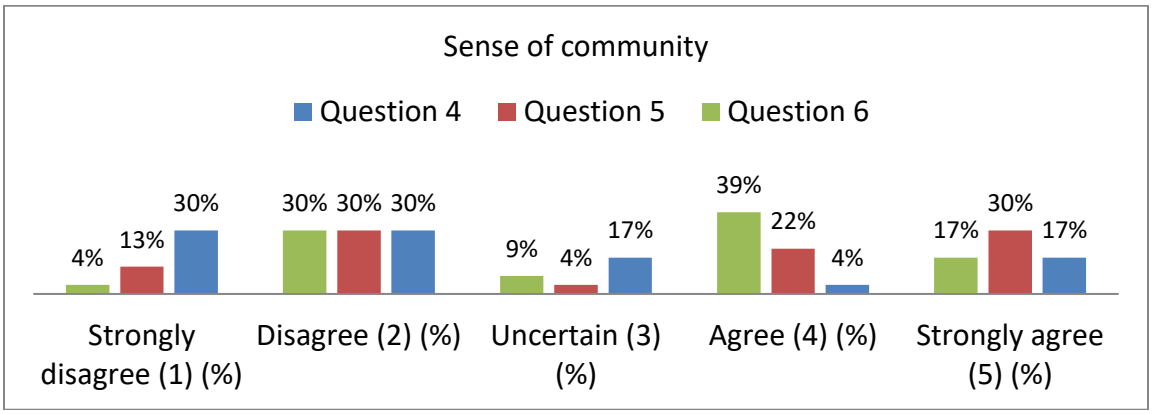


Figure 2. The percentages of students' responses in the sense of community

In the interactivity, the statement "It is easy to follow the class discussions" has a 35% response, then the statement "I did not face problems when I used the text-based chatting" has 30% as the most strongly agreed upon responses. On the other hand, the statement "I cannot interact with my colleagues because I cannot see them face-to-face" has 43% as the most disagree upon response (see Figure 3 for the rest of the questions of interactivity & Table 4 for the mean scores of interactivity in Appendix A).

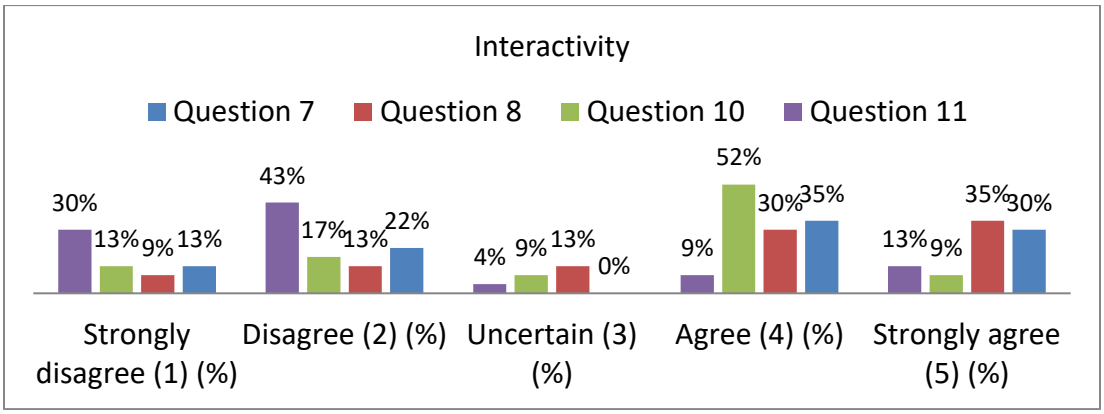


Figure 3. The percentages of students' responses in interactivity

As we can see in Figure 4, of the usefulness and ease of use, the statement "I could easily access the class" has 61% as the most agreed upon response, while the statement "My performance improved through the experience of using the virtual classes" has 22% as the most disagreed upon response (see Figure 4 for the rest of the questions of usefulness & ease of use & Table 5 for the mean scores of usefulness & ease of use in Appendix A).

