Special Issue on Covid 19 Challenges: English Language Teaching and Learning

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English K-12 Teacher Experiences in Saudi Arabia in the Pandemic Era: A Follow-up Study of One Khbrat University Program

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Abstract  
A mixed-methods study examines the impact of the pandemic-driven move to virtual learning on K-12 (kindergarten through twelfth grade) English teacher experiences in Saudi Arabia to inform future development of the teaching of English in the country. Research is limited in K-12 English instruction in the country, and it is just emerging on the pandemic’s impact on education in the MENA region. The 35 subjects were English educators who completed the Saudi government-sponsored professional development program, Khbrat, at one U.S. university. Contextualized within the literature on technology in instruction, leadership frameworks, and Vision 2030 education reforms, the study explores the convergence of technological, institutional, and socio-cultural factors affecting innovation in English education to address the research question of how the pandemic has impacted Khbrat graduates as EFL teachers and as change agents in their country. Integrated analysis of survey and interview data reveals patterns of both acceleration and constraint. Findings suggest pathways to leverage virtual technology and acquired knowledge and skills of Khbrat English teacher graduates to deliver EFL professional development with a more pedagogical focus and to build coalitions among EFL educators to sustain the forward movement of innovation in English education in post-pandemic Saudi Arabia. The study concludes with recommendations for future applications.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, English as a Foreign Language, professional development, Saudi Arabia, virtual education

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Introduction

The global disruption of the coronavirus pandemic led many countries to close schools, affecting millions of students (UNESCO, 2020). In March 2020, Saudi Arabia started the shift from in-person to distance learning. Within one week of the country’s first confirmed coronavirus case, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education (MoE) moved K-12 schools to an online environment, with nationwide distance learning beginning the day after schools closed (Ministry of Education, 2020). Due to this emergency-characterized change, it is essential to record the recent experiences of teachers during these unstable times and explore possible outcomes that may influence the future of the teaching and learning experiences of all involved.

In the U.S., similar conditions and emergency responses occurred. Within this global context, a Saudi government-sponsored educational leadership initiative was underway at the U.S. university where researchers conduct this study. The Khbrat program was an initiative launched by the MoE between 2017 and 2020, partnering with universities worldwide to equip Saudi K-12 educators through a year-long professional learning program to become change agents in the transformation of Saudi schools, in service of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2018). Khbrat scholars produced a research-based project focusing on innovation for Saudi schools. The host university for this study provided one year of intensive Professional Development (PD) and cross-cultural experience in K-12 schools to two cohorts totaling 90 teachers between 2018 and 2020 (hereafter identified as Cohort Two and Cohort Three). Teachers of English and other disciplines collaborated with university mentors to build capacity as educational leaders and develop action plans for implementation when they returned home.

A previous study, conducted shortly before the pandemic, inquired into the impact of the program on Cohort Two (2018-2019), yielding insights into shifts in self-perception as leaders and highlighting the importance of systematic post-program support and the value of qualitative inquiry into program impacts (Bentahar, Copeland, & Stevens, 2020).

The current study builds on the first. First, it focuses on the experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and examines pedagogical development in this field. Second, it explores how the pandemic-driven move to a virtual learning environment impacted participants as educators and change agents in Saudi education. Third, while retaining a mixed-method design, it uses qualitative data more extensively to explore teacher experiences. The study addresses the following question: How did the pandemic impact EFL teachers from this university Khbrat program as change agents in their country? Thus, researchers aim to explore the current experiences of these teachers during the pandemic in order to identify areas of possible development that may inform the forward movement of the teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia.

A difference between the experiences of Cohorts Two and Three should be noted. Cohort Two teachers experienced all phases of the pandemic response detailed above while working as teachers or supervisors in Saudi schools. However, Cohort Three was nearing the completion of their year in the U.S. when the pandemic disrupted education worldwide, forcing mass migration to an online environment. The Khbrat program at this university also migrated online. After graduation in May 2020, Cohort Three returned to very different educational challenges in Saudi Arabia than they left the year before.
Literature Review

Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in both K-12 and higher education as part of Vision 2030, in part through digital learning initiatives and in the development of EFL education, as English plays a vital role in the economic, political, and cultural sectors of the country (Al-Zahrani & Rajab, 2017; Faroque, 2017). English is the only foreign language taught at public universities in Saudi Arabia, hence, its position in K-12 education (Alharbi, 2019). Overall, there are high expectations about the role of English in the country’s Vision 2030 (Al-Shehri, 2020).

The swift national transition by Saudi Arabia to virtual learning in response to the pandemic, praised by UNESCO (Oxford Business Group, 2020), necessitated the adoption of "robust" and “dynamic” technology to ensure the continuation of the educational process at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2020). Initially, K-12 students had multiple options for accessing curriculum asynchronously through existing technology such as the Noor platform and iEN National Educational Portal/iEN YouTube channel or satellite TV (Ministry of Education, 2020). These offered videos, downloadable textbooks, and other resources covering the curriculum (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

In the first semester of 2020-21, schools remained online with several changes. First, the MoE launched the Madrasati platform (Arabic for “My School”), which was linked to Microsoft 365 applications and provided a coordinated system for accessing/delivering content, submitting assignments, and communicating. All students, parents, and educators were expected to join the platform, and online synchronous classes were held using Microsoft Teams (Saudi Gazette, 2020). Attendance and academic accountability resumed and could be monitored through the Madrasati dashboard. The iEN channels remained an option for students without reliable internet access. El-Saharty, Kheyfets, Herbst, and Ajwad (2020) view the pandemic disruption as an opportunity to further accelerate educational reforms set by Vision 2030 through the rapid adoption and ongoing accessibility of new educational technologies.

Concurrently, the MoE adopted a single textbook series for EFL education nationwide. This was part of a planned multi-year strategy in which different regions piloted different materials and compared results. Because of the simultaneous pandemic shift, students and teachers now began using the online versions of the adopted curriculum, affording further integration of technology into instruction (Al-Shehri, 2020).

As trends in EFL pedagogy have evolved over the years, the Communicative Approach, emphasizing language acquisition through authentic and meaningful communication, has gained wide acceptance (Rahman, 2015). According to Mabrook and Mabrook (2020), this approach has been beneficial to English language learners in Saudi universities if balanced to cover all language skills.

Despite many initiatives in Saudi Arabia, student performance in English language learning has remained low (Alrabai, 2016). Factors mentioned in the literature include outdated learning practices such as memorization, misalignment of curriculum to students' needs, limited exposure to the target language, and lack of student motivation (Al-Zahrani & Rajab, 2017; Faroque, 2017; Hasan, 2012). Mabrook and Mabrook (2020) suggested that Saudi EFL students are less involved in learning because they are not accustomed to the authentic practice of oral
productive skills. Outdated instructional paradigms persist, which view students as receivers of information, meeting class requirements through mechanical tasks and fixed response assessments, often receiving minimal feedback (Hasan, 2012). More importance is placed on covering the curriculum according to a schedule than on targeting language learning according to student proficiency and needs (Al-Shehri, 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, technology in EFL classrooms in many parts of Saudi Arabia was often limited; many schools lacked language labs and other resources such as recorders and projectors, with the exception that some teachers utilized social media and WhatsApp for learning purposes (Alharbi, 2015; Al-Shehri, 2020). Since the pandemic, student-teacher and teacher-teacher communication have been facilitated primarily through technology, revealing the potential to enhance teaching and learning through its affordances of connection, co-creation, flexibility, and convenience (Onyema et al., 2020). Moreover, online education has the capacity to reach more learners (Duhoe, Owusu-Afriyie, & Kumi, 2020). In Hakim’s (2020) research, most teachers asserted that teaching online also affords new ways to deliver English language instruction. Technology can provide tools that benefit both learner and teacher experiences through resources for developing speaking and writing skills (Al-Shehri, 2020; Hakim, 2020), connecting with students through chat platforms, and addressing varying learning styles (Aburmaileh, 2015). However, Vlachopoulos (2020) warns that new technological learning solutions must be approached systematically in investment, planning, and delivery to ensure effectiveness.

In this new learning environment, differentiation and customization to meet English learner needs may be possible (Tao, Yeh, & Sun, 2006). Furthermore, Duhoe et al. (2020) found that online learning “facilitates communication and also strengthens the relationships which support learning." (p. 63) but also that this optimistic outlook comes with the requirement of a more intentional investment of effort and time to ensure the optimization of the learning experience.

The SAMR model offers a way to critically examine how technology changes learning experiences as it moves from low-tech to high-tech environments (Puentedura, 2013). According to Puentedura (2013), changes could be mapped onto a continuum “from enhancement to transformation,” starting with simple substitution “with no functional change,” to augmentation involving “some functional improvement,” to modification, allowing for “significant task redesign,” to redefinition, which “allows for the creation of new tasks, previously inconceivable,” thus effecting a transformation of the learning experience (slide 3).

Studies also reveal additional obstacles for English learning in the online environment, mainly relating to student engagement and motivation. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) assert that different learning styles and language proficiencies create new challenges online, especially with low proficiency learners. Furthermore, learners must have an increased awareness of online learning norms and develop a more autonomous mindset. Atmojo and Nugroho found that students often do not fully understand these considerations, perceiving online learning as informal and less important, resulting in less focus and participation. Moreover, in Saudi Arabia where private and public spaces are distinct and family “privacy from the outside is essential” (Nydell, 2018, p.49), webcams are more likely off during virtual instruction, creating an additional potential barrier to the engagement necessary for language learning.
Assessment is yet another dilemma in online education although in some settings, technology has provided opportunities for creative project-based learning online. Because digital multiple-choice tests are prevalent due to their ease and automaticity, testing higher-order skills has become even more challenging (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Another issue emerges in accurately measuring outcomes and validating results. In Saudi Arabia, according to Alrabai (2016), "[s]tudents are not usually tested or promoted based on their actual competence in the foreign language"(p. 26) but instead based on memorization. Moreover, at the college level, Mabrook and Mabrook (2020) found that EFL learners often use technology to open a second device to search for answers or to paste exam responses, and can now more easily enlist friends or family to help answer questions or perform tasks.

At the 2016 International Conference of English as a Foreign Language Education, Saudi EFL teachers recognized the need for continuing professional development in achieving the Vision 2030 goals of enhancing English instruction (Al-Zahrani & Rajab, 2017). A mismatch between instructional best practice and teacher preparation has persisted (Rahman, 2015), with many EFL teachers still using traditional audiolingual and grammar-translation methods (Al-Shehri, 2020). Zohairy (2012) reported that misconceptions also existed about the purpose and value of teacher PD in Saudi Arabia, at least before the pandemic, and that teachers were not always afforded time in their schedules to attend PD sessions or to implement what they learned.

Now, teachers, students, and parents alike have experienced new and sudden unpreparedness in the use of online technologies, resulting in barriers to effective learning worldwide (Al Salman, Alkathiri, & Bawaneh, 2021). In addition to PD in English instruction, Hakim (2020) recommends that EFL teachers receive extensive PD to further develop their virtual technology skills to positively impact student success. This training should include digital materials development, feedback tools, motivation strategies, and facilitating online interaction (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

During uncertain times, leadership plays a vital role in embracing innovations to allow learning and teaching to move forward. The nature of school leadership experienced a key transformation in the pandemic. Professional relationships are significantly altered, with fewer opportunities for informal interactions. Harris (2020) argued that a new model of “distributed, collaborative and networked” (para. 4) leadership is evolving to fill needs in this era of uncertainty and ambiguity. Harris and Jones (2020) argued that this model allows for the voices of stakeholders at all levels of an organization and leverages teacher leadership to move schools forward. Nevertheless, despite significant capital investment in educational reforms over the last 20 years, Alsaleh (2019) attributed a limited impact of these initiatives to “a lack or weak change management and leadership during the implementation stage.” (p. 175)

One change management framework directly taught to program participants was Kotter (1996), in which successful transformation requires a coalition of supporters working together and occurs through a series of phases over time. Kotter outlined steps to bring about change, including creating a vision, communicating that vision to others and empowering them to act, and planning for incremental successes before moving on to institutionalize a new approach.
Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, delivers education through the national centralized leadership of the MoE, which decides all matters of curriculum, policy, evaluation, and training within a curriculum-centered rather than a student-centered educational paradigm. According to Algarni and Male (2014), this model tends to limit the flexibility, autonomy, and voice of potential educational leaders, as well as the capacity to create effective learning environments. Within this context, researchers will explore how EFL teachers, who were to return to Saudi Arabia as change agents, have navigated the challenges of the pandemic to implement their visions for EFL instructional innovations.

This inquiry fills three gaps in the literature discussed here. First, in the MENA region, most EFL research is conducted in higher education, not in K-12 settings (Mabrook & Mabrook, 2020). Second, research to date is limited about the K-12 educational impact of the pandemic in the region; of 89 pandemic-related studies reviewed by Bond (2020), only 3% came from the MENA region. Third, researchers aim to address methodological limitations, given that only 4% of the studies in Bond (2020) used mixed methods.

Methods
This mixed-methods study uses a convergent design for triangulation purposes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) data collection proceeded separately but in overlapping timeframes, and then the findings were brought into conversation with each other. Integration, therefore, occurred both in analysis and interpretation.

Participants
The survey was a census; all Khbrat graduates of the researchers’ university were invited to participate. This included 48 from Cohort Two (2018-19) and 42 from Cohort Three (2019-20). These Saudi educators had all applied to, been selected for, and completed the intensive Khbrat program. Otherwise, they varied both demographically (e.g., gender, region, age) and in terms of their professional context (e.g., role, subject, and level taught). There were 67 survey respondents, a 74% response rate. This included 32 Academic Content Teachers (ACT) and 35 English as a Foreign Language Teachers (EFL). For the rest of this analysis, only the EFL teachers are included. In this subgroup, the survey response rate was 78%.

Sampling for the interviews combined convenience and purposive approaches. Everyone who completed the survey was sent a link to consent and sign up for an interview, and all volunteers were interviewed. Interview participants were recruited to achieve a representative balance between cohorts and genders and to include supervisor perspectives.

Demographics of survey and interview respondents, compared to the EFL subgroup as a whole, are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

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<th>Pre-program Role</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2 (2018-19)</td>
<td>3 (2019-20)</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Responses</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
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English K-12 Teacher Experiences in Saudi Arabia in the Pandemic Era

Daraghmeh, Mead

| (N=35) | 8 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 12 | 2 |
| (N=14) | 25 | 20 | 27 | 18 | 40 | 5 |

**Instruments**

The survey instrument included twenty-four closed-ended questions, some with multiple parts, and seven open-ended questions. These fell into six categories: 1) demographics, 2) employment, 3) action plan implementation, 4) teaching experiences, 5) educational leadership, and 6) final thoughts and recommendations. Only respondents who identified as teachers answered section four. To permit comparisons across studies and with the permission of those researchers, where possible, question formats from Bentahar et al. (2020) were replicated, with additional questions about the pandemic added.

The interview protocol was semi-structured and included nine broad questions with follow-up probes and a final opportunity for participants to share any additional thoughts.

For the survey and the interview, participants could choose to receive and respond to questions in English or Arabic. The Arabic instruments were verified with two external professionals. One member of the research team is a native Arabic speaker; she translated all responses into English before the analysis.

**Research Procedures**

The survey was administered in Qualtrics. The link was shared via personalized emails and WhatsApp messages in groups that had been established for each cohort. The survey opened on January 15 and closed on January 29, 2021, with two reminders sent over that period.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom in late January through mid-February 2021 and recorded. Transcripts were obtained through Zoom and, where applicable, translated. All three researchers conducted interviews, which ranged from 30 minutes to almost two hours long.

Closed-ended survey questions were analyzed quantitatively using Qualtrics and Excel. Results were disaggregated to look for differences by gender, cohort, and reassignment (i.e., whether a participant had been moved to a new school). Open-ended survey responses were manually coded for themes.

Interview data were analyzed in Dedoose (SocioCultural Research Consultants, 2020) using an inductive approach and open (constant comparative) coding. One researcher did all coding and initial analysis, but the interpretive process was completed collaboratively. As former Khbrat personnel, the researchers drew on their understanding of the program and their relationships with the participants and sought to recognize their own cultural lenses in conducting the inquiry.
Results

Integration of survey and interview findings reveals three dimensions of participant experiences in the pandemic: as educators in virtual EFL classrooms, as colleagues interacting with peers and supervisors, and as leaders attempting to implement initiatives within a new educational environment.

Experiences in Classrooms

Almost all survey respondents (97%) reported working either entirely online or in a mix of online and in person. Some respondents noted the speed and comprehensiveness of the pivot online as a benefit of a centralized system in a time of great stress. Others understood this pandemic-driven move as a massive acceleration of their country’s long-term plans as one participant indicated: “The electronic/technological transformation is a fascinating one. We had never imagined it before. Well, there were plans and visions, but they would have required ten years ahead.”