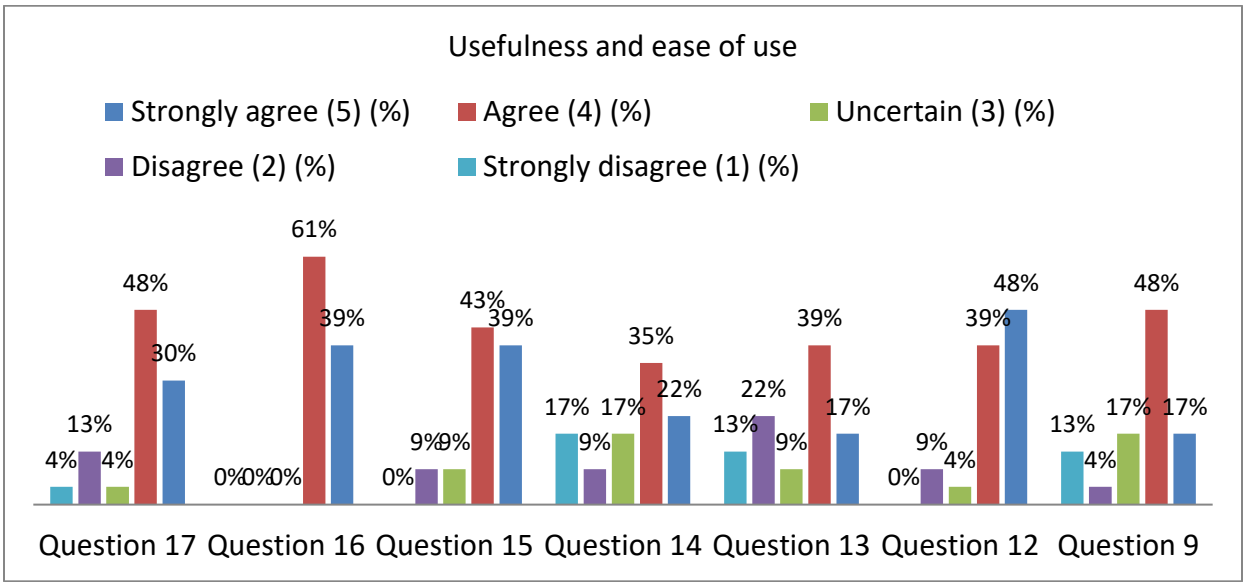


Figure 4. The percentages of students' responses in the usefulness and ease of use

Students' attitudes towards using virtual classes

From Figure 5, 6, and 7 (in Appendix B) it is evident that the statements "I had the feedback provided by my instructor and my colleagues" has 57% and "I had a good experience through using the virtual classes" has 48% as the most agreed upon responses. On the other hand, the statement "I faced problems because of the fixed time of the classes" has 48% as the most disagreed upon response (see Figure 5, 6, & 7 for the rest of the questions about the students' attitudes in Appendix B & Table 6 for the mean scores of the students' attitudes in Appendix A).

Reasons that affect the students' perceptions

Technical problems

Students face some technical issues, and these problems often appear in the form of Internet connection (75%), sound problem (12.50%), and KKU blackboard problems (12.50%).

The feeling of isolation

Students feel isolated when they use virtual classes (30%). Some of the reasons for feeling isolated are no chance for face-face interaction, everything around the student is silent, and the student feels that there is nobody to hear her. While some students do not feel isolated (70%) because they can communicate with each other through Whatsapp and chat room in the virtual class.

The sense of being in a real class

The students feel they are in a real class because students get more chance to participate than before (42.86%). They prefer virtual classes taught by male professors, and it is better to meet online instead of going to college. They value virtual classes than video conferences in the college. Also, the teachers can ask questions at any time and call the students by their names to answer, which is similar to the real class situation. Some students feel that there was no sense of being in an actual class (57.14%) as they have video conferences in the college. The communication between the teacher and his students in virtual class is limited because some students do not attend the classes or participate appropriately,

they cannot direct their questions any time, they cannot see others, everything around them is silent, and they feel that there is nobody there to hear them.

Working alone or individually with the help of virtual classes

Many students work alone using virtual classes (72.73%) because teachers ask them to work independently. But it depends on the nature of the subject. Since some topics require individual work, as students are not collaborative and do not like to chat as groups, do not know who will work with them would prefer one way of thinking and processing. Moreover, they want to work individually to achieve proficiency and avoid making mistakes since some of their colleagues may not exert adequate effort when working on the project. On the other hand, some students work together using virtual classes (27.27%) because teachers ask them to work together, and the group work saves their time and effort.

Problems related to the text-based chatting

Students have problems while using text-based chatting (33.33%) because some instructors are not trained to use the virtual classes. So, they disable the chat. As they are not familiar with the keyboard, they send the message which have typos by mistake, and cannot omit the word. While there are students, who have no problems using the text-based chatting (66.67%) because it is close to face-to-face chatting and easy to use.