Participants who were current teachers were asked to rate how much the pandemic had changed their teaching approaches. The reported responses are in Table 2.

<table>
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<th>Table 2. Ratings of pandemic-related change in teaching approaches</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Changed a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed a little</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not change</td>
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As Table 2 shows, all members of both cohorts perceived pandemic-related changes in their teaching. Cohort Three were more likely to call it “a lot” of pedagogical change. One respondent expressed, “…because of covid,… it is like a jump to the 21st century.”

These perceptions of change revealed divergent views about the affordances or limitations of online EFL classrooms. Some struggled to identify positives, while others found online teaching “easier” and hoped that they could keep it after the pandemic. While these differences cannot fully be explained, key ideas can be distilled from the data. The rest of this section discusses how teachers experienced this “jump to the 21st century” in their instruction, communication, curriculum, and assessment.

Participants identified rapidly improved technology skills as a benefit of the pandemic, a Vision 2030 goal which, according to one, had previously been slow to take hold. Teaching from home in front of their computers, instead of traveling long distances to school and moving room to room throughout the day, some teachers found more time and better online access.

[English] teachers have maybe gotten benefits from online learning because in the past maybe you’ll enter the classroom, you have to plug in to prepare the screen. (... now just
You can provide them with the materials and (…) upload that, they can listen, they can watch

The online environment also created new lines of communication. Teachers, students, and families could connect via the platform, emails, or social media. Participants saw this as an advantage, and some reported that their students were initiating contact.

As described above, KSA adopted one textbook series for EFL nationwide, concurrent with the pandemic, thus motivating teachers to tap into the curriculum’s existing online capacity. Some respondents praised the curriculum for integrating a more comprehensive range of language skills in the four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The general comment that “tech is useful in teaching English as a second language” echoed across all data; however, upon further analysis, the impact of technology appears more varied.

The survey asked teachers how much flexibility they had in “what and how they teach” using a before and after format to gauge pandemic effects. Responses show a shift towards greater flexibility. The number of teachers reporting “a lot” of flexibility grew from three (11%) before the pandemic to twelve (43%) once the pandemic began. Yet, respondents also reported that the curriculum continued to operate as a traditional governing structure, with adherence to the textbook and a consistent pace still expected despite new circumstances. Although one teacher commented, “I can use what I want for materials,” extra videos or websites supplemented rather than replaced the textbook.

Some teachers experienced increased supervisory visits, facilitated by the online environment, as primarily a check for curricular compliance: “Online you are more monitored than in your [physical] classroom. You have to really stick to your textbook.”

Some teachers identified the ease of providing authentic English input online:

...Because you have access to different resources...that kids nowadays really enjoy and they love to participate with it and also they get exposed to native speech.

While there were many comments about increased receptive input (e.g., videos, activities), interview responses revealed a wider range of experiences of communicative productive language practice online.

Some teachers found their students engaged online, and they occasionally shared innovative activities to get them talking. One described how technology helped students find their voice in English:

The shy students who couldn’t speak face to face, now they are... the most important stars. Through the online, they can speak, they can give jok[es] in English...They have some confidence...

On the other end of the spectrum were comments such as:
I have to beg some students to interact and speak...this semester I have 31 students in the class, those who interact with me are four or five. The rest don't even respond... at all even if I call on them all class.

Most descriptions of students’ communicative output fell somewhere between these extremes, with increased participation reported by the middle of the school year as teachers found more creative ways to elicit it.

I have to prepare many strategies during the class to attract the students' attention, and ...most of them fun or games to encourage...participation.

Before the availability of Teams breakout rooms in late 2020 one interviewee commented, opportunities for small group interactive practice, typical of face-to-face language classrooms, were not available. Furthermore, the cultural importance of privacy influenced the role of webcams, which usually stayed off for both students and teachers. Consequently, more difficulty was reported in building rapport and modeling pronunciation, conditions for communicative language instruction.

It was challenging teaching... without the physical appearance...especially because we cannot force or ask our students to open their cameras (...) That's difficult to maintain a manageable relationship with your students.
It’s still hard for my students and for me to reach each other (...) I tried sometimes to talk and mime and try to open my mouth, but nobody sees me.

As with curricular expectations, centralized assessment policies remained during the pandemic. Yet, the manner in which they were administered and how they impacted students was more flexible, with several revisions to the guidelines for assigning student grades. Data showed that participants experienced the MoE’s response in this area in different ways. While some viewed the changes as evidence of decision-makers’ responsiveness, others found the frequent policy changes to be “random” and disorienting.

English assessments were administered online in multiple-choice format. Respondents recognized some benefits to automated assessment but also raised many challenges:

You have Forms to do any exam and it's much better than papers, grading ...Everything will be done for you. It saves lots of time, lots of effort. But the student can cheat easily.

Teachers described students copying from each other, looking up answers, and having their relatives take their tests. They also noted the absence of assessments measuring student production:

[Assessments] are not reliable and not valid. There is no credibility or consistency. The questions are multiple choice questions and students benefit from the opportunity of using the book or his brother or someone. They don't give an honest true impression. There is inflation in grades.
The ease of gaming the system had a negative impact on student effort. Despite the widespread acknowledgment of this problem, researchers heard of no national move as yet to address it, leaving teachers to seek out innovations at the margins. These included technology-infused projects, formative assessments, and strategies for asking “questions from outside the curriculum, which increased [student] focus,” in one teacher’s words. These strategies were in addition to, not instead of, official exams.

**Experiences within Professional Communities**

While respondents agreed that the pandemic had caused upheaval in relationships with students, they were less uniform about its impact on their relationships with peers, PD, or supervisor interactions.

Most respondents (77%, n=27) reported some shift in their interactions with colleagues, about evenly split between a “lot” and a “little,” but 23% (n = 7) perceived no change due to the pandemic. Cohort 3 participants were more likely to perceive significant changes. Teachers reassigned to new schools after Khbrat reported more considerable changes than those who returned to their previous schools. Qualitative data confirm that teachers who joined new professional communities during the pandemic faced major challenges in forging new relationships online. For instance, one described colleague relationships as “Zero. Absolutely never spoken to them.”

Participants described transactional online communication. Some appreciated the flexibility and efficiency while others missed face-to-face interaction. While many teachers attended school occasionally, this was a logistical necessity, not an opportunity for collaboration.

*Interaction is less and more formal. Once a week (...) we are there just in case a student comes and has a question. There is no communication or interaction.*

*(...) we don’t connect at all. Like, we only have a WhatsApp group and only post if there is something really important like, “oh it’s a time to post grades”*

Although not typical, one teacher described how the steep learning curve needed for online teaching motivated colleagues to connect in new ways for support.

Participants perceived some positives to online PD versus face-to-face. It was convenient and promoted work/life balance. Supervisors reported increased PD attendance and anyone conducting online PD reached a broader geographic audience. There were many efforts to help teachers adjust to the basics of the new environment. Participants reported attending -- or providing -- online PD about Microsoft applications, including Teams and Forms for assessment, the Madrasati platform, or the new curriculum. While a few participants had the opportunity to train teachers on other topics, such as those of their Khbrat action plans, the priority was the pandemic response.

Technology greatly facilitated increased supervisory visits. Before, supervisors covered a wide geographical area and were lucky to visit two schools in a day; now they could observe up to six by entering any online classroom with one click. This allowed supervisors to provide support and to better understand daily instructional experiences. One teacher found the
dynamics “better, because now even the supervisors are learning from the teachers...this has given the teachers more confidence about their ways of teaching.”

Other teachers registered the changes in classroom privacy, expressing neutral, ambivalent, or negative feelings. Some experienced the increased visits by supervisors as a form of curricular control or a limit to their creativity. Attendance and performance data provided by the Madrasati platform also facilitated monitoring. Depending on the supervisor’s orientation and his or her relationship with teachers, that could feel to a teacher like support or surveillance:

_They can attend my class any minute without permission and without prior notice (…) there is no problem. It is normal. It is true that one gets a bit annoyed by the numerous visits..._

**Experiences as Change Agents**

Khbrat graduates returned home with research-based action plans to implement in their schools. Topics covered many areas of EFL pedagogy including oral communication, writing, educational drama, differentiation and, formative assessment. Table 3 below shows the participant-reported implementation outcomes of these plans in January 2021.

**Table 3. Implementation status for action plans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total EFL</th>
<th>Cohort 2</th>
<th>Cohort 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, implemented</td>
<td>19 (54.3%)</td>
<td>10 (55.6)</td>
<td>9 (52.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, did not implement</td>
<td>16 (45.7%)</td>
<td>8 (44.4%)</td>
<td>8 (47.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>35 (100.0)</td>
<td>18 (100.0)</td>
<td>17 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of the participants had been able to move forward in some way with their action plans, with similar rates in each cohort. However, there was a reduction in self-reported implementation among Cohort two in January 2021 (56%) versus November 2019 (74%). This difference cannot fully be explained by participation because the surveys’ high EFL response rates (78% in 2021, 80% in 2019) suggest substantial respondent overlap.

Nine educators (26%) cited pandemic-related delays or challenges or said their initiatives were no longer relevant. The actual or perceived limitations of online instruction and changes in student interactions often curtailed classroom-level implementation. “My action plan is mainly focused on the classroom environment. Due to corona and online education, it’s hard to implement my approach.”

As demonstrated above, there was also little opportunity for colleague interactions or collaboration that might facilitate implementation. Cohort Two participants who had begun to train, coach, or collaborate with other teachers as part of their initiatives found it challenging to continue amid shifting priorities.
Another condition affecting implementation was the practice of reassigning returning Khbrat teachers to different schools. This change compounded the disruption of the pandemic. Of the sixteen teachers who returned to the same school, 69% were able to progress with their action plans, while only 25% of the twelve reassigned to new schools reported this success.

A final challenge was a lack of systematic, follow-up support for participant initiatives. Members from both cohorts raised this concern in interviews, often without being prompted. Some commented on the perceived indifference or resistance encountered upon their return, while others invoked the idea of return on investment:

*If you spend that much money and you cooperate with professional universities and educational systems...respect that. You have to plan.*

**Discussion**

This study was conducted during a period of singularly disruptive forces in education but also of rapid social and educational change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Findings illuminate the convergence of technological, institutional, and socio-cultural factors affecting innovation in English education in the Kingdom, and suggest areas for further examination for professional support, as well as pathways to leverage virtual technology and the acquired knowledge and skills of Khbrat English teacher graduates for innovation in English instruction.

Study participants witnessed first-hand the fast, coordinated implementation of online learning through the centralized Saudi educational system, demonstrating the potential to push English language instruction forward and accelerate progress toward many Vision 2030 goals. This step towards improving English learning, however, came about with much effort and creativity beyond the core content to provide meaningful language learning experiences, as indicated by Duho et al. (2020), who found teachers across the spectrum of comfort with online teaching. Similarly, diverse experiences were reported even among the EFL educators of this study, all Khbrat initiative alumni.

Teachers reported more flexibility in how they taught during the pandemic compared to before, utilizing social media, videos, and websites to supplement the electronic textbook and provide more authentic English input. Yet the curricular pacing governed by the textbook continued to constrain teachers in content, time, and creativity. While the opportunity to increase language input through technology added substance to EFL instruction, following Puentedura's (2013) SAMR paradigm, this could be considered an augmentation but not yet a transformation of learning.

Despite the increase in receptive input and engagement with technology, productive practice has lagged. While the virtual environment has been less conducive to a communicative approach in EFL due to socio-cultural constraints around the use of cameras and adjustments to new expectations, midway through the 2020-21 school year, there was evidence of improvement in participation with more examples of authentic and meaningful communication activities, as defined by Rahman (2015). Overall, it is unclear whether the pandemic has been a catalyst or a deterrent in the implementation of communicative instruction in Saudi English classrooms.
Further research is necessary on the adaptation of communicative pedagogy to online English instruction.

Participants in this study voiced concerns about online assessment, a global challenge during the pandemic. Designing authentic and reliable skill-based assessments is a complex undertaking, and online settings pose additional challenges. While assessment policies were adjusted and technology was efficiently adopted and implemented, the Saudi assessment system appears to remain aligned to the lower substitution level of Puentedura’s SAMR continuum (2013), migrating traditional assessments to the online space. While some participants were able to innovate with classroom activities and formative assessment, there is not yet a broader system response to the need for a more meaningful language development assessment.

Technology such as the Madrasati platform and WhatsApp provided new pathways and efficiencies for communication between students and teachers and among educators, who recognized the benefits. Still, the lack of face-to-face contact in a “cameras off” culture presented challenges not only for language learning but also for relationship building as students and teachers sheltered in place within what Nydell (2018) described as the strictly private sphere of the family home. Participants generally felt their professional relationships were curtailed during the pandemic. Their comments reflect that virtual communication is not typically perceived as connection, which corroborates the finding from Bentahar et al. (2020) that professional collaboration was informal and relational rather than structured and scheduled. There were some examples of educators harnessing technology to communicate with each other in new ways, but they were sporadic.

On the other hand, teacher-supervisor relationships were characterized by increased accessibility. In an online environment, supervisors were one click away. Generally, interviewed supervisors expressed positive opinions about this shift; however, teachers’ views varied. While the frequency of visits and means of feedback has changed, typical supervisory dynamics have not. While supervisors can better monitor teachers’ performance, this may or may not promote EFL pedagogical innovation; in some cases, supervisors are still perceived as guardians of strict protocol within the hierarchical and centralized system described by Algamri and Male (2014). To move EFL instruction forward and capitalize on both greater access and acquired skills of newly trained teachers, supervision should transform from a compliance activity to a coaching and feedback model. Professional development (PD) participation witnessed a boost in the pandemic environment; physical location was no longer a barrier, and time was more available due to new teaching conditions. Again, within Puentedura’s SAMR model (2013), these examples represent augmentations, where professional activities were more accessible, faster, and broader-reaching. However, as the focus was to train teachers in new technology procedures and not necessarily introduce or sustain EFL pedagogical innovations, it has not yet fully capitalized on technology to substantially transform English learning, the ultimate goal in Puentedora’s framework.

Responding to pandemic conditions created an urgent priority for the Saudi educational system, which in some ways compete with EFL pedagogical innovation already underway. Interruptions and barriers are reflected, for example, in the reduced implementation rates of Khbrat action plans in January 2021 compared to November 2019 (Bentahar et al., 2020). The
reported on-hold status of many action plans coincides with the suspension of the Khbrat program’s deployment of Cohort four for the 2020-2021 year as the MoE turned its attention to the pandemic response. Although the pandemic may have exacerbated the uneven follow-up support for program participants, that issue was noted by Alsaleh (2019) and Bentahar et al. (2020).

Changing EFL education is a gradual and relational process. As Kotter (1996) states, it requires building a coalition of support with supervisors, colleagues, and students. The two groups of graduates had very different opportunities to strengthen such ties. While Cohort Two participants had a year to set their plans in motion before the pandemic, Cohort Three returned to an emergency context, and many were simultaneously challenged by reassignment to new schools. In common with educators everywhere, each participant experienced the pandemic differently. Some members of both cohorts found synergy between their EFL initiatives and online teaching. Contextualizing the implementation results within pandemic conditions may provide a reason for optimism, as over half of the EFL innovations created by Khbrat graduates are in the works.

Conclusion

In their aim to study the experiences of English teachers in Saudi Arabia during the current pandemic, the researchers identified multiple areas where further development can take place to move EFL teaching forward; a wider range of English input accompanied challenges facilitating authentic communicative output and administering valid language assessment; increased supervisor-teacher interactions counterbalanced overall fewer opportunities for collaboration among teachers; and wide-spread procedural training led to increased competence in instructional technologies but was offset by a narrow focus on EFL pedagogy. Finally, the participants had returned to Saudi Arabia to implement research-based initiatives; while over half of these are moving forward, pandemic-related delays have resulted in a decrease in progress.

This study illustrates what one participant called the “jump to the 21st century” for Saudi education. Significant changes in teaching and learning and the use of technology occurred very rapidly throughout the country. In some ways, EFL classrooms of the 2020-2021 school year would have been unrecognizable just a few years earlier. In other ways, though, traditional approaches to curriculum, assessment, and decision-making persisted and new challenges related to online EFL contexts emerged. Pandemic conditions evolve quickly. Saudi educational experiences of the 2020-2021 school year have been quite different from those of the previous school year. As the world moves into the second year of the pandemic and students and educators continue to adjust, there are opportunities to align better with the shifts necessitated by the pandemic with best practices for EFL innovation. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations include:

1. Develop PD with a pedagogical rather than procedural focus. Best practices for teaching EFL online, including ways to promote meaningful communication and language production, should be part of future PD programs.
2. Explore and develop more authentic and valid approaches to language assessment online focusing on language production.
3. Leverage increased virtual accessibility of supervisors to teachers and teachers to teachers more effectively by developing a collaborative culture of support and constructive feedback.
4. Provide space and time for EFL educators to build relationships and coalitions to facilitate innovation in English education.