The virtual class designs

Students indicated that the virtual classes have a good design which provided an interactive environment (92.86%) because they can chat in the main room and privately with all the classmates and the professor, can share documents, can participate either through typing a text or using the microphone, and can use the virtual classes to encourage participation among students since some of them are shy to speak face-to-face, whereas there are students who indicate that the design of the virtual classes do not offer an interactive environment (7.14%) because face-to-face classes are better to be interactive.

Microphone problems

Students have problems when they use the microphone (50%) because there is no possibility to use the microphone by more than three students. Sometimes it depends on the accessibility given by the professors. On the other hand, some students do not have problems using the microphone in the virtual classes (50%) because some of the professors give access to the microphone from the beginning till the end of the class. While some teachers prefer students to ask for the microphone. Moreover, the microphone is easy to use, it transfers the voice immediately, it shows who opens it, and who is speaking at the moment.

Using virtual classes to improve the students' performance

Students develop their performance through using the virtual classes (78.57) because they become more comfortable and confident about their opinions, they can speak freely without fear, they participate more actively than in the real classes, It helps them to speak fluently, and to be more aware of their speech. Also, they can listen to their speech by using recorded lectures. While there are students, who do not improve their performance by using the virtual classes (21.43%) because their performance improves very much through face-to-face classes.

Enhanced time management through using the virtual classes

Students improve their time management (100%) because it gives them extra time to finish and achieve what is required; it gives them the chance to mediate between class time and other works. As the classes have fixed schedule to log in, it encourages them to wake up early and set the alarm to join the session early and to avoid any technical problems, whereas there are no students who do not improve their time management through using the virtual classes (0%).

Reasons which affected the students' attitudes

Using the virtual classes for the students' future study

Students want to use the virtual classes for their future study (69.23%) because they can attend the class from their homes comfortably without a wastage of time. The virtual classes allow them to listen to the lectures again to those who stay away from the university. The virtual classes have explicit content, provide extra time to do other works, are very useful, easy to use, and follow. On the other hand, some students do not want to use virtual classes for their future study (30.77%) because they prefer face-to-face classes and communication. It provides them with more interaction and information than the virtual classes. Also, their performance is better in face-to-face classes.

The negative effects on the students' learning process by using virtual classes

Students have negative effects on their learning process by using virtual classes (66.67%). The teacher does not motivate them to keep up with the classes, so they lost interest in completing the class or pay attention. The absence of the body language and lack of access to the microphone which must be given by the teacher are the reasons for their disinterest. While there are students who do not have negative effects on their learning process through using virtual classes (33.33%) because it helps them to participate with the male professors, it motivates them to interact and involve more than before, and it is one of the best strategies which used to enhance their learning process.

Students' effort through using the virtual classes

Students consider the use of virtual classes to be a time consumer (14.29%) because there is a preference for using face-to-face classes, whereas there are students who do not consider the use of the virtual classes to be a time consumer (85.71%) because it helps them to work from home without wasting time by going to the college. It does not require much effort to use virtual classes, and it gives them more time to work on their home works. Also, some students who live in remote cities prefer virtual classes. Furthermore, it is easy to join the session and to replay the session at any time and anywhere.

Students' confidence after using the virtual classes

Students have confidence when they used virtual classes (80%) because it raises their confidence to express their opinions to male professors. The use of the virtual classes is useful and beneficial, it is easy to fix any technical problems that may pop at any time, the teachers are understandable when technical issues appear, the students attend the class from their homes comfortably, there is no pressure, it is easy to be used by all the students, and there are many videos available there to inform students how to use the virtual classes without any problems. On the other hand, some students do not have confidence when they use virtual classes (20%) because of the Internet and headphone problems.

Discussion

To answer the first question based upon the previous results, students have a good experience and positive attitudes towards using virtual classes (Ku & Lohr, 2003; Knowles & Kerkman, 2007). Those positive attitudes are supported by many things such as the ability to do work at home, the easiness of

access to the virtual classes (they are one of the likes in Ku & Lohr study's (2003)), and the availability of feedback (it is one of the likes in Ku & Lohr study's (2003)). Also, students are interested in using virtual classes, and they become motivated (Mosquera, 2017).
Furthermore, this study shows that we have a good number of students who do not feel isolated, while in Ku and Lohr's study (2003), students feel isolated. Moreover, students enjoy having feedback which is provided by their instructors and colleagues (Knowles & Kerkman, 2007). Also, students save their time by using the virtual classes, but they worry about the fixed time of the classes. In contrast, using the virtual classes take more time in Knowles and Kerkman's study (2007).

We have an interactive, flexible, and easy to use environment which is provided by the virtual classes. Also, students enhance their performance (Hussain, 2007). Furthermore, students feel comfortable and confident while using virtual classes in their study, which is similar to Huss and Eastep's study (2013) in contrast to Canchala's study (2010). This study reveals that students might feel uncomfortable and less confident because of the Internet and microphone problems, while in Canchala's study (2010) that doesn't happen because of the little previous knowledge of English.

So, the first hypothesis, which states that if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will have some attitudes towards it, is supported by these results.

To answer the second question based upon the previous results: interactivity, usefulness, and ease of use have significant results in this study, which is close to Parker and Martin's research (2010). Besides that, the sense of community does not have substantial results in this study, and the most probable reason behind that is that the students work individually (Parker & Martin, 2010). Moreover, students do not face problems in using text-based chatting, whereas it is a significant problem in Parker and Martin's study (2010). Furthermore, students in this study can effectively interact with their professors and colleagues using voice and text-based chat (Parker & Martin, 2010; Huss & Eastep, 2013).

Also, the students want to use the virtual classes in their future study (Mosquera, 2017) because they know the benefits of using the virtual classes such as the effectiveness and the opportunity to listen to the lectures again (Almarabeh, 2014). Besides that, students face some technical problems such as Internet connection, sound issues, and KKU blackboard problems. In Mosquera's study (2017), they just face digital issues and being on time, while in this study, students do not encounter issues with time management. Instead of that, students enhance their time management skills (Indreica, 2014) because of many reasons, which include extra time to work on other works, save time, and effort.

So, the second hypothesis which states that if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will have different perceptions levels of interactivity, synchrony, usefulness, ease of use, and sense of community, is supported by these results.

To answer the third question based upon the previous results, it was evident in this study that there are many advantages of using virtual classes such as saving time, ease of use, viewing the archived lectures, motivating students, providing the students with feedback from their instructors and colleagues, improving the students' time management, performance, and effectiveness. Also, it has an attractive, positive, and collaborative environment by using voice and text-based chats.

Besides these advantages, we have some disadvantages, such as technical problems. Also, the students need to work individually, feel lonely, or have no feeling of being in a real class. Furthermore, they may face difficulties while using the microphone and text-based chat. Moreover, they may have

negative effects on the learning process. Besides that, the use of virtual classes may affect their confidence. By comparing the result of this study with Ku and Lohr's study (2003), Mosquera's study (2017), Indreica's study (2014), Bogdan and Brindusa's study (2018) all of those advantages and disadvantages are unique to this study under its circumstances except "feel lonely" which mention in Ku and Lohr's study (2003).

So, the third hypothesis which states that if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will have some advantages and disadvantages of using it, is supported by these results.

To answer the fourth question and depending on the previous results, the open-ended questions in this study reveal many positive and negative factors that affect the students' attitudes and perceptions while using the virtual classes. So, the last hypothesis which states that if the postgraduate female students use virtual classes in their master's program at KKU, they will have some factors which affect their attitudes and perceptions, is supported by these results.

First, there are positive and negative factors that influenced the students' perceptions. The positive factors which affect the students' perceptions are the ability of communicating with each other through chat rooms, the chance to participate more than before, the preference of using virtual classes, working together for many reasons such as saving time and effort, the ease of use, the excellent design which provides an interactive environment, easiness of using the microphone, having more comfort and confident about their opinions, speaking freely without fear, participating more often than in real classes, providing the chance to be more active than in face-to-face classes, speaking fluently, being more aware of the students' speeches, listening again to the students' speeches by using the recorded lectures, and improving the students' time management skills. Additionally, it is the best way to meet their male professors, and the teacher can ask the students the same as in real classes.

The negative factors which affect the students' perceptions are technical problems, the disability to see others (students and teachers), the silence in the virtual classes, the preference to take face-to-face classes, the limited communication between the teacher and students, working alone for many reasons such as teachers ask the students to work individually. Moreover, the students face text-based chatting problems which cause by many reasons such as the students are not familiar with the keyboard**,** and microphone problems which cause by many reasons such as the disability of using it when three students are pressing it.