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Abstract

Digital teaching has become an alternative way to replace the conventional learning process in COVID pandemic time. Educators explore different language achievement strategies to assist students on the way to academic success. One of the approaches the teachers can benefit from significantly is instructional modal – the Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol (SIOP). This study aims to determine the effectiveness of SIOP instructional strategies in this digital teaching of EFL students. The study was conducted at the undergraduate level for English language learners in the Faculty of Philology, V.O. Sukhomlynsky National University of Mykolaiv, Ukraine. The researchers conducted the study in the first semester of 2020. The contribution of this study is to evaluate experience of teachers in instructional strategies and to assess their effectiveness in digital teaching. The study analyzes the responses of twenty-five teachers and 63 students to the SIOP-based survey. A descriptive statistical method was used to test the validation. The results of the research show that EFL learners are not satisfied with activities to apply language and content knowledge. The results justified that teachers need to establish active online communication with their students. The study presents some recommendations for EFL teachers to improve their professional skills by adopting the specific components of SIOP and mastering their instructional strategies in digital learning. The implementation of the SIOP Model in digital teaching could bring appropriate and meaningful resources for high school teachers as a tool for them to grow professionally in COVID pandemic time.

Keywords: digital content teaching, instructional strategies, online teaching, Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol modal, Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol, Ukrainian EFL University students

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Introduction

Implementation of digital technologies in the learning process started before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the current Millennium Era, technology usage plays a vital role in supporting teaching and learning processes to make the content understandable. The use of digital content in the learning process is a very viable, alternative way to replace the conventional learning process (Alrubaie, Alrubaie, & Hassoon, 2020).

Digital education during the COVID-19 lockdown showed some concerns about essential directions, which should be improved: curriculum, evaluation, academic planning and management, guidance and counseling, the use of edTechs. The spread of the virus has accelerated online learning in the world, particularly in Ukraine. Disasters will continue to occur, and technologies will help us cope with them (Andriivna, Vasylivna, Pavlivna, & Smaglii, 2020).

Negative consequences COVID-19 is likely to have on education. The teachers’ goal is to focus on one big positive change during this time: strengthening university-school-family blocks, figuring out how to effectively respond to support their students on their own. (Reich, Buttimer, Fang, Hillaire, Hirsch, Larke, & Slama, 2020). The doors these partnerships and networks have opened may transform how teachers think about teaching and instruction by shifting into a new domain – the digital age of university-school blocks with an emphasis on trauma-informed and social-emotional learning (SEL) supports (Reich et al., 2020; Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019).

During this time, it is complicated to quantify to what degree students are engaging with content and understanding teacher’s instructions on distance. The external conditions make it necessary to find new communication channels that allow us to implement the learning process in isolation (Rezvan, Ilienko, Zelinska, Krokhal., & Prykhodko, 2020). The main question is how to provide support for various instructional scenarios in digital learning and develop strategies to maneuver the additional stressors and challenges posed by teaching during COVID-19 (Hodges, Kerch, & Fowler, 2020). As instructors during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers must constantly introduce new teaching methods to keep the students interested and motivated. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the motivation of students to learn is low because they only study at home. Therefore, the teachers should overcome this problem (Fansury, Januarty, Rahman, & Syawal, 2020).

EFL teachers are searching the ways to lead their students to academic success. They face challenges in finding the tools to make the content of the subject understandable in digital learning. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) represents the instructional strategies making the content more accessible (Song, 2016).

Instructional strategies meet the needs of students and can significantly help them acquire the content of each lesson. The modal provides verified techniques for teachers through additional research to increasing their professionalism (Khong & Saito, 2014; Song, 2016).

The researchers conducted the study with the belief that instructional strategies of SIOP can become an influential factor of the teaching process to foster interaction and communication. Understanding teacher’s instructions by students can enhance the learning process.
The contribution of this study is to evaluate the experience of teachers in instructional strategies and to assess their effectiveness in digital teaching. The goal of this research is to investigate the efficacy of SIOP strategies of online education in the Ukrainian university setting. The study had the following target questions: What SIOP techniques do Ukrainian teachers practice in digital education? How much are they productive in delivering lessons? Do students perceive their instructions? What kind of instructional strategies do teachers need to implement in their practice in e-learning? Do EFL students benefit from promoting e-learning?

The objectives of this research are as follows:
- Familiarize teachers and students with instructional strategies of the SIOP Model;
- Determine the correspondence of teaching techniques in e-learning to the SIOP Model and assess the effectiveness of EFL teachers;
- Explore possible solutions and recommendations for implementing the SIOP Model that can facilitate teachers’ professional development during pandemics.

Literature Review

The characteristics of the Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol

Comprehending the content is a significant point for English language learners (ELLs). Different approaches suggest effective practices to make the instructions of teachers understandable (Calderon & Zamora, 2011; Cervetti, Kulikowich & Bravo, 2015; Genese, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Pray & Jiminez, 2009; Short, D. & Himmel, 2013) state the importance of teachers’ proficiency to assist linguistically and culturally different students.

The theoretical ground of this model is the statement that language acquisition means meaningful use and learning (Kareva & Echevarria, 2013). Foreign language learning should include activities that integrate skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The model implements the relationship between the language and content of the subject (Muhanna, 2019). Teachers consistently and regularly increase students’ knowledge of the academic language as an integral part of professional activity (Lyster, 2017). The model takes into account the unique needs of students in language development. Teachers make the content understandable using modeling, tutoring, multicultural content, and native language (Cisco & Pardon, 2012).

They create a particular environment where students feel comfortable experimenting with language. The environment includes settings when students learn a new language through content teaching and where the language of instructions is different from the native language of students. Teachers use a variety of proven instructional features, providing opportunities for practicing the target language.

They also establish specific links between the content of the subject, students’ experiences, and prior knowledge, focusing on expanding vocabulary of students. This activity requires a high level of student involvement and interaction, leading to detailed discourse and higher-order thinking. Students master functional language skills, such as reconciling meanings, explaining, confirming information, arguing, persuading, and disagreeing. Through learning
conversations and meaningful activities, students practice and apply their new knowledge of language and content.

For the past 20 years, SIOP has become a widely used approach for teaching in the USA. A dozen countries use it to teach content through non-native language of students. This model is empirically tested as a framework planning and delivering instructions as a framework for planning and delivering instructions in content areas for students who need to strengthen their academic language and literacy skills. Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2017) described it in the main works. The model covers eight aspects of lesson design and delivery: lesson preparation, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, review, and assessment (Short & Himmel, 2013).

**Components of the modal**

The facilitation instruction model combines various teaching methods. Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2017) described the components of the modal as following:

- **Lesson preparation** includes objectives linked to standards and curricula. The goal is to assist students in gaining experience in progress toward fluency in academic English. Teachers meet students’ expectations to know what they are going to learn and what they can do at the end of the lesson. Preparation includes providing adopted supplementary materials. Meaningful activities stimulate student interest in the subject and create the conditions to apply the knowledge.

- **Building Background** connects new concepts with personal experiences of students and their past learning. It’s necessary to activate prior knowledge to learn what they already know, to identify misinformation, or discover when it’s essential for understanding. SIOP teachers increase attention to vocabulary instruction across the curriculum for effective reading writing, speaking, and listening.

- **Comprehensible input.** EFLs acquire a new language differently. Teachers should use various appropriate language techniques (instructions fitting to student proficiency level, restatement, paraphrasing and repetition, previews and reviews important information) and additional accommodation techniques for students to comprehend the lessons’ concepts (demonstrations, modeling tasks, gestures, pantomime, and movement). This activity demands the students’ engagement into role plays, improvisations, simulations, experimental and discovery activities.

The next component includes **Strategies:** learning strategies, teacher-scaffold instructions, and higher-order thinking skills. Students should understand how to use learning strategies flexibly and benefit from combining them. The created tasks require the extended application of knowledge and represent complex thinking. By explicitly teaching cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, teachers equip students for academic learning inside and outside the classroom. SIOP teachers capitalize on the learning strategies students already know and use in their mother tongue.
Students learn the language through interaction that helps students develop and deepen content knowledge. In exchange, students practice essential language functions (asking for clarification, confirming interpretations, elaborating ideas, citing evidence to support claims, and evaluating opinions). It is a crucial aspect of educational achievement.

**Practice and application** create multiple modalities. SIOP teachers ensure that lessons include varous activities that encourage students to apply both the content and language skills they are learning through means such as hands-on materials, group assignments, partner work, and projects.

**Delivering lessons**, teachers introduce meaningful activities to students; provide appropriate time for them to process concepts, foster motivation, and engagement. The main subject of **Lesson Delivery** is teaching support of the content and language objectives. It includes students’ understanding of critical concepts as the goal.

**Review and assessment** are the necessary parts of the lesson to review the previous knowledge, check the topic knowledge, content, and language objectives. Review and assessment provide feedback, checking on student comprehension to determine whether additional explanations or re-teaching are needed.

The modal reflects many practices of teaching. Its adaptation accentuates attention to content during the professional development of EFL teachers.

**Digital learning systems**

Digital learning contributes quantitatively to teaching and learning interactions. The interaction on face to face learning is limited, that is, between instructors and learners only, but in digital learning, the learning interactions are more spread out. Interactions will occur between learners and learners, learners with instructors, learners with the environment, or learners with the media. The exchange may occur due to the support of digital media, such as e-learning, online discussion groups, e-mail, chat, instant messaging, streaming video, animation, Facebook, Instagram, and video conferencing. Digital content-based learning allows students to interact actively using computers or smartphones (Fansury et al., 2020).

Management of digital learning systems is different from conventional approaches. Digital learning systems require infrastructure and technology (technology support) (Fansury et al., 2020). Mobile technology creates new opportunities to improve the learning experience of students at all levels of education. It facilitates them to access educational resources in a new digital environment (Calimag, Mugel, Conde, & Aquino, 2014).

Changing the learning system from conventional to e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has many challenges. It can provide new learning space and culture. By integrating social networks in teaching EFL students can take advantage of all the existing digital media to use them as learning instruments (Deng & Tavares, 2013; Espinosa, 2015; Gorg, 2014).

Analyzing the tools, which educators use to promote virtual learning in the Algerian context, Ghounane (2020) admits that the most used tool for educational purposes is Facebook due to the motivation of students. The second one is the Moodle platform.
Many educators think Google Classroom to be the most effective innovative teaching and learning online platform (Albashtawi & Al Batainch, 2020). Al-Qahani. (2019), Hamouda (2020), Alahmadi, and Alraddadi (2020) proved the effectiveness of virtual classes for promoting interaction through the English language and enhancing communication skills. Learning styles and the technologies the students experienced is to evaluate if the learning style and the technologies complement each other (Syahrin & Salih, 2020).


**Methodology**

The purpose of the research is to determine the correspondence of teaching techniques to the model. The study assesses the effectiveness of EFL teachers in digital teaching due to the COVID-19, and explores possible solutions and recommendations for future online learning.

**Method of data collection**

The researchers used a descriptive statistical method to test the validation of the study. The researchers created a five-point scale of assessment for each component, based on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarria et al., 2000).

**Participants**

The study was conducted at the undergraduate level for English language learners in Faculty of Philology, V.O. Sukhomlynskyi National University of Mykolaiv, Ukraine. The researchers conducted the study in the first semester of 2020. There were 88 participants in this study: Twenty-five EFL teachers and 63 undergraduate students in the Department of German Philology and Translation, and the Department of English Language and Literature. Most of the teachers had previous experience with digital teaching and did not have any experience with SIOP.

**Research Instruments**

For conducting the study, the researchers created an online survey for teachers. The survey consists of three parts (Lesson Preparation, Instruction, Assessment) and 30 items.

Seeking authenticity in the naturalistic paradigm, the authors developed a code for each item to use in other informal or participant observations to allow the construction of data displays.

Teachers had to mark only one answer according to what they think best matches a digital teaching situation (e-learning): 0 = Not observed; 1 = Poorly observed; 2 = Somewhat observed; 3 = Observed; 4 = Highly observed.
Table 1. The survey with the codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>CODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You explain to students the content objectives of the lesson and what they will be learning.</td>
<td>CONT OBJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>You give instructions to students about the objectives of the lesson, and they will be learning in terms of grammar.</td>
<td>LANG OBJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You use content appropriate to the age of students, English level, and educational background.</td>
<td>CONTENT-AGE/EDU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You use digital supplementary materials regularly (besides the book) to make lessons clearly and meaningful.</td>
<td>SUPP MAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>You adapt the content of your lesson to all English levels of your students’ proficiency.</td>
<td>ADAPT CONT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You use meaningful activities that integrate the lesson concepts with the language practice for reading, writing, listening, and speaking.</td>
<td>MEAN ACT - RWLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>You typically relate the concepts of the lesson to background and experiences of your students.</td>
<td>CONC-STU EXP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>You make explicit/obvious connections between past lessons and new concepts.</td>
<td>PASTL+NEWCON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>You emphasize the vocabulary from the lesson by introducing it, highlighting it for your students.</td>
<td>KEY VOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>You use speech appropriately for the English language proficiency level of your students.</td>
<td>SPEECH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>You explain all academic tasks clearly.</td>
<td>CLEAR EXPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>You use various digital methods and techniques to make content concepts clear (e.g., modeling, visuals, etc.).</td>
<td>TECHN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>You provide a lot of opportunities for your students to use several digital strategies to learn English.</td>
<td>SUPPORT-STRAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>You use scaffolding techniques (detailed explanations, slow speech rate, use of visuals, etc.) during all the lesson to help and support your students understand the content.</td>
<td>SCAFFOLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>You use many types of questions, but also those that promote higher-order thinking skills to help your students understand the lesson.</td>
<td>QUESTIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>You have interactions and discussions with all your students to understand the lesson in virtual rooms better.</td>
<td>INTERACT/DISCUSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>You let your students work flexibly to support their learning of the language and content objectives.</td>
<td>GROUP—LANG/CONT OBJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>You wait enough time for your students to respond when they ask you a question during the lesson.</td>
<td>WAIT TIME STU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>You give your student several opportunities to clarify essential concepts in their first language (Russian or Ukrainian) needed with the help of a helper.</td>
<td>L1 CLARIFY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>You give your students the chance to use Internet resources to practice, using new content knowledge.</td>
<td>NEWCONT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>You give your students activities to apply the content and language knowledge.</td>
<td>APPLY LANG/CONT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>You use activities that integrate all language skills: reading, writing, listening, &amp; speaking.</td>
<td>LANG SKILL - RWLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>The content objectives you use/teach well-supported by the lesson.</td>
<td>LESSON=CONT OBJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>All students are engaged in the lesson, approximately 90%-100%</td>
<td>STU ENGAGED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>The speed of the lesson is appropriate to your students’ ability level.</td>
<td>LESSON-PACING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>You provide a comprehensible (detailed) review of the main vocabulary of the lesson.</td>
<td>REVIEW KEY VOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>You provide an understandable (detailed) review of the content concepts.</td>
<td>REVIEW KEY CONT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>You typically give feedback to all your student’s response.</td>
<td>FEEDBACKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>You assess your students’ comprehension and learning of all lesson objectives</td>
<td>SCOMP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in class in *e-learning*.

| 30 | You evaluate student comprehension and learning of all lesson objectives throughout the lesson. | ASSESS COMP/LEARN |

Student Survey was parallel and identical in their criterion to teacher survey. Students had to evaluate their teachers in using instructions, methods, *assessment*, and lesson preparation. The researchers checked survey for validity and reliability fulfillment.

**Procedures**

*Table 2. Time table of the research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of research</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 2020</td>
<td>Stage 1. Collecting the data of the survey</td>
<td>Teachers (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 4, 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 6, 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9, 2020</td>
<td>Stage 2. Collecting the data of the survey</td>
<td>Group 1 (18 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 10, 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 2 (15 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 11, 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 3 (16 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12, 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 4 (14 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 16-21, 2020</td>
<td>Stage 3. Analysis of students survey</td>
<td>Researchers, observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1-11, 2020</td>
<td>Stage 5. Analysis of correlation between teachers observations in the SIOP versus perceptions of students on the survey</td>
<td>Researchers, observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 14-23, 2020</td>
<td>Stage 6. Analysis of the scores of teacher and student survey and SIOP observation rating scale</td>
<td>Researchers, observers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results**

A calculation between the teachers’ and students’ mean scores are conducted to establish the dependency between the SIOP components. A mean score was found per each code (SIOP component) from both the teacher and students.