Second, there are positive and negative factors that influenced the students' attitudes. The positive factors which affect the students' attitudes are the preference to use the virtual classes in the future for many reasons such as the ability to attend the class from their homes comfortably without any time wastage, the positive effects on the students' learning process for many reasons such as the use of the virtual classes motivates the students to interact and participate more than before, saving effort because of many reasons that include the easiness of joining the sessions and replaying them at anytime and anywhere, and the students' increased confidence for many reasons such as the absence of the pressure.

The negative factors which affect the students' attitudes are the preference of taking face-to-face classes in the future since it provides them with more interaction and information than the virtual classes, the students' performance is better in face-to-face classes, the negative effects on the students' learning process which cause by many reasons such as the absence of body language, the use of virtual classes

consume their effort because of many reasons that include the preference of using face-to-face classes, and the students' decrease confidence for many reasons such as the Internet problems and headphone problems.

We can find some of these positive and negative factors which affect the students' attitudes and perceptions in Bogdan and Brindusa's study (2018) and Jovic, Stankovic, and Neskovic's study (2017). But, in this study, we can find factors which do not appear in other studies (that mentioned in this study). For the positive factors which affect the students' perceptions which are not mentioned in Bogdan and Brindusa's study (2018) and Jovic, Stankovic, and Neskovic's study (2017) are the chance to participate more than before, the preference of using virtual classes, working together for many reasons such as saving time and effort, having more comfort and confident about their opinions, speaking freely without fear, participating more than in real classes, providing the chance to be more active than in face-to-face classes, speaking fluently, being more aware of the students' speeches, listening again to the students' speeches by using the recorded lectures, and improving the students' time management skills because of many reasons that include the extra time that is provided by the virtual classes to finish and achieve what is required. Moreover, it is the best way to meet their male professors, and the teacher can ask students like in real classes.

Besides these positive factors we have negative factors which affect the students' perceptions which are not mentioned in Bogdan and Brindusa's study (2018) and Jovic, Stankovic, and Neskovic's study (2017) are technical problems, the silence in the virtual classes, the preference to take face-to-face classes, the limited communication between the teacher and students, working alone for many reasons such as teachers asked the students to work individually. Also, students face text-based chatting problems which cause by many reasons such as the students are not familiar with the keyboard**,** and microphone problems which cause by many reasons such as the disability of using it when three students are pressing it.

Besides that, all of the positive and negative factors which affect the students' attitudes are unique to this study under its circumstances.

Recommendations

An expansion of this study can investigate the effect of using virtual classes on tests, the relationship between using virtual classes and students' achievement regarding age and gender, and teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards using the virtual classes. In this study, based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were set for e-learning:

1. Virtual classes should be developed suit for students' needs since we have a significant number of students who want to use it for their future study.
2. Teachers and students must be trained to use the virtual classes to avoid problems.
3. Virtual classes should be implemented in the learning process because of its advantages and effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the postgraduate students' attitudes and perceptions of the virtual classroom and its characteristics such as synchrony, sense of community, interactivity, usefulness, and ease of use. Also, it studied the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual classes and discussed the factors which affected the students' attitudes and perceptions towards using virtual classes. The study

revealed that the students had different attitudes and perceptions towards using the virtual classes. Generally, we had positive reactions from the students who use this technology. Furthermore, there were some difficulties faced by students, such as technical problems. But, we had a significant number of students who wanted to have online courses because of its effectiveness and usefulness (Parker & Martin, 2010). Besides that, interactivity, usefulness, and ease of use had significant results in this study. Also, this study revealed that there were some advantages (such as the ease of use) and disadvantages (such as having no sense of being in a real class) of using virtual classes. Moreover, many positive and negative factors affected the students' attitudes and perceptions.

We know that technology enhances the learning environment (Perraton, 1988 as cited in Schlosser & Simonson, 2006). So, in my opinion, having an effective learning process depends on having a better understanding of our students' perceptions and attitudes regarding the ways and the tools for teaching and learning. Also, it is essential to know more about the factors that will affect the process of learning through virtual classes besides the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual classes. Moreover, we use new technology (the virtual classes), which needs more understanding of how it works and how to use it (Qahmash, 2013). So, this study proved to be a useful guide for teachers when they consider using virtual classes. Besides that, it provides them with more information and experience to know how to meet their students' expectations. Also, this study formed a baseline for other researches since this area of research is related to Applied Linguistics (AL) and it has become a crucial significant area in AL recently (Bin, 2013). Generally, this study could help people involved in using virtual classes.

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Appendix A. Tables

Table 2. *The mean scores of synchrony*

Synchrony	Mean scores	The total of the mean raw scores of synchrony
1. I had technical problems while using the virtual classes.	3.34	12

2. Using virtual classes reduced my time than attending classes face-to-face	4.56	
3. It is easy to collaborate with my colleagues without being in the same place.	4.08	

Table 3. *The mean scores of the sense of community*

Sense of community	Mean scores	The total of the mean raw scores of the sense of community
4. I am isolated and lonely.	2.47	9.08
5. There is no sense of being in a real classroom when I used the virtual classes.	3.26	
6. I worked individually for most of the projects.	3.34	

Table 4. *The mean scores of interactivity*

Interactivity	Mean scores	The total of the mean raw scores of interactivity
7. I did not face problems when I used the text-based chatting.	3.47	12.73
8. It is easy to follow the class discussions.	3.69	
10. I can talk freely using the microphone.	3.26	
11. I cannot interact with my colleagues because I cannot see them face-to-face.	2.30	

Table 5. *The mean scores of usefulness and ease of use*

Usefulness and ease of use	Mean scores	The total of the mean scores
12. It is easy to use the Virtual Classrooms.	4.26	26.78
13. My performance improved through the experience of using the virtual classes.	3.26	

14. My effectiveness in learning has enhanced through the experience of using the virtual classes.	3.34
15. I can easily view the archived sessions.	4.13
16. I could easily access the class.	4.39
9. The design of the virtual classes provided an interactive environment.	3.52
17. The use of the virtual classes enhanced my time management techniques.	3.8

Table 6. *The mean scores of the students' attitudes*

Statements	Mean scores
18. I hope to use the virtual classes for my future study.	3.17
19. I developed a positive reaction towards the use of virtual classes.	3.91
20. I had a negative reaction to the use of the virtual classes.	2.56
21. Using Virtual Classes makes me a motivated student.	3.08
22. There is a negative effect on my learning process because of the use of virtual classes.	3.04
23. I had a good experience while using the virtual classes.	4.04
24. I had a bad experience while using the virtual classes.	2.43
25. It was interesting to use the virtual classes.	3.69
26. The process of completing the semester using the virtual classes was time consuming.	2.91
27. I was confused because there was no immediate feedback.	2.56
28. I had the feedback provided by my instructor and my colleagues.	4.04
29. I faced problems because of the fixed time of the classes.	2.30
30. I am confident because I could complete everything at home.	3.95

31. I was worried while accessing the class through online because of the Internet problems.	3.21
32. There is no confidence when I use the virtual classes.	2.34

Appendix B. Figures

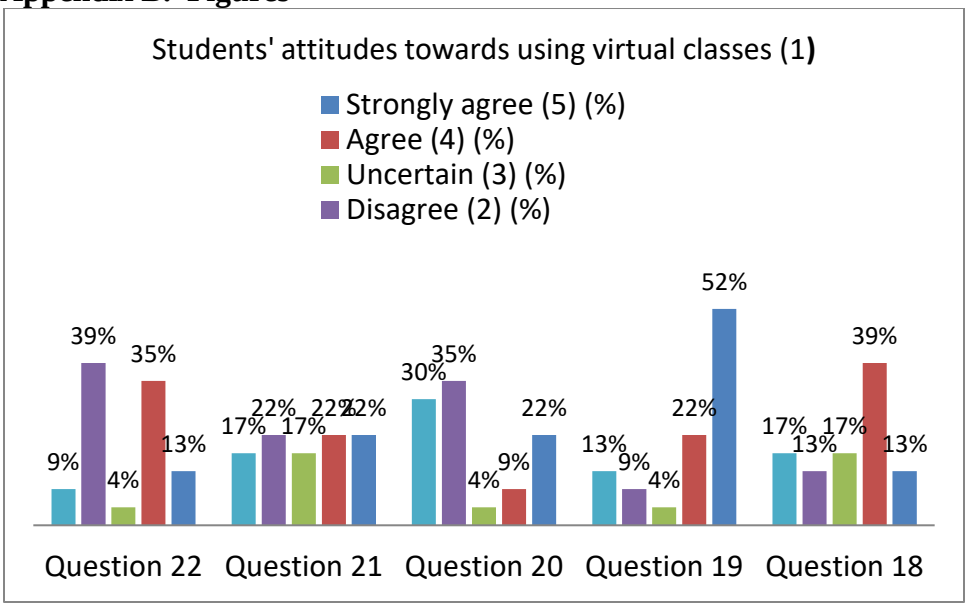


Figure 5. The percentages of students' responses about their attitudes (question 18, 19, 20, 21, & 22)