The interpretation given in the table below analyzes how teachers or students perceive that teachers are not meeting enough sheltered techniques in digital learning. The following table demonstrates the mean scores on each SIOP component (item) gained on the scale and the survey.

*Table 3. The mean scores between the SIOP rating scale (teacher observations) and the mean scores of the SIOP survey (student observation)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIOP components (coded)</th>
<th>Teachers’ Mean on the SIOP Rating Scale</th>
<th>Students’ Mean on the SIOP Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONT OBJ</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANG OBJ</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCONT-AGE/EDU</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>Observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPP MAT</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>Somewhat observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data shows a mismatch between the assessment of students and teachers. Students evaluated less the teachers in SCONT-AGE/EDU, CONC-STU EXP, KEY VOC, SPEECH, CLEAR EXP, QUESTIONS, WAIT TIME STU, LANG SKILL (RWLS), REVIEW KEY CONT, and FEEDBACK. Only in LANG OBJ, SUPP MAT, ADAPT CONT, APPLY LANG/CONT, and SCOMP the students evaluated their teacher higher. The SIOP observations mean scores show that the teachers don’t apply much this component. Students under-evaluated their teachers in the mentioned categories. The graph reflects similar assumptions of means comparing SIOP results of students and teachers.

Figure 1. Correlation between Teachers Observations in the SIOP versus Perceptions of Students on the Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Teacher Observations</th>
<th>Student Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADAPT CONT</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>Somewhat observed</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAN ACT(RWLS)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONC-STU EXP</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASTL+NEWCON</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEY VOC</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEECH</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEAR EXPL</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TECHN</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT-STRAT</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAFFOLD</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUESTIONS</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERACT/DISCUSS</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUP→LANG/CONT OBJ</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Somewhat Observed</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAIT TIME STU</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1 CLARIFY</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWCONT</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Somewhat observed</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPLY LANG/CONT</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANG SKILL(RWLS)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Highly observed</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESSON=CONT OBJ</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STU ENGAGED</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESSON-PACING</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW KEY VOC</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW KEY CONT</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEEDBACK</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOMP</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASSESS COMP/LEARN</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total mean scores: 93.62/3.07 for teachers and 94.05/3.06 for students.
The data reflects the correlated outcomes where the highest discrepancies were. There were significant gaps among most of the scores.

**Figure 2.** Combined Mean Scores of Teacher and Student Survey and SIOP Observation Rating Scale

The results show a mismatch between rate of students in components such as SCONT-AGE/EDU, SUPP MAT, L1 CLARIFY, ADAPT CONT, CONC-STU EXP, PASTL+NEWCON, KEY VOC. Additionally, students assess less the teachers in clear explanations, grouping configurations, and time, students need to answer, clarification with native language, language tasks, and revising vocabulary. Only in the rate of SCAFFOLD, the students assessed the same as teachers did. The SIOP mean scores of observations demonstrate that the teachers apply some components. The mean score of teachers is 90.01 versus the students’ mean score of students – 60.32. The research data revealed the most arguable SIOP categories: SCONT-AGE/EDU, CONC-STU EXP, KEY VOC, SPEECH, CLEAR EXP, QUESTIONS, WAIT TIME STU, LANG SKILL (RWLS), REVIEW KEY CONT, and FEEDBACK. The constructs that got the lowest marks (somewhat observed) were: TECHN, NEW CONT, SUPP MAT, ADAPT CONT.

The following SIOP categories were the most arguable: supplementary materials; essential vocabulary emphasized; concepts explicitly linked to background experiences of students; meaningful activities. The following constructs got the lowest marks (observing the graphs): usage of various techniques; group configurations support language and content objectives of the lesson; sample opportunities to use strategies; materials for students to practice using new content knowledge; activities to apply language and content knowledge. It is crucial to mention that teachers need to look at those components to develop appropriate strategies.

The data also demonstrated that 95.6% of teachers use Moodle. Students prefer face-to-face interaction in virtual classrooms (87% of students) than working in Moodle. For this reason, Ukrainian IFL teachers integrated various applications such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meet. The following data describes the online learning system in teaching English in Ukraine: 61.2% of teachers use Google Classroom, 23.5% – Zoom, 15.3% – Google Meet.

**Discussion**

The study aimed to determine the effectiveness of SIOP instructional strategies in the digital teaching of EFL students. The responses of the survey indicate the positive attitude of students and teachers towards SIOP.
The research and findings indicate that when teachers use the components of the SIOP Model in their classroom, they are more likely to help their students gain and retain information and vocabulary. As evidenced by the survey, many teachers apply the parts of the SIOP Model in their teaching. They explore the SIOP tools for lesson planning, self-monitoring, and reflection. This practice helps them to integrate language objectives into content lessons and the content into digital learning. Teachers admit they can be flexible to create their scaffolding instructions to foster interaction and communication.

This finding is consistent with that of Andriivna et al., 2020, who emphasizes that differentiated multilevel training provides cognitive motivation of students and stimulation of their mental activity; total assimilation of the primary component of the content of education; ongoing monitoring of learning material; introductory or final control for each unit of mastering educational material.

The teachers reported that the assessment of teaching effectiveness is crucial to the professional development of teachers. Using the rating scale of SIOP, teachers can identify areas for their professional growth and select one or two categories of SIOP as a professional goal for improvement. Well-designed lessons allow EFL students to practice the language and apply the information they study.

Thus, the findings of this research corroborate and support the findings of previous studies conducted by Echevarria et al., 2008, Short et al., 2013, in terms of using the rating scale to evaluate lessons, determining the correspondence of their teaching techniques to the SIOP Model.

The findings proved that SIOP is a ready-made designed program for teachers. The model helps teachers to organize well-thought-out lessons based on digital content and provides reflective practice for the teaching process.

These findings agree with those of Cisco et al., 2012, Khong (2014), and Song (2016), who noted that the model takes into account the unique needs of students in language development. EFL teachers make the content understandable, using modeling, tutoring, multicultural content, and native language.

The study showed that learners are motivated to use digital technologies in learning. They benefit from face-to-face interaction in Zoom and Google Classroom. This finding supports evidence from previous research conducted by Alahmadi et al., 2020, that virtual classroom has excellent potential in the EFL learners to overcome some learning obstacles.

The findings suggest that implementation of the SIOP model into digital teaching EFL students can facilitate professional development of teacher and meet the needs of students in acquiring the content of each lesson.

The study presents some recommendations:
- Exploring the goals of SIOP, teachers can distinguish effective strategies for EFL digital learning to support higher-level thinking that includes problem-solving and self-monitoring.
Instructional strategies involve the students in scaffolding techniques that provide the support for them to move to the next level;

- Teachers can get experience in implementing SIOP. They explore student level of understanding through student engagement level, types of questions they ask, and their behavior. The visual clues help learners to understand the tasks. The analysis of individual student performance reveals the difficulties caused by the teacher;

- Changes in teaching do not take place easily and quickly. Teachers should follow achievement of their students’ and understand their needs. This issue demands a significant amount of comprehensible input as well as curriculum modification. The process of practicing and perfecting SIOP is a matter of time and collaboration.
- The necessary steps are needed to facilitate SIOP training for teachers.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of SIOP strategies in digital EFL teaching in the Ukrainian university context during COVID-19.

The study proved that implementation of the SIOP model could bring appropriate and meaningful resources for high school teachers as a tool for them to grow professionally in COVID pandemic time. The study showed promising significance for applying the SIOP-based instructional framework as means for digital teaching.

The results justified that teachers need to establish active online communication with their students to find their needs, abilities, and expectations. EFL teachers can improve their professional skills by adopting the specific components of SIOP and mastering their teaching strategies in digital learning.

As the result of this study, the research should continue to monitor the progress of students and the professional development of teachers in implementing SIOP strategies in digital teaching EFL students.

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E-Assessment at Jordan’s Universities in the Time of the COVID-19 Lockdown: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract
This study aims to delineate the observations of instructors at Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) in Jordan with regards to online assessment of their students in the time of the Coronavirus lockdown. Specifically, the study attempts to find out whether universities are prepared for online assessment during the lockdown and to probe feasible solutions to the challenges that hinder proper assessment in a virtual learning environment (VLE). As the challenges are determined, the study suggests a number of practical solutions. Data on faculty’s observations were obtained by means of an online survey. Eighty-three faculty members participated in this study. The findings showed that universities swiftly shifted to e-classes during the lockdown but that they were not adequately primed for an appropriate assessment in an online environment. The findings further showed that instructors were skeptical about the efficiency of remote assessment of their students. In addition, faculty members believed there was still a long way to go with regards to (1) the unavailability of reliable software to preclude academic dishonesty; (2) some faculty being unable to assess their students in VLE as it was their first experience; and (3) formative assessment not having been given enough attention. It is concluded that universities should have an exigency strategy for any sudden future lockdowns. This strategy includes, among other things, intensive e-teaching and e-testing training for faculty, high-tech invigilation and plagiarism software, reliable e-learning platforms with sufficient Internet bandwidth, setting up an e-assessment council at the university level.

Keywords: e-assessment, remote assessment, e-test, COVID-19, Jordan, Princess Sumaya University for Technology, challenges and solutions

Introduction

It goes without saying that the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has taken the world by surprise and has brought life in some parts of the world to a complete full-stop. Ever since the first confirmed Coronavirus case in China in December 2019, the virus has been steadily spreading globally, disrupting life in many ways and causing consternation and confusion. According to the World Health Organization, the virus has so far claimed more than a million lives, and it is unlikely to see this virus go anytime in the near future.

In Jordan, like anywhere else in the world, the government tried to respond as swiftly and sagaciously as possible, and so a number of precautionary measures were put in place. The most obvious countermeasure to stifle or at least to limit the spread of the virus, which was adopted almost everywhere in the world, was lockdown. This lockdown was often partial, but sometimes a complete lockdown had to be enforced in some cases in some parts of Jordan. Most government institutions and businesses in the country were forced to close temporarily. Educational institutions too had to close, and learning had to be resumed online, whereby teachers and students worked from home; they met online via whatever technological amenities the institutions or the individuals could afford. This way, Jordan made sure that education was not going to be interrupted due to the sudden lockdown. A number of online educational portals were activated by the Ministry of Education. All educational institutions nation-wide, schools and universities, were urged to take advantage of any e-platforms they had access to. Among the various platforms that were launched and started to become familiar names amongst students and teachers were Blackboard, ZOOM, Classera, Moodle, and eFront. Javaid et al. (2020) are proponents of digital platforms for online learning, and they posit that these platforms are going to be enormously beneficial in supporting virtual learning environments (VLEs) and assuaging the negative impact of the pandemic on the educational process.

Because of the lockdown, the Ministry of Higher Education in Jordan set out guidelines for universities with regards to the preparations for testing and assessment. Universities have adopted a number of assessment policies, and with an eye on the nature of the courses and topics, they used online assessment as a replacement for face-to-face (FTF) assessments. In order to make sure that faculty members, as well as students, were prepared for a smooth and trouble-free transition to e-learning, universities nation-wide held online workshops for faculty and workshops for the students geared towards acquainting them with the fundamentals of virtual teaching/learning. Such workshops were deemed indispensable as it was rightly assumed that the vast majority of faculty and students had never had a virtual learning experience before.

Owing to the abrupt and unprecedented shift to virtual learning, the Ministry of Higher Education strove to recommend a number of assessment methods that were propitious to the new-fangled nature of learning/teaching that was taking place in the country. Among those recommendations were the following: (a) formative assessment throughout the whole duration of the e-learning; (b) final online testing; (c) periodic quizzes; (d) open-book exams; (e) viva voces via the various platforms of e-learning; (f) presentations; (g) student active involvement in the discussions in their online sessions; (h) homework; and (i) various projects. In compliance with directives from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Higher Education, PSUT – from which the present study elicited responses from 83 participants – made it mandatory that all
formative and summative evaluation be carried out remotely to avert physical contact and so to protect the lives of faculty and students.

On various occasions, the Ministry of Higher Education issued resolutions aimed at tackling the challenges of e-learning; among those challenges was the procedure for the final exams. Among those mechanisms was to allow students to drop out of a course or any number of courses. This unique legislation meant students were not coerced into e-tests against their will. No academic penalty was entailed upon withdrawal. This way, students had enough time to reflect on their academic situation so as to make the proper decision in due course. A second recommendation was to allocate more grades to the formative assessment and fewer grades to the final exams. This way, the most evaluation would be based on coursework such as assignments and active student involvement in class. Another recommendation was to analyze students’ grades for previous semesters electronically and to create a matrix that would calculate the students’ GPAs and produce automated grades for this ‘extraordinary’ period, at least in the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020, when FTF tuition was first interrupted and replaced by e-learning. Yet another policy was to alter the grading systems from the ‘percent system’ to the ‘pass/fail’ policy in order that the results of the ‘lockdown’ courses would have no influence on the students’ GPAs.

The present study is significantly important because it focuses on the challenges that universities are facing as they strive to prepare and implement the two types of assessment: formative and summative. Moreover, the study suggests down-to-earth solutions to sort out the challenges and to make sure that e-assessments are implemented effectively. To achieve this, the current study delineates the perceptions of faculty members at PSUT regarding whether universities are prepared for e-assessment in the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, the study investigates signs of tangible challenges that deter proper employment of formative and summative assessment, and also provides tentative but realistic solutions that may help make the VLE learning experience a more agreeable one. With such goals, the current study attempted to address two research questions:

RQ1: According to faculty member perceptions, to what extent are IHE prepared for e-assessment?
RQ2: According to faculty members, what are the most feasible solutions to challenges to e-assessment?

Literature Review

Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) exerted every effort to ensure that classes would go on unimpeded during the lockdown, and the administrators and faculty worked indefatigably to cope with this exceptional period. However, they were faced with a tough challenge that at times seemed insurmountable: how to properly assess students online. Kearns (2012) posited that “an area of focus that deserves special attention is the assessment of student learning” (p. 198). Vlachou (2018) stated that “classroom assessment is a process in which teachers and students gather evidence of student learning through several assessment practices” (p. 2). Hopfenbeck (2018) pointed out that certain validity and reliability procedures must be implemented in the classroom to ensure that student assessment is properly achieved but that in
VLEs assessment poses genuine concerns. These concerns are innumerable. For example, in the absence of direct invigilation, students may be tempted to cheat in a way or another.

Ayachi-Ghanouchi, Cheniti-Belcadhi, and Lewis (2013) described two main types of assessment: “formative assessment and summative” assessment (p. 4). Formative assessment aims to measure students’ ongoing performance throughout an entire course of study (Wuttke, Hamann, & Henke, 2015). Formative assessment helps provide nonstop feedback throughout the course (Lozano & Segura, 2016) since it reflects the ups and downs of a student’s performance, which enables the instructor to fine-tune his/her teaching and meet the student’s specific needs (Ertle, Rosenfeld, Presser, & Goldstein, 2016). Formative assessment can be conducted in any of a multiplicity of forms at any point after any chapter or portion of the course has been taught. It can be a quiz, an oral test, or drills. In fact, formative assessment is intended to (1) monitor goals in the short-run (Dolin, Black, Harlen, & Tiberghien, 2018); (2) check what has been learned and what has not (Heritage, 2007); (3) assist learners in ameliorating their overall learning experience (Alshenqeeti, 2020); (4) help educators diagnose their teaching style (Hasim & Barnard, 2018); (5) motivate learners to revise and learn (Leenknecht et al., 2020).

According to Faulconer, Griffith, & Frank (2019), summative assessment “occurs at the end of the learning process” (p. 1). It results “in a ranking, a mark, a grade or a degree” (Jones, 1996, p. 134). Exams provide teachers with feedback on the learner’s progress, and this “feedback is an essential component to the development of the recipient” (Sarkany & Deitte, 2017, p. 1). The role of summative assessment is to (1) give feedback in the long term (Chapman, Bynog, & Yocom, 2013); (2) assign grades to students that reflect to what extent they have achieved the intended objectives (Sangwin, 2017); (3) enable instructors to decide and enact penalties (Rolfe & McPherson, 1995); (4) allow educational institutions to make decisions regarding student academic status (Das et al., 2017).

Nowadays, because of the lockdown imposed in many parts of the world, institutions of higher education (IHE) have resorted to online learning as a temporary replacement of traditional FTF learning, which means assessment too will have to be conducted online. This will present unprecedented assessment challenges (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Owing to the lockdown, Burke and Dempsey (2020) posit that “distance learning is a poor substitute for real interaction,” and formative assessment is best carried out via direct observation in the classroom (p. 37). Unsurprisingly, most of the challenges facing e-assessment are due to the absence of direct FTF contact (Kearns, 2012). Following are some of the e-assessment issues cited in the literature: (1) educators being unable to thwart cheating or any other act of academic dishonesty (Xiong & Suen, 2018); (2) verification of the identity of the learner (Baró, Bernaus, Baneres, & Guerrero-Roldán, 2020); (3) reliability and validity of assessment in VLE (Akimov & Malin, 2020); (4) limitations on question types in VLE, since questions are mostly T/F, multiple-choice, match the items, and fill in the gaps (Marriott, 2009); (5) academic integrity issues (Kearns, 2012); (6) invigilation of online test sessions (Khan & Jawaid, 2020); (7) instructors’ e-teaching skills and time management (Hettiarachchi, Balasooriya, Mor, & Huertas, 2016).

The shift “towards institution-wide adoption of online assessment is attracting considerable attention among higher education institutions” (Mayhew, 2018, p. 1). However, Crisp et al. (2011) pointed out that although online tools and applications galore are available
these days, the efficacy of online assessment replacing direct classroom assessment is debatable. Xiong and Suen (2018) stated that it may be a tenable idea to shift to VLE teaching but to keep the traditional assessment as it is because “the need for a high-quality, trustworthy and effective assessment approach remains a major gap in the burgeoning open online learning world” (p. 257). Khan and Jawaid (2020) also indicated that the pandemic has compelled IHE to transform their teaching from traditional FTF classes to VLE, and that this change “will bring long-lasting effects on teaching and learning, assessment procedures and methods” (p. 3). According to Sabzwari (2020), FTF assessment ought to be maintained “to ensure integrity and security of assessment;” therefore, IHE need to “consider creating larger venues that allow physical distancing or plan a greater number of venues to achieve the same goal” (p. 3). Naturally then, faculty members have been confronting unprecedented challenges that reflect their preparedness or lack of it for this abrupt shift (Kebritchi, Lipschuetz, & Santiague, 2017; Phillip & Cain, 2015).

The studies so far on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing e-teaching and e-learning have been innumerable. However, little research has been carried out to ascertain to what extent IHE are prepared for e-assessment, or to ascertain how faculty members are coping with e-assessment. A rigorous study is badly needed to find out what may best be done to ensure that e-assessment is as reliable as the traditional FTF assessment. Hussein, Daoud, Alrabaiah, and Badawi (2020) firmly maintained that online learning was a great nonpharmaceutical way to curb the spread of the COVID-19 disease, but that “it has also put all those involved in the educational process under substantial pressure. This is particularly true because many instructors and learners who had never had adequate (if any) experience with online learning found themselves obliged to do so with minimal support” (p. 2).

Methods

Before setting about this piece of research, the researchers procured ethics approval from the research ethics panel in PSUT. The researchers then made an extensive review of relevant literature on the topic of e-learning and challenges to e-assessment. Enlightened by this review, they created a survey, using Google Forms, that aimed at eliciting faculty members’ perceptions of e-assessment. To make sure that no items on the e-survey would be skipped, whether intentionally or inadvertently, the researchers assigned the electronic feature ‘*Required’ to all items. This tactic eliminated all room for ‘missing data’ in the participants’ responses. The participants were reassured that their responses were going to be used for academic purposes only and that their data would remain confidential and anonymous. The elicited data came from 83 participants, who represented a simple random sample.

The data were then coded and analyzed using the “IBM SPSS Statistics 26”. A statistical summary of the results was reported using descriptive statistics, namely means (M) and percentages. Responses are presented in the form of a continuum of variables because the e-survey took the form of a Likert-type scale of five options that ranged from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), which had equal-appearing intervals. Analysis of the data gave the researchers insight into the most likely challenges that loomed over e-assessment at PSUT during the COVID-19 lockdown and shed light on a number of feasible solutions to those challenges.
Participants
Instructors from PSUT, Jordan, participated in this study. They represented a simple random sample because every member of the PSUT faculty population had an equal chance of providing data for the study. An e-survey was created, and its link was shared with the faculty members. 83 faculty responded. Data were collected from 2 to 30 Nov 2020. No demographic data about the participants was collected in this research inasmuch as the respondents were more or less comparable in that they all worked at the same university and also due to the fact that the main objective of this study was solely the collection of data about challenges facing e-assessment at universities in the time of the lockdown. PSUT gave the researchers the opportunity to contact its faculty for use as a sample, based on factors such as the willingness of faculty to take part in the study, the University having chosen to do e-assessment in exams, and because one of the researchers was already affiliated with PSUT, which gave him easy access to contact faculty there.

Instruments
The survey was key to this study, and to create it in such a way that it would serve its purpose, the researchers made an extensive review of relevant literature, and they also benefited from their own experience as an indispensable source of information. Taking advantage of Google Forms, the researchers created the e-survey. The e-survey was intended for the collection of data on the challenges facing e-assessment, both formative and summative, at IHE from the faculty’s perspectives. The e-survey was divided into two parts. The first part had twenty closed-response questions with a focus on these categories: (1) to what extent universities were prepared for e-assessment, (2) to what extent instructors were prepared for e-assessment, (3) challenges facing the validity and reliability of e-assessment, and (4) technology-related issues that presented challenges to e-assessment. The second part provided an unrestrictive question meant to elicit from faculty whatever further ideas on challenges not mentioned in the first part. The participants were required to carefully read the questions and then to click the option that accurately conveyed their views, on a five-level Likert-scale, with options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Validity and Reliability
A panel of English language experts reviewed the items of the survey for the purpose of assessing its validity. The panel gave their expert feedback, which helped improve the survey. Working independently of each other, the experts assessed the survey for clarity, correctness and relevance to the study. The researchers also carried out a pilot test on a number of instructors (n = 12). Those instructors did not participate in the e-survey. The pilot study was done for the purpose of achieving maximum face validity and to guarantee reliability. The aim was to ascertain if the survey was suitable in order to find out if any additional alterations were needed before sharing the survey with the faculty members. In light of findings from the pilot study, the final version of the survey was thus made. Making use of Cronbach’s alpha, the researchers were able to prove the internal reliability of the survey questions (.871). This value was proof of quite a high degree of reliability.

Findings
The researchers opted to group the findings into four groups: (a) to what extent universities were prepared for e-assessment, (b) to what extent instructors were prepared for e-
assessment, (c) challenges that are likely to mar the validity and reliability of e-assessment, and (d) technology-related issues that presented challenges to e-assessment. The first two categories answer RQ1, and the third and fourth categories answer RQ2. Despite a likely overlap amongst the categories sometimes, these categories are propitious for a convenient classification of the findings.

This study aimed first and foremost to find out the perceptions of faculty members with regards to how prepared or otherwise IHE were for e-assessment during the COVID-19 lockdown. Table one lists all the survey questions and shows Means, Standard Deviations, and percentages of faculty members’ perceptions elicited via the survey. Analysis of the survey responses shows that, for example, 64.7% of instructors believed that IHE were not prepared for e-assessment because the transition to e-learning was sudden and unexpected (M = 3.76). It was also found out that 78% of faculty believed that universities hesitated time and again in their endeavor to arrive at a decision with regards to shifting to e-learning (M = 4.0). Moreover, the majority of faculty (90.1%) agreed that PSUT ran a good number of training workshops aimed at acquainting faculty with e-learning (M = 4.4).

Table 1.
Means, Standard Deviation, and percentages of faculty members’ perceptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IHE were not prepared for e-assessment because the transition to e-learning was sudden and unexpected.</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.313</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>Universities hesitated time and again in their endeavor to arrive at a decision with regards to shifting to e-learning.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.160</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was impossible to prevent students from cheating.</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scores obtained by students in online tests were significantly higher than those they would have obtained in FTF tests on campus.</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online tests were propitious for cheating.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.196</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was a good idea to assign less marks to the final / summative assessment because it was believed that e-assessment, at least for the time being, was not highly reliable or accurate.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.123</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors were not sufficiently acquainted with e-assessment and its various features.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.172</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSUT ran a good number of training workshops aimed at acquainting faculty with e-learning.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>.820</td>
<td>90.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online testing took a very long time to create.</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.313</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither the instructors nor the academic programs were capable of assessing the students truthfully and justly.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.051</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moodle is a deficient platform that does not welcome all types of test questions.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.275</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some technical issues with the Moodle software hamper the e-assessment experience because of some features of Moodle like the limitations on testing options.  

The Moodle interface does not provide comfortable experience for students taking exams, and in general it is not user-friendly.  

There was a substantial amount of online traffic on PSUT’s server while final exams were being conducted, which slowed down student’s work on their exams and thus put a damper on the overall online assessment experience.  

There was a more pressing need for strict regulations and procedure in summative assessment than in formative assessment.  

The students’ achievement in e-testing was the same as their achievements in FTF testing.  

The e-assessment was grossly unfair to the students because some of them had powerful, reliable internet connection while others did not.  

At the outset of each electronic test, a great deal of time was wasted in pre-test procedures such as communicating with students, making sure they were ready, giving them instructions, repeating the instructions again and again in a way that confused the testing process.  

Sometimes Moodle behaved so erratically that I was muddled and unsure what to do. For example, in some tests it scored some students’ answers and overlooked others for no explicit reasons, or it sometimes left the test open for some students but closed for others even when test time was up.  

Most of the questions in the final exams were of the objective type like multiple-choice, gap-filling, T/F, and item matching.  

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Discussion

*Institutions of Higher Education and E-assessment*

Results of this study show that IHE were not quite prepared to carry out reliable e-assessment during this exceptional period. IHE did not have any straightforward, unequivocal mechanisms for e-assessment, and that is why universities hesitated and set forth various decisions, some of which were even conflicting, during the lockdown period. One of the participants mentioned in the open-ended question that the most irksome experience s/he had with e-learning was the incessant resolutions made by the university, which took faculty members ‘out of their depth.’ Those challenges were in line with the concerns posited by Hopfenbeck (2018), as mentioned earlier in the literature review. Oncu and Cakir (2011) state that any university that has delivered education exclusively in the traditional classrooms is
unlikely to have a clear vision for VLE learning, and this definitely casts doubt on the reliability, validity and security of its e-assessment.

**Faculty Members and E-assessment**

The majority of faculty members agreed that their university ran a good number of orientation workshops aimed at preparing them for teaching in a VLE. However, most of them acknowledged that those workshops aimed to prepare them to conduct online classes and to carry out summative assessment only, using Moodle, but did not focus on connecting the summative assessment with the intended course outcomes. This finding confirms the position of Burke and Dempsey (2020), cited earlier in the literature, who did not believe VLE assessment could replace physical classroom FTF interaction. Thuy (2019) states that, as the e-learning semester draws to a close, it is incumbent upon universities to assess students’ academic performance and to scrutinize their learning outcomes. In fact, it is insufficient for IHE to refer to the numbers of learners who completed their courses and to consider those statistics as evidence that e-assessment has been a successful experience. Xiong and Suen (2018) posit that e-assessment is posing new-fangled challenges to educators with regards to how this type of assessment is going to meet the different needs of the learners.

As already mentioned, training workshops focused exclusively on summative assessment, and formative assessment was largely relegated by the universities. Relegation of the importance of formative assessment in VLEs does not sit well with the literature on the inalienable importance of both types of assessment (e.g., Ayachi-Ghanouchi et al., 2013; Wuttke et al., 2015; Ertle et al., 2016). Heinrich (2006) indicates that in e-assessment faculty are excessively concerned with summative assessment only. Ullah, Xiao, Lilley, and Barker (2012) state that formative assessment is not used to calculate the ultimate grades for students. In stark contrast with Heinrich (2006) and Ullah et al. (2012), Thuy (2019) points out that the technology used at Hanoi Open University is auspicious for developing formative evaluation only inasmuch as the online system used there is not conducive to summative tests. Interestingly, Thuy (2019) affirms that Hanoi Open University is just beginning to take advantage of assisted technologies for e-assessment and that it is going to take some time before faculty are capable of using this technology to carry out summative e-assessment successfully.

Many of the participants pointed out that not all professors had enough experience in creating tests for e-assessment notwithstanding the sheer bulk of training during the lockdown. A respondent explained that the IT department at the University was sloppy in spreading know-how about using Moodle for e-assessment. However, another participant believed that the amount of training s/he had received on e-assessment was more than enough.

**Assessment Methods and Challenges Confronting Validity and Reliability**

Although the University made it clear to faculty that the final exam was not going to be the ‘be-all-and-end-all’ of assessment during the lockdown, most faculty members believed that they were unable to ‘e-assess’ the students correctly and equitably. A number of shortcomings made them so believe. For instance, most faculty believed that the vast majority of students were able to cheat in the final exams in defiance of all the e-invigilation measures, and that many students acquired scores that they did not deserve. Tereseviciene, Trepule, Dauksiene, Tamoliune, and Costa (2020) assert that IHE should implement various techniques, such as
software to verify student identity, to guarantee the validity and reliability of e-assessment. For the time being, cheating was believed to be rife and unstoppable. At present, if there develops a rift between students’ GPAs and their actual abilities, the credibility of IHE graduates in the marketplace is going to be adversely impacted. As mentioned by Heritage (2007), proper assessment is an indispensable tool to measure what has been learned and what has not.

The researchers analyzed the students’ grades in their courses they had taken in the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020, which was the first semester during which lockdown started, and e-learning was launched and compared them with their grades in previous semesters prior to the lockdown. It was evident from this analysis that the grades of the latest ‘lockdown’ semester were blatantly incongruent with the students’ grades in all previous semesters. The later scores were significantly higher. Although this comparison is not necessarily flawless, it can be used as an indication that e-assessment may not be reliable. Moreover, in some e-tests where students were given the opportunity to attempt question tests two times, the second attempt yielded very different results from the first. This could mean students may have cheated in a way or another.

To prevent academic dishonesty like cheating and the need to verify student identity are genuine concerns that started to appear in VLE during the pandemic. The literature shows that amongst the most compelling challenges facing e-assessment is that there is ample room for plagiarism and other dishonest behavior from some students during the testing (Mellar, Peytcheva-Forsyth, Kocdar, Karadeniz, & Yovkova, 2018). Because of the sudden and quick shift to virtual learning during the lockdown, most IHE made use of only uncomplicated security procedures instead of using intricate high-security software (Hernández, Ortiz, Andaverde, & Burlak, 2008). A number of studies indicate that for summative assessment, stricter measures are needed than for formative assessment for obvious reasons (Andreatta & Gruppen, 2009). Typically, formative assessment is carried out without it being invigilated, since it basically helps in supplementing education (Xiong & Suen, 2018). However, to ensure the validity of e-assessment, there must be a reliable form of invigilation (Xiong & Suen, 2018). As for plagiarism, at PSUT teachers did not use any plagiarism detection software in the case of assignments as most deemed it unnecessary to do so, and probably also because such software, such as iThenticate, is considered by many to be costly to use.

Most assessment tests (84.4% agreed) took up the form of objective questions like MCQ, gap filling, T/F, and matching items. Such kinds of questions are “generally easier to grade both by automatic and human means” (Hettiarach-chi et al., 2016, p. 50). Professors can benefit from the automatic grading feature, and so they can do away with test questions that need to be marked manually. But it is worth mentioning that this kind of question is usually appropriate for assessing knowledge at the lower-order level of Bloom’s taxonomy rather than at the higher-order level (Hettiarachchi et al., 2016; Khan & Jawaid, 2020). Much of the literature posits that it is not possible to cater for cognitive skills at the higher-order level (such as analysis, problem-solving, creative thinking, etc.) by relying on MCQs (Bloor, Sampson, & Gekara, 2014) or “questions which only need a simple yes or no” (Bearn, Chadwick, Jack, & Sackville, 2002, p. 163).

Technology-Related Challenges
As for technological challenges, many studies point out that the use of technology in education cannot be problem-free (Burgess & Sieverts, Op. Cit; Burke and Dempsey, Op. Cit; Brown & Dinecola, 2020; Al Meajel & Sharadgah, 2018). This study describes a number of challenges in the discussion. In the survey, some respondents agreed but others disagreed about whether these challenges really are an issue. For instance, some participants agreed that conducting e-assessment tests is a painstaking process. Dean (2003) posits that this type of “assessment development involves a multi-step exacting and often frustrating procedure” (p. 896). By contrast, Yao (2020) argues that technology-based assessment, in contrast with traditional assessment, “is less time-consuming, easier and quicker to be administered and scored” (p. 124). Some participants remarked on these technical restrictions stating that giving exams online is a headache because students keep complaining about everything. For example, some students’ internet connection isn’t powerful enough. Some students use their phones to do the test, but it seems Moodle works better on computers than on phones. We cannot force all students to buy laptops, for example.

One serious issue in Moodle is that its automatic grading feature is not always identical to grading by a person. For one thing, such platforms as Moodle lack human flexibility, which can sometimes be indispensable in giving students marks for unexpected answers, whereas Moodle would rule them out right away as wrong answers. On various occasions, professors noted that a student might provide the correct answer in an open-ended question, but Moodle crosses it out completely because of a couple of misspellings. In a case like this, human intervention is of paramount importance for the assessment accurately reflect the students’ performance.

Besides all these challenges mentioned so far, e-assessment did not give equal opportunity to all students with regards to internet connection, internet reliability and other technological considerations. In the present study, the majority of participants agreed that the students’ achievement in e-tests was very different from what they were likely to have done in pre-lockdown classroom assessment. Azzahra (2020) discovered that this abrupt halt to FTF education and the shift to e-learning posed intractable problems for students who lived in rural areas or in impoverished slums. Azzahra also stated that the pandemic triggered in universities assessment challenges caused by the disparity amongst students in their access to technological amenities. Because the shift to e-learning was unanticipated, some students were ‘out of their depth’ as they struggled to cope with the inexorable technical demands of the new-fangled learning experience (Longhurst et al., 2020). One of the participants pointed out that Zoom sessions and Moodle assessments posed like an insurmountable citadel at the outset of the e-learning experience. The researchers assume that this initial conundrum was a genuine concern at first owing to the busy online traffic as a number of classes were taking place at the same time.

**Solutions**

This article has brought to the forefront a good number of e-assessment challenges brought about by the lockdown and the shift to e-learning. The issues presented here will clearly become even more of a challenge in the coming semester unless the lockdown is continued, but since it is next to impossible for now to tell how long more the lockdown will linger on, it should be assumed that the challenges to e-assessment presented in this paper are likely to continue to pose a case of uncertainty. Because of this, it is imperative at the moment to take action in order...
to make sure that universities are capable of conducting an appropriate online assessment (see Table two).

Table 2.  
**The challenges faced by instructors and recommended solutions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Solution(s)</th>
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| University readiness | • Universities should have an exigency strategy for any sudden future lockdowns, in order that unambiguous measures are ready in place for e-assessment.  
• It is essential for universities to devise whatever means are needed to make sure that the students’ achievement in online testing is the same as their achievement in FTF tests. |
| Readiness of educators (This challenge is interconnected with all the others because educators are at the receiving end of all challenges) | • It is extremely necessary for IHE to provide adequate constant training on making online tests for the two types of assessments: formative and summative.  
• It is essential to give instructors access to e-test invigilation software. |
| Cheating | • In order to prevent cheating, universities should use online invigilation software (such as Respondus Lockdown Browser) that locks down the testing environment within a learning management system during the exam (Khan & Jawaid, 2020).  
• IHE could utilize biometrics like face/voice recognition software (Tereseviciene et al., 2020).  
• IHE may make it mandatory to create one test for each one learner (Palloff & Pratt, 2008).  
• IHE may run the exams at real physical locations with invigilators but still maintain rules of social distancing set by WHO. |
| Plagiarism | • To foil plagiarism, the iThenticate software should be made more accessible to faculty. Currently, using it can be costly.  
• It may also be a good idea to give students free access to iThenticate. This way the software is not intended to be a “plagiarism detection tool” for punishing dishonest academic behavior but as a “learning tool used to support learners” (Mahabeer & Pirtheepal, 2019, p. 3). |
| Summative assessment needs stricter practices than formative assessment. | • Measures must be taken to ensure similarly accurate reliability and validity for the two types of assessment, formative and summative, since they are essential to meet educational goals and objectives.  
• All aforementioned solutions that the researchers have put forward for the purpose of foiling academic dishonesty have to be implemented for both kinds of assessment. |
| Technical issues with the auto grading system | • The auto grading system is not immaculate. Final grades should be reviewed by a human examiner prior to final approval. |
| IHE server stretched to its limits due to too much simultaneous online activity | • There should be a dedicated server for e-tests so that online activity has enough bandwidth.  
• E-tests may be distributed over numerous time slots to avoid running too many tests simultaneously. |
Most final exams made use of objective questions.

- IHE ought to conduct workshops on objective and subjective assessment. This may ensure a comprehensive assessment of both lower and higher-order cognitive skills.
- Universities ought to form an experienced e-assessment team in every academic program to monitor e-assessments and to aid faculty members.

Limitations and Future Research

Two limitations have been identified by the researchers, which can be directions for future research. One of these limitations is that this study merely investigates the observations of faculty members. Student perceptions are as yet to be investigated in future studies, and the findings can be scrutinized against the findings of the current study. Second, the sample was taken only from PSUT. However, because e-assessment was made obligatory in all universities in Jordan, it is still possible to generalize the findings of the present research. Moreover, because the COVID-19 lockdown limited the researchers’ movement, it was difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population. To augment the generalizability of the findings, future research may be applied to a greater extent that involves instructors from various IHE. Moreover, there may still be plenty of room for further recommendations and suggestions with regards to the procedures and methods of e-assessment. More solutions are needed for the challenges that were pinpointed in the current study.

Conclusion

There is no shadow of a doubt that the academic year 2019-2020 has witnessed unique challenges to education because of the sudden shift from traditional classroom teaching to online teaching. This research was mainly concerned with investigating and assessing challenges that emerged as the assessment of student performance shifted from the traditional classroom to VLEs. The degree of incertitude involved in e-learning, both for learners and educators, has been alarming. It is perfectly clear that students did not all have equal opportunities in Internet connection and several related technological issues. This may have adversely impacted the validity and reliability of e-assessments. Universities were not prepared for this unforeseen change and thus were in many ways incapable of carrying out the assessment process appropriately. One of the prominent challenges was that, although faculty were able to make e-assessment tasks, there was no way they could completely bank on the performance of the students, since learners did not interact with their e-classes at all times as their professors were expecting from them. As a result, it is now of paramount importance to get the students to accept and be ready for a new-fangled realm of assessment in a VLE, and to produce a new generation of students who are capable of identifying what their learning needs are and what commitments they are liable to.

The Coronavirus has interrupted the commonly practiced ways of education, resulting in a critical need for applying alternative approaches to assessment. Because of this, universities need to learn from mistakes committed so far during the lockdown semesters; they should revisit their existing assessment methods and tailor them to the current, exceptional learning scenario. It is incumbent upon IHE to examine the merits and demerits of their initial experience in online assessment and to try to use this knowledge as a launching pad for improvement. E-assessment
requires IHE to develop a system that hinges on scrupulous planning to make sure that assessment in a VLE is truthful, valid and reliable.

In summation, the current e-assessment systems do not prepare universities or faculty members for valid and reliable assessment of the students. In order for e-assessment to be trustworthy and reliable, the challenges discussed in the present study should be tackled.

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**E-Assessment at Jordan’s Universities in the Time of the COVID-19**

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EFL Students Affective Attitudes towards Distance E-Learning Based on Moodle Platform during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Perspectives from Dr. MoulayTahar University of Saida, Algeria

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Abstract
The practice of the online learning system in Algeria is novel. However, with the spread of Covid 19, Algerian universities have been compelled to undertake remote and digital teaching. The University of Dr. MoulayTahar in Saida has arbitrarily hastened in implementing E-learning as an alternative teaching measure to maintain both positive educational outcomes and keep students safe and healthy. This research purports to examine how the University of Dr. MoulayTahar in Saida has used Moodle platform to facilitate the teaching process during the Covid 19. This paper, therefore, stresses the issues of distance e-learning that challenge both teachers and students alike. The researchers attempt to answer the following question: What are the affective attitudes of EFL students towards distance learning assisted with Moodle Platform during the Coronavirus? To supply an adequate answer to the raised question, the researchers have selected a sample of 157 participants. The researchers collected data through a questionnaire and delivered copies to the participants. The findings revealed that both the teachers and the learners were not well prepared for an online learning experience. That there are more disadvantages than advantages. The results of the research conveyed that the technical skills, the teachers’ lack of experience as well as the social situation of the students have made E-learning a complex process. The analysis also revealed that Master students have negative attitudes towards e-learning, and they would prefer face-to-face interaction in the classroom and handouts more than virtual learning.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, distance – learning, Dr. MoulayTahar University, e-learning, Moodle platform, EFL students’ attitudes

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Introduction

The tremendous and rapid changes in communication and technology in the digital age, have universally introduced the notion of distance education, rendering its practices a globally no returning point and thanks to ever its increasing accessibility, openness, and flexibility (Harasim, 2000). Algerian universities, akin to all the universities of the world influenced by school and university closure, have opted for distance education and coined the concept of e-learning – a digital platform called “Moodle”— alternative method to face the Pandemic of the Coronavirus. The idea of distance education is introduced to assist ambitious learners who cannot attend regular full-time classes to fulfill their educational aspirations. It is characterized by its adaptability, flexibility, and students’ learning-centeredness, therefore, improving students’ interactions via synchronous and asynchronous technological implements (Dhawan, 2020). However, during the last few months, the whole world educational system has dramatically been changed due to the Covid19, which resulted in unpremeditatedly abrupt and unprecedented schools and universities lockdown (Ali, 2020).

To face the phenomenon of being away from regular class courses, schools and universities have taken colossal and audacious measures to face this challenging turmoil. Teachers are then obliged to adapt their teaching methods opting for internet-based learning to preserve a certain amount of educational continuity and maintain life at schools and universities (Abou El-Seoud, Taj-Eddin, Seddiek, El-Khouly & Nossier 2014). Some developed countries are more or less technologically well-equipped and supported with well-trained staff to face the situation. However, many countries—in a state of unsuspected confusing haste—are obliged to adapt their teaching and learning in due time with insufficient training and mediocre preparation. Universities and institutions use multiple methods in online learning, such as remote and digital platforms. Algerian schools and universities have adopted various designs for distance education, like online lectures, distance drills and exercises, virtual tutorials, video conferences, group works, and assessments. The University of Dr. Moulay Tahar, Saida, like all Algeria universities, has shifted to the Moodle-based online learning Platform where teachers deliver curricula, courses, syllabi, lectures, lessons, and activities. Nevertheless, another issue has emerged among EFL students, especially in the ELT department.

There has been an echo of dissatisfaction with distant teaching assisted with Moodle Platform, which manifests itself in the attitudes of the target students and their resulting grades. Both teachers and students have detected many obstacles in the learning process when using these e-learning platforms. Students were often featured as being reluctant due to their decreased motivation. They delayed feedback cause of the unavailability of their teachers at moments of learning processes or simply because of their growing weariness and feeling of isolation (Yusuf & Banawi 2013). Besides, the researchers believe that these issues might be qualified as being more notable owing to the inexperienced teachers in using E-learning and due to the great haste during which they had to adapt their teaching style to the new circumstances.

Increasingly, while implementing this rapid virtualization process students, have crashed into many tedious challenges. Among these challenges are the enormous amounts of imbalanced online courses, which could undoubtedly jeopardize the health of the students, both physical and emotional, while spending successively long hours in front of a screen. Besides, even if these courses were available online, the educational institutions and universities have not considered...
that not all students are lucky enough to have computers, proper instruments, and access to the Internet. The lack of accessibility, the shortage of devices, and the increasing weariness caused by the lack of communication and interaction with teachers and peers would undoubtedly affect the students learning process and academic achievement. (Aboagye, Yawson, & Appiah, 2020). This current perplexing matter qualifies the present investigation to be more than primordial to undertake attempted measures to determine the soft spots of our digital weaknesses and mitigate the impact of immediate schooling closures. By so doing, experience and knowledge about teaching in the online environment are more than fundamental to positively strengthen this field of virtualization process learning and scaffold learning accordingly. The researchers attempt to answer the following questions: What are the effective attitudes of EFL students towards distance learning assisted with Moodle Platform during the Coronavirus? To what extent are students capable of assimilating the information used in online learning platforms?

**Literature Review**

In recent years, the treatment of distance or virtual learning throughout the universities of the world is generally marred with conceptual vagueness. It has become one of those fashionable and political catchwords often invoked by rare properly defined or submitted to scrutiny. While embraced as an inevitable learning strategy to increase interactivity and maintain education continuity, especially during the pandemic Coronavirus, distance learning has also become the focus of some criticism. Therefore, to attune the learners’ needs and reinforce their teaching and learning requirements, colossal investments have been launched on E-learning systems and devices (Popovici & Mironov, 2015). The difficulty of bringing the concept of E-learning under a single definitional umbrella has raised diverse controversy. E-learning, however, would simply mean the incorporation of all educational activities performed by a group of individuals working online or offline via networked or standalone computers and other electronic devices (Horton, 2006). Horton defines E-learning as “the use of information and computer technologies to create learning experiences” (p.1). Similarly, Rosenberg (2001) defines E-learning or electronic learning as a concept that uses Internet technologies to provide a wide array of solutions that enhances and transforms knowledge and performance. Teachers and lecturers use various electronic devices to meet the learners’ needs.

Subsequently, the integration of distance learning in Algerian universities dates back to 2006, when Algeria collaborates with “Thompson” and “Microsoft”, has launched an e-learning system. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) were introduced in higher education as a teaching tool to facilitate access to knowledge. Moreover, its courses purport to familiarize learners with basic concepts of communication and networking. It aimed at offering learners new ways of teaching and learning using distance teaching techniques. By so doing, teachers and lecturers have designed 4,000 courses and lectures to teach ICTs and communication skills (Guemide & Benachaiba, 2012). Guemide and Benachaiba strongly believe that ICTs refer to “forms of technologies that are used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information” (p.4). However, the e-learning strategy delivered by Djaweb, Guemide, and Benachaiba have noticed could not bring any advantage to the teachers aspiring to integrate ICTs and e-learning in their professional careers. They are devoid of any specific programs.

Being incredibly aware of the importance of E-learning enhancing knowledge and sharing information, and improving communication at a broader scale has compelled the
Algerian government to consider investing in the educational field. Accordingly, academic research has received considerable support from the Algerian government to increase lifelong learning opportunities and institutional autonomy while producing learning outcomes more attuned to the learners’ needs. However, despite the Algerian policy-makers’ deliberate focus on the significance of research and continuous learning, Algerian universities are still providing students with mediocre research skills (UNISCO, 2004). Two great reasons are identified: The first refers to the inaptitude of the trainers to handle the new technologies and adopt adequate pedagogies, whereas the second reason refers to the question of the readiness of the Algerian learners and their ability to adopt new learning strategies involving the use of computers and the Internet (Djoudi, 2007).

Under the pressure of the unusual condition engendered by the Pandemic Coronavirus, the Algerian policymakers, instructors, and educational teachers have made haste to advertise for this new strategy of distance learning. Many studies are conducted, and an avalanche of articles are written to shed light on this new concept of teaching by inflicting so many investigations on the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning during the Pandemic. Thus, Zermane and Aitouche(2020), for instance, have investigated the positive sides of engineering education and online courses during the Pandemic of Covid-19. For that objective, Zermane and Aitouche claimed that “in the last decade, over 13,000 agreements between industry and academic institutions have been signed, resulting in the training of 650,000 new workers” (p.165). Another research Souad Guessar, from the University of Bechar, has also investigated the impact of Covid-19 on the Algerian University. Guesser (2020) has put under scrutiny the effect of the pandemic on the conduct of lessons at the Algerian universities. Ghounane (2020), another researcher from the University of Dr. Moulay Tahar Saida, emphasizes the importance of Moodle and other social networks in distance learning.

Nevertheless, no paper, as mentioned above, has focused on the learners’ attitudes towards these electronic platforms. Just minor studies that focus on the learners’ feedback towards lecture assimilation and course interaction via distance learning are made. Nobody has anticipated the significant disruption in the educational system caused by a pandemic that weirdly baffled the teachers and the students alike. Mainly when both are unfamiliar with online learning platforms or are compelled to change rapidly from traditional learning to less technology-savvy online learning. Subsequently, the objective of this present paper is to highlight the reasons behind the delay or the reluctance of the universities in Algeria in embracing the e-learning experience despite the considerable efforts devoted by the Ministry of Higher Education to ensure its success. By so doing, experience and knowledge about teaching in the online environment are more than fundamental to positively strengthen this field of virtualization process leaning and scaffold learning accordingly. The present researchers attempt to facilitate the E-learning process by supplying information on the adequate and usefulness of specific strategies concerning course delivery, time completing tasks and projects, content course balance and student’s grievances needs, and preferences for teaching techniques.

Methods

To conduct this research, the researchers have deliberately focused on the analysis of students’ perception concerning online learning, their ability to digest and assimilate information, and the availability and use of E-learning platforms. Thus, the researchers have
devised an online survey composed of an elaborated questionnaire to gather information and collect feedback from respondent students concerned with the lockdown during the second semester. The respondents belong to two different program options of master studies (MA) in Literature and Civilization and didactics. Due to the unprecedented schooling, closing decisions were taken abruptly by the Algerian government by the mid of March 2019 to avoid the rapid virus proliferation among students. The researchers have delivered the survey to the learners via private e-mails and other social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The data were collected from 157 Master students at the ELT Department.

Participants

The study population was selected in a non-probabilistic way. It comprised 157 students from the department of English Language and Literature Faculty of Literature, Foreign Languages, and the Arts, University of Dr. Moulay Tahar, Saida, Algeria. The sample consists of 76 participants from first-year Master’s students in both streams: Literature and Civilization and Didactics, and 81 students from both streams Master second year. The majority of respondents are female, primarily up to 24 years old, from urban areas. However, 29 (18.47 %) of the students were male, and 128 female (81.52 %), 84 (53.50%) were from a rural area, 73 (46.19 %) from an urban area (Table one).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristic of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>81.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Master I</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master II</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>51.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20-22</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>82.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>04.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ResidentialEnvironment</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>53.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>46.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Procedures

The researchers have sent the questionnaire during the second semester of the academic year 2019–2020. The study participants were informed at the beginning of the questionnaire about the purpose and the objective of the survey. The Participants immediately responded positively to the participation in the study. The participants were allotted up to 20 minutes to answer the questionnaire. The researchers have focused on the learners’ attitudes towards e-learning sustained by Moodle platform. The questions were designed to get overall feedback from the learners’ behalf, their motivations and interest in distance learning in general, and Moodle platform used by Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida. See a sample of the questions in appendix A.

Research Instruments

The elaborated questionnaire involved items related to the two raised research questions. Accordingly, the researchers unhesitatingly incorporated the elements corresponding to the students’ attitudes towards integrating Internet tools in language learning activities. To put stress on the first question, for example, the researchers have included the following items: the
attitudes of the students vis a vis frequency of technical problems in virtualization learning. In this case, four elements related to the connection to the Moodle platform such as sound clarity, delayed message viewing, loss of signal or no signal at all, surrender with the schedule, balanced teaching style, assigning tasks to students compared to face-to-face learning, obstacles encountered in the E-learning process were strongly emphasized. To keep with the same pace concerning the students’ attitudes towards the use of E-learning supported by Moodle platform as an exclusive way to teaching, the researchers have used the following items: opinion towards online learning (5-point Likert scale, where 1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied), sentiment towards the students’ assimilation and information processing on the different online answers were recorded: (5-point Likert scale where 1= less complex, 5= more difficult).

Concerning the second research question, the researchers have included the following items: opinion towards the use of the Moodle platform, assimilation of information and online learning compared to face to face learning, processing information, the type of course that facilitates information processing, preference for interaction with teachers during courses/seminars, the difficulty regarding the presentation of the seminar projects online, opinion towards online learning, appreciation for future learning in higher education (online, face to face, or a combination of both). However, for purely descriptive purposes, the last part of the questionnaire was devoted to a series of socio-demographic variables such as gender, background, degree level, a field of study. The researchers have used the quantitative method to analyze the answers of the open items by classifying them into various categories which refer to the central conditions for successful online learning, especially teachers’ and students’ technical aptitudes, technical needs, teaching method, and online students/teachers’ interaction. The researchers have analyzed the data by using descriptive statistics based on percentages.

Results

It should be highlighted, however, in the information displayed in table one that the University of Dr. Moulay Tahar, teachers and students alike were not well prepared for the abrupt shift to online learning and teaching process despite the enormous efforts of the Algerian government. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Algeria alone. Kirkwood (2009) observed that many countries had spent vast sums of money on infrastructure and educational institutions; however, they still do not harvest the aspired results in developing learning communities. Nevertheless, despite their non-updated means and infrastructure shortage, lecturers attempted to find strategies and create suitable methods to adapt and meet the new challenges. Thus, most teachers have moved to virtual classrooms, all thanks to tools such as Moodle. There are some still struggling to get online. Indeed, the shift from a traditional knowledge transmission method to an online learning approach takes place in unexpected automatic way (Armellini & Jones, 2008; Swan, 2010). This shift however, does not occur automatically. It is discovered that some lectures may require great endeavors, training, and new teaching models (Burge & Polec, 2008).

Often both the respondent students and lecturers have complained about disruption in the Internet connectivity or trouble with WIFI due to the lack of the technical capacity to deliver optimal for online learning conditions. 71.33% of the respondents complained that they frequently and very frequently encountered technical problems with the platforms provided by
the university, without forgetting to mention the great panic of some teachers over the prospect of teaching students over the digital platforms (Iwai, 2020).

Strange enough, some lectures attempted to find other alternative means by using their e-mails and Facebook application; but this has generated stress among some students because there was no clear interaction between the students, and their teachers and teaching were merely transformed into purely sending and receiving messages with a few quick keystrokes 75.23% of students mentioned this aspect. Thus, most teachers let “the Trojan-like mouse” into their pedagogical activities without noticing that it will demand them to reconsider their use of hardware and software in their teaching process. What they are doing, Abrioux (2001) noticed, is just enhancing “old models of distance education by taking advantage of the e-learning environment” (p.1). This would suggest that we have failed in bringing about this shift in the teaching process.

The problem of accessibility to the Moodle platform is another burden to be added to this new shift of pedagogical approach. Both have complained of poor and connection troubles, especially when the number of students connected was high. Besides, students’ lack of adequate technologies for participating in online learning has overlapped with these issues (lack of laptops/computers, the mobile connection that partially offers access to resources provided by Moodle platform, especially those who live on the campus), 15.15% of respondents mentioned these aspects (See table two on appendix B).

The researchers also observed that most teachers lack the necessary technical skills to be able to either adapt their teaching style or to appropriately interact with students in the online environment assuring high standards of the teaching process. They have not realized yet that the pedagogy in online learning is quite different from face-to-face teaching. They are not well experienced in designing activities suitable for distance learning. 19.43% of respondents remarked the teachers’ incompetence in distance mediation education to accomplish their teaching task. Some would even resist using e-learning because they find it difficult (Collis & Moonen, 2008). When asked about their readiness about the use of e-learning, twenty-seven teachers of 38 in the English Department showed negative attitudes.

The research results also revealed that 35.2% of teachers were unwilling to improve their teaching skills in the online environment. Furthermore, 30% of students mentioned that the main issue was the teachers’ lack of adaptation to the online environment. The issue undoubtedly would negatively affect their ability to assimilate and understand the subjects taught during the courses (Table three).

Table 3. Frequency distribution of indicators related to students’ perception of the use of the E-learning platform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous experience</td>
<td>Previous use of the E-learning Moodle platform</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The usefulness of the E-learning platform</td>
<td>People who considered the usefulness of the Moodle Platform as a tool of collaborative learning.</td>
<td>36.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to use</td>
<td>Preference for the E-learning platform</td>
<td>42.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the results displayed in table three, it is noticed that just a minimal number of teachers and students alike have prerequisite knowledge of e-learning Moodle platform usage 5.2%. However, the majority have great intentions, preference and devotes for e-learning. The variance of choice for the Moodle e-learning platform is quite wide, 42.76%. For the teaching process to efficiently occur online, policymakers, educators, and students should reconsider the excellent intention and ambitions for distance learning appropriately. They should realize that in the domain of teaching and learning across different environments in the digital age there is always some work left over to perform. The last part of the survey in this research was devoted to the students’ ability to assimilate and learn in the online learning context (See Table four on Appendix C).

**Discussion**

Most students affirmed that the lack of interaction with their teachers had hurt their ability to assimilate and understand the subjects taught during the courses. Just a few limited numbers of teachers were fortunate enough to deliver their lectures through video conferences 2.2%. Although most of the correlated variants have demonstrated positive attitudes towards E-learning, the students’ opinions towards online courses appeared to be quite distinctive and divergent. 50.5% of the respondents found it difficult to process information in an online teaching environment compared to 20.5% who qualified it as being accessible in a regular classroom. The issue, in turn, undoubtedly impedes the students’ concentration and stimulus and affects their response. Moreover, students complained about the considerable amount of lectures displayed on the Moodle platform compared to the short lifespan to digest and process these courses. To make it more explicit, there is an abundance of information and a considerable quantity of knowledge on the platform concerning the time limits and the means students have to process them. Processing information would require the selection of suitable material, analysis, synthesis, and experiential insights processes which would demand transcending both time and space.

Consequently, learners became very distracted and might lose focus and even motivation. For better assimilation of information, it is advisable to balance the number of course and valuable tasks and to assign students a decent number of practical studies for them to avoid spending too many hours in front of the computer. Thus, this implies certain creative thinking in designing tasks that stimulate collaborative learning. Assimilation of information also requires technical skills to create and implement programs to improve interaction among students. Furthermore, teachers must provide feedback on the tasks solved by students quickly. It is of utmost importance for teachers to remain constant reminders to students, particularly those reluctant ones who keep procrastinating things assignments and, or deadlines. It is fundamentally crucial that teachers be available and open to students’ needs to increase their engagement and involvement in the educational process (which is lower in the online environment).

Thus, the respondents’ opinions regarding the use of the virtual environment for learning are divided. Some of them (27.8%) consider it an appropriate setting for learning. Some believe it is not very convenient (38.5%), and a third is undecided (33.7%). The same thing happens when it comes to satisfaction towards their online learning experience: 29.1% being delighted and satisfied by the E-learning process, 25.9% were undecided, and 45% were dissatisfied.
No doubt E-learning may have enormous advantages, but its downsides are ignored too, especially in Algeria. Information-processing depends on technology such as the Internet and computers, to which students may not have access. Often interruptions and other system errors may appear during courses. The variants in table one show that most of the students are from rural areas (53.50%), which means that the challenge of internet connectivity is even worse, particularly for girl students who live oncampus (81.52%). Even if Internet connectivity is partially solved, not all students have computers and smartphones to get connected. There is, therefore, a significant gap between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds. It is high time policymakers and educators thought deeply about this obstacle to water down the drawbacks in this new online teaching environment to create justice and educational opportunities among all learners. Besides, the lecturers must be aware of their learners’ profiles when designing their online courses. They should address the learners’ differences appropriately and effectively (Beetham& Sharpe, 2019).

Subsequently, the present research demonstrates that the success of the digitalization applied by the University of Dr. MoulayTaharduring the Pandemic Coronavirus depends enormously on diverse factors. If the teachers are not well trained in using technology, do not improve their teaching style, interact with their students, use different strategies to persuade them to devote more time for studies, diversify their technological learning tools, so the project of e-learning would be abortive. The study also demonstrates that the students who responded to the proposed questionnaire consider that reliance on exclusive e-learning at the expense of face-to-face attendance would harm the learners’ assimilation of their processing information. Moreover, some learners descending from poor social backgrounds could not all have access to the Internet. They live in rural areas—“people of the shadow”, as policymakers prefer to call them—have neither computers nor smart phones. They are entirely cut from the modern world and find it even more challenging to access to online learning. It is also very exhilaratingthat even though students wish to participate in the online learning process actively, their lack of experience with this type of learning makes them even more anxious.

Furthermore, the learners believe that online learning may even harm their performance due to the poor assimilation of the courses, particularly the hard ones, the respondents have revealed. Besides, the teachers’ inability to appropriately adapt their teaching methods shows that the University of Dr. MoulayTahar is not yet ready to integrate E-learning in the teaching and learning processes.

Conclusion
The need to include virtual-based learning in Algeria during the crisis of the Coronavirus pandemic has been more than necessary. In a very concise period, the countries all over the globe have made haste to an unprecedented lockdown of schools, universities, and other institutions to prevent the proliferation of the virus among the learners and the staff alike. The world has witnessed significant changes and disruptions in its educational system, transforming indoors and homes into schools, institutions, and universities. Thanks to digital technology, educators and lecturers were forced to switch to E-learning platforms. Algeria, like many other countries, has opted for technology-based and distance learning. Algerian universities and the University of Dr. MoulayTahar, Saida, is one among them has adopted the Moodle platform providing students
with online course contents. It is an E-learning project designed to help teachers construct efficient and effective communities for authentic learning (Singh, O'Donoghue & Worton, 2005).

Nevertheless, after analyzing the results obtained in this study, the researchers can draw the following conclusions on Moodle platform adopted by the university. So despite its variety of positive features such as efficiency in terms of cost, friendly interface, easy information transfer, psychological comfort, and various usages lurk several challenges. Almost all the respondents have concurred that they have sometimes encountered technical issues and think they process information better in the traditional courses. Besides, multiple factors determine the quality of the educational process in the online environment, among which are: the level of training that teachers’ level training in technology use, their interaction with the students, teaching style, collaborative learning, quick feedback, their omnipresence, active learning, and experience in using mediocre technology. Thus some of the advantages aforementioned about E-learning sustained by the Moodle platform dwindle in value, and drawbacks become more outstanding.

Throughout the students’ responses to the questions surveyed in the questionnaire, the majority considers that online learning does not have advantageous effects on assimilating and processing information. It is somewhat more challenging to study and be focused online. Besides, teaching online is always hard. Thus students quickly get distracted and lose focus because teachers do not implement the proper strategies to keep their learners focused since they lack experience with this type of learning. Besides, the present study revealed that the process of learning and assimilating information is deficient in the online environment, and this could result in poorer learning outcomes. Respondents frequently reported problems with technical materials. As a result, the finding confirms the reasons why students became reluctant and unmotivated. A shortage of infrastructure, notably telephone lines, is also a significant obstacle to increasing Internet access. What makes the matter more badly was the teachers’ incapacity to adapt sound methods of teaching, mainly when designing challenging courses. To sum up, the study demonstrates that our university was not ready to implement online teaching and learning environment.

About the Authors

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### Appendices

#### Appendix A

**Questionnaire about the learners’ attitudes towards e-learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. What do you think of e-learning implement by your university?</td>
<td>Q6. Do you expect your teachers to keep using e-learning in teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. Do you find E-learning helpful?</td>
<td>Q7. To what extent you interact with your teachers and classmates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. Are you all equipped with personal computers or smartphones?</td>
<td>Q8. What do you prefer, E-learning or face-to-face learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. Do you all have Internet access?</td>
<td>Q9. Are you accustomed to using the E-learning Moodle platform?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. Do online classes affect your grades?</td>
<td>Q10. Does online learning enhance your motivation and interest?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Appendix B

*Frequency distribution of indicators related to the Moodle platform capacity to provide knowledge in the process of exclusively online learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical situations and Internet Connectivity</td>
<td>The Technical issues while learning online</td>
<td>75.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disruption Internet Connectivity (open questions)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internet Speed and Quality (Bad or Slow)</td>
<td>28.66 Bad 71.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of multiple online platforms (depending on the teachers’ preferences)</td>
<td>00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ skills</td>
<td>Lack of students’ adequate technologies</td>
<td>15.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lack of interest in improving their skills</td>
<td>19.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Percentage%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliance on the existing teaching rules in the online teaching/learning environment</td>
<td>Non-compliance with the schedule in the online environment</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Style</td>
<td>Lack of adaptation of teaching style for the online environment engendering difficulties of assimilation and understanding.</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unbalanced teaching style(theory versus-practical tasks) (either just theory or just practical lessons)</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unbalanced assignment of tasks and time management</td>
<td>10.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with student/teacher</td>
<td>Lack of support from teachers in the learning process (deficient interaction)</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix C

_Variants related to student’s ability to assimilate and learn in the online learning context_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with teachers</td>
<td>Live answer in a video conference</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to online teaching, online information processing is easier</td>
<td>Easier</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harder</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The same</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General opinion towards learning in the online environment</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The online environment is appropriate for learning</td>
<td>Very satisfied + satisfied</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very little extent + little extent</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither little nor great measure</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>very great extent + great extent</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for online learning</td>
<td>Would choose the unfolding online courses</td>
<td>17.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would choose the unfolding of face to face courses</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would choose a combination between the online and online courses</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract
The World Wide Web continuously provides rapid access to information, and numerous information resources, virtually unlimited. The convenience and interactivity of its usage encourage people to turn to it in the educational process rather often while teaching or studying unfamiliar topics. Hypertext resources of different kinds have become a virtual educational environment. They offer new opportunities for structuring, presenting, adapting, and integrating contemporary learning materials. Besides, hypermedia technologies have made a considerable breakthrough in the educational process, particularly in self-education, combining hitherto incompatible elements. The article focuses on practical experience in the introduction of hypertext in the educational process of higher education institutions in general and during pandemic periods, in particular, the world faces nowadays. In the course of the research, it was emphasized that such technologies are pretty significant in implementing distance learning. Hypermedia technologies create especially suitable conditions for the independent acquisition and quality assimilation of the necessary information, which can be easily integrated into the educational process. The provided analysis of the implementation of e-learning materials based on hypertext and multimedia tools made it possible to point out the advantages and disadvantages of the described technologies (compared to traditional usage of printed textbooks), thus identifying their didactic potential. They became especially of great importance during the coronavirus lockdown.

Keywords: covid lockdown, e-learning materials, higher education, hypermedia educational technologies, hypertext

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Introduction

Informatization and computerization are phenomena inherent in all spheres of modern society. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) became an integral part of any Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The e-learning environment is a system that provides students with a new tool for the formation of essential competencies and professional development of modern specialists (Bokalo, 2012).

Polat (1999) defines the e-learning environment as a combination of conditions that provide learning. The primary function of the e-learning environment is to organize convenient conditions for the independent acquisition and quality assimilation of the necessary information used in the learning process. Other but no less essential functions are methodological, communicational, motivational, and evolutional for successful implementation of the abovementioned functions of the e-learning environment into the Ukrainian educational system in training specialists during the coronavirus lockdown, that offer mutual integration of hypermedia technologies into the current educational process in HEIs.

The problem of processing a large amount of information has long been connected with the purpose of optimization of the educational process. Carley (2014) identified the essential principles of hypermedia technologies, among them flexibility and adaptability of the lessons (students can start and complete their tasks at any convenient time); availability of different resources (unlimited number of students can use the same sources of information); minimization of efforts and time (students can send their homework online, saving time and media, etc.), joint work of students through chats, forums, team projects, self-assessment, and self-control.

While organizing the educational process using hypermedia technologies, it is necessary to consider the pedagogical suitability principle of the information and communication methods in contemporary teaching. Most teachers and scholars (Reeves, 1998; Babelyuk et al., 2020) concluded that the feasibility of computerization is determined by the level of achievement of pedagogical, methodological, and economic efficiency compared to traditional teaching aids. It means that any teacher, who intends to implement modern ICT in their discipline classes, must, firstly, know the mechanism of their application. Secondly, have a sufficient and clear methodological basis for such integration. Thirdly, if it is necessary, to change, and adapt existing methods, taking into account the specifics of their training course. As a result, such educational technologies intensify the individualization of teaching, change the nature of the interaction between students and teachers, turning them into partners in the process of searching and transforming information. It became crucial and valued during coronavirus lockdowns the world faces nowadays.

Therefore, the introduction of hypertext in the educational process of HEIs should be aimed at training qualified specialists of the appropriate professional level, who are competitive, competent, mobile, able to meet international professional standards, highly motivated, ready for continuous professional development, that’s in other words, for long-life learning.

The objectives of the research is to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of using hypermedia programs in the educational process in HEIs and the possibility of their integration.
Literature Review

The current state of hypertext studies, according to Dedova, is characterized by the fact that despite the great interest in “hypertext topics,” publications in which the authors analyze specific features of hypertexts are virtually absent. The researcher names two main reasons for the described situation. The first reason is the inefficiency of the theoretical basis of such researches, as hypertext being a specific, innovative object of analysis, the product of a new field of written communication, cannot be studied based on traditional textology theories. The second reason is that the term “hypertext” has many theoretical and practical projections on various fields of modern scientific knowledge, among them computer science, sociology, linguistics, literature, pedagogy, etc. (Dedova, 2008). It is necessary to resort to essential historical information and the preconditions for the emergence of the hypertext idea to understand the essence of this phenomenon.

In the field of cybernetics and computer technology, the issues of hypermedia and hypertext systems were dealt with by Epshtein (2016), who developed the concepts of “hypertext and “hypertext systems.” On the contrary, Monakhov (2007) and Kahn (1993) considered the negative consequences of working in a hypertext virtual environment.

Hypertext and hypermedia technologies are used in educational technology for the following reasons: hypermedia non-linear access to vast amounts of information (Nielsen, 1997); users can explore a text in depth (Coller, 1987); interaction with the instructional material can be self-paced (Barrett, 1988); hypermedia catches attention and engages the users (Jonassen, 1990); hypermedia represents a natural form of representation simulating the work of human mind (Delany & Gilbert, 1991; Koliasa, 2016).

The purpose of the article is to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of hypermedia technologies in the educational process of HEIs.

Methods

The research uses the notions of hypertext, hypermedia system, and technologies as an effective tool for supplying learners with all necessary information. With the help of linguistic and extra-linguistic methods, hypermedia categories were defined those that include macro literary systems, which center on the integration and ready accessibility of large volumes of information; problem exploration systems, they are designed to allow the interactive manipulation of data; systems for structured reading/browsing/reference; and, finally, systems that might have been applied to a specific application but whose real purpose in construction had been the experimental investigation of hypertext technology itself. The educational implications of hypertext rest on a mixture of these three underlying tendencies.

The considered possibilities of hypertext allow addressing the question of structuring of educational material via hypertext technology. It means that it is necessary to identify a specific set of educational material elements and establish links between them based on hypertext technology.

To structure educational information in hypertext for the formation of knowledge of English for professional purposes, it is essential to follow the following algorithm, which includes compiling a dictionary of terms; identifying objects and concepts; identifying the relationship between concepts; detailing.
Data Collection Procedure

There are more than 100 different types of hypermedia systems that are designed by people for different needs. The hypermedia system was proposed by Bush when he worked as a scientific adviser to Roosevelt in 1945. Already in those days, he foresaw the problem of disseminating information and developed a mechanical recorder, which he called Memex for his own needs. Its function was “to store books, notes, conversations, which were organized in such a way that could be quickly accessed” (Bush, 1945, p. 4). In other words, Memex was a unique recorder, “(...) in which individual stores his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized, so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility” (Bush, 1945, p. 5).

The device was more than just an ordinary storage medium. Memex was based on association, with the help of which all facts, concepts, and ideas were connected in memory, and that any piece of information organized on the ad hoc principle that can act as stimulus or trigger (“trigger mechanism”) to remember another (Koliasa, 2016).

Besides developing this device, Bush sought the best ways to store and search for information, combining the principle of similarity with the mind activities. However, the given amount of information a person needs, taking into account what we know about unstable associative relationships (e.g., Howe, 1980), it was unlikely that such a principle could be the basis of a hypermedia system.

While Bush sought to develop systems based on cognitive equivalence, in the early 1960s, Doug Engelbart developed his hypertext concept, emphasizing the strength of human intelligence (Engelbart, 1963), by naming the system Augment. Engelbart's first implementation was the NLS (On-Line System), which was designed to serve the work needs of his human intelligence research center at the Stanford Research Institute. It was a simple computer environment that contained all the documents, notes, notes, reports, etc. Thus, the On-Line System can be considered one of the first attempts to provide a hypertext environment in which collaboration could take place using a computer.

Conceptualizing technology like this, Engelbart saw hypertext as a form of a cognitive artifact that enhances human capabilities and offers the potential to achieve productivity level in information tasks that would be difficult or impossible to achieve without it.

The introduction of the term “hypertext” is attributed to Nelson (1997). He called his dream system Xanadu – “documentation,” which connects all the world literature, namely, “a universal instant network of hypertext publications” (pp. 84-100).

There was no need to write anything twice in Xanadu. The document consists of the original or native bytes, which are inclusions, and provides transfer and inclusion of one form in another. However, an essential aspect of Xanadu was that the transaction was virtual. Each document contained a reference to the original structure and not to copies of its parts.

Nelson's definition of hypertext is as follows: “a combination of natural language text with the computer’s capacities for interactive, branching, or dynamic display (...) of a non-linear text, which cannot be printed conveniently on a conventional page” (Nelson, 1997, pp. 94-100).
It is necessary to highlight its leading characteristics to understand the essential difference between conventional text and hypertext.

Hypertext is the representation of information as linked nodes, in which the reader navigates nonlinearly. It also allows the possibility of a plurality of authors, the blurring of the functions of the author and the reader, the expansion of work with blurred boundaries, and the multiplicity of ways of reading (Vizel, 2016). As far as we can see from this definition, there are three essential aspects of hypertext: the dispersion of its structure (information can be provided in the form of small fragments-nests, and “entrance” to this structure can be from any link), nonlinearity (the reader is free to choose the reading path while creating one’s text), and diversity and multimedia (i.e., the use of all means to influence the reader, which is technically possible only within this system).

When considering the concepts of text and hypertext in general, the following differences can be found, among them the linearity of the text vs. nonlinearity of hypertext; completeness of traditional text vs. infinity, incompleteness, the openness of hypertext; exact authorship of the text vs. lack of authorship (in the conventional sense) in hypertext; removal (using hypertext) of opposition between the author and the reader; subjectivity, the one-sidedness of plain text vs. objectivity, the versatility of hypertext; homogeneity of plain text vs. heterogeneity of hypertext (Baranov, 1997).

Hypermedia is an extension of hypertext that allows the user to create a linked database of materials, including text, static graphics, animated graphics, video, sound, music, etc. The difference between hypertext and hypermedia is that a hypertext system allows users to combine only textual information blocks, whereas hypermedia provides such capability between heterogeneous blocks of information created by different tools or programs.

Despite the shortcomings of paper media, their use continues and is quite common in the last seven centuries. Of course, it is quite convenient to keep books, magazines, documents at hand and then re-read and work with them. However, if you want to combine other media, such as a video, it becomes impossible to store audio and immediately process heterogeneous information formats in one database or platform.

Hypertext systems significantly differ from printed ones, including structure, organization, and functionality. They are distinguished by their advantages, which are quite obvious. In the hypertext database, we can change the structure quickly or move from one fragment to another. One can create, edit, and reorganize pieces according to their needs and interests. A user can track the most minor piece of information in an extensive database. One can also combine information using associative and intuitive connections, regardless of location.

Findings

For more than 40 years, all that has been offered to teachers to carry out their activities are technological “solutions” (from program text to modern computers), which are supposed to increase their efficiency. Courses such as Computer Based Learning (CBL) or Computer-Aided Instruction (CAI) are designed to provide some of the up-to-date functions of a teacher.
Since the introduction of hypertext into the learning process, it has gained both critics and supporters. Critics (Duchastel, Velay) insisted that hypertext reduces teaching to optimize the presentation of the material.

The perceived advantages of hypertext as an educational environment are usually attributed to its non-linear properties. It often contrasts with the supposed linearity of traditional texts, as in the statement: “Unlike [hypertext], most standard text documents are built for reading linearly, from the starting page to the end” (Berg, 1991, p. 118). Unfortunately, there are currently few studies that objectively and with the descriptions of some results evaluate hypertext in the educational environment – empirical testing of real users who interact with hypertext.

One of the first attempts to assess the potential of hypertext in the learning process was a report made by Beamen et al. (1987), which described practical results of using the Intermedia hypernet system in two courses at Brown University, namely, in the course of English literature, and biology. Teams of sociologists observed the courses before the introduction of hypertext and when using hypertext materials. Teachers and students were interviewed several times during the experiment. Besides, a group of students was asked to keep diaries of their activities during their studies. The use of a specially created computer laboratory was monitored by both students and teachers.

At first glance, the preliminary results of the introduction of hypertext were positive. The developers reported a positive correlation between the use of hypermedia and high scores. However, they also reported an unexpected finding that the improvements might not have been related to the introduction of hypertext as such but rather to a factor related to its implementation.

Beeman's research is an excellent illustration of the difficulties involved in assessing the effect of implementing not only hypertext but also any new, unknown educational technique into the educational context. Moreover, Beeman's most interesting finding was that the significant performance indicators observed in the process of implementing Intermedia were more pronounced among people who participated in its implementation than among students who used the system, apparently confirming the statement that “the best way to learn something, is to teach!” (Beeman, 1987, p. 77).

Hammond & Allinson (1989) believe that hypertext can serve as a basis for a research system of learning. Still, it is insufficient and must be supplemented by more targeted mechanisms of guidance and access.

Stanton & Stammers (1990) suggest that a non-linear organization may be more effective than a linear one and find reasons to support his statement. First, it will enable different levels of prior knowledge. Second, it encourages research. Third, it allows subjects to see the task and adapt the material to their learning style.
Discussion

It can be argued that the hypertext environment provides more control over students, and therefore has advantages over traditional paper materials. However, this makes it possible to come to two equally plausible interpretations: 1) greater control over the user access to the hypertext content through links provided by the author/developer, or 2) greater control by the user because they are free to follow their own choices, an option, that is more complex, than printed text.

The concept of control is essential in the educational process, but it remains unclear whether hypertext gives the student more power than traditional media. Duchastel (1988) argues that computers facilitate interaction through a manipulative learning style, where the student responds to the information provided by using the mouse to select items and move through the information space, but does not make the process more “active” than turning book pages, emphasizing excerpts, and writing notes in the margins.

There is, however, some doubt as to whether all these process-oriented educational aspects of hypertext systems are necessarily “good” in any learning situation. There is much evidence that students, who are free to choose their strategies, do not always choose wisely” (Duchastel, 1988, p. 322). This statement reflects previous assumptions that most students cannot set and study learning goals on their own. On the other hand, access to a broad and rich interconnected hypermedia database may be of genuine interest to, for example, a researcher trying to identify common factors that have influenced the diversity of human activity. As Whalley (1990) points out, “a hypertext reader can easily fly between trees but still can not perceive the shape of a tree better than before” (pp. 61-67).

Jonassen, who is one of the most prominent scholars in the field of hypertext researches and learning, reported on a series of studies that sought to evaluate hypertext in terms of acquiring structural knowledge. Jonassen concluded that his results call into question “the ability of students to engage in meaningful learning, rather than to search for information from hypertext, especially in the context of the learning environment” (Jonassen et al., 1990, p. 165).

Not being a “natural” learning environment that somehow reflects semantic memory, Jonassen suggests that “fair assessment can only occur in hypertext literacy, while students have acquired a useful set of strategies for navigating, and integrating information from hypertext” (Jonassen et al., 1990, p. 165).

Marchionini & Schneiderman (1988) suggested that hypertext is more suitable for viewing than for search. Based on this assumption, Jones (1989) hypothesized that more random learning would occur when reviewing tasks than in a work that requires the use of a reference. Jones (1989) argued that hyperlinked links were built-in menus and that the context provided by the site should encourage ideas to be connected at any end of the link. In other words, a semantic connection is likely to be found, and only then, a mental operation aimed at memorization and learning will take place.

In general, these studies reflect the current problems that arise when using hypertext in learning, namely difficulties in controlled experiments, finding tasks, describing the educational
process, not to mention assessment – learning outcomes. Marchionini (1990) sums it up that “a significant problem in evaluating highly interactive systems is the evaluation of both, the quality of interaction, and learning outcomes. Evaluations of learning based on hypermedia should relate to the learning process and learning outcomes” (p. 206).

Given all the advantages listed above, we may sum it up that hypertext is an integral tool of learning in today's globalization of the educational system in general. In the hypertext environment, there is no difference between an author and a reader, and a student, and a teacher. Everyone is equal.

Films, audio-visual materials, presentations, and other teaching materials have always been helped in the learning process. But not one of them has replaced conventional teaching aids. Modern teaching aids have changed the role of a teacher from instructor to assistant. The use of media and computers has revolutionized the teaching process in schools, colleges, and universities. Teachers began to develop their lessons using video and computer-based instructional programs that allow students to listen, watch and work with their course materials. A compelling advantage of using hypermedia to study a course is that the student can return to the material, which raises some doubts about how many times he or she needs it.

In the ’80s, new training programs were developed. Among expert systems are Interactive Video Disc (IVD), Computer-Aided Learning (CAL), Computer Based Training (CBT), Multimedia, and hypertext (MHT).

Multimedia and hypertext programs have become the most used in the learning process due to their ability to combine disparate fragments in a non-linear way, and to use them efficiently while storing a large amount of information. Hypertext presents tremendous potential and flexibility in the process of delivering educational material. Besides, students can change the sequence of information in the learning process according to their wishes or understanding. Studies of hypertext in the learning process have shown critical and logical thinking skills in building relationships between pieces of information (Landow & Delany, 1991).

Hypertext should also be used at the stage of revision and self-study of already learned material. It combines a lot of disparate information, but not at the stage of introducing new material and explaining the essential information.

In dealing with hypertext, students develop the ability to find different ways to solve problems and explore issues compared to the traditional way of learning.

Advantages of using hypertext as a learning tool are the following:

1) optimal freedom of choice;
2) provides links between fragments of information placed randomly;
3) the ability to highlight, comments, and mark;
4) the only form that does not require differentiation by age, style, or field;
5) the ability to find additional information without leaving the screen;
6) the ability to combine different forms of presentation of material (graphics, video, sound, text, etc.).
The ability to apply individual instructions;
8) to work in groups, having the opportunity to exchange views, information.

The impact of hypertext on the learning process can be briefly presented by such essential aspects as the replacement of traditional tools with dynamic visual media; special programs for developers of hypertext courses in graphics, programming, psychology, and cognitive linguistics; the development of analytical thinking, and professional skills of students.

Among many advantages that hypertext has as, no doubt, a helpful learning tool, it should be noted its disadvantages. Hypertext itself often takes the form of broken fragments. If the connections are not logical, it becomes ineffective. The success of the presentation and processing of the material depends on the developer of the hypertext. There is a high probability of getting lost in this web because of fragmentation.

Although the idea of creating hypertext came much earlier than the creation