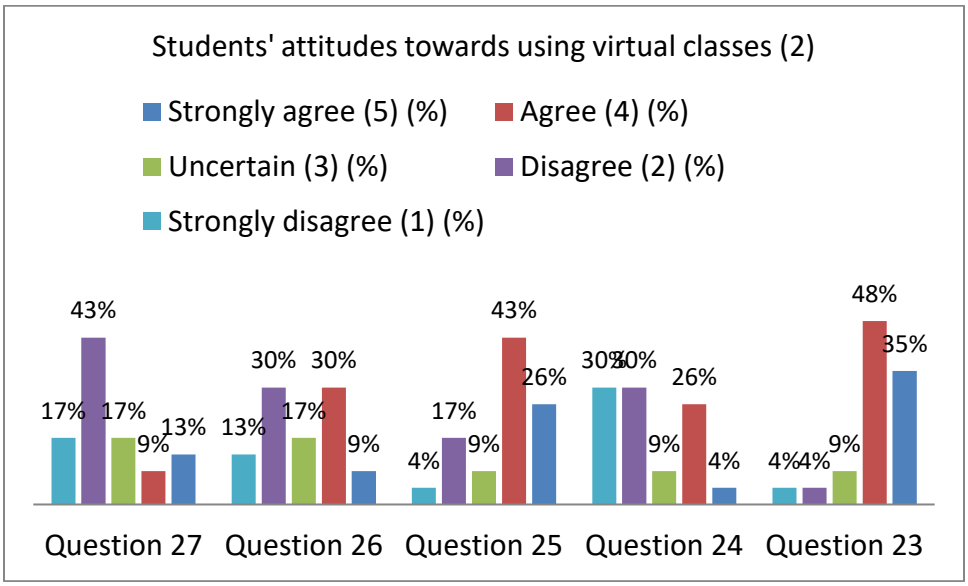


Figure 6. The percentages of students' responses about their attitudes (question 23, 24, 25, 26, & 27)

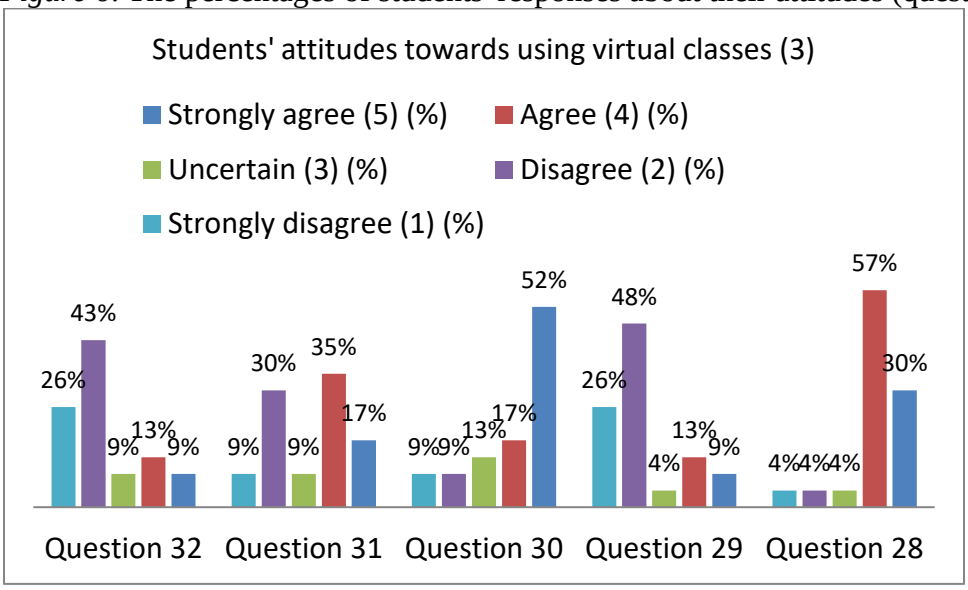


Figure 7. The percentages of students' responses about their attitudes (question 28, 29, 30, 31, & 32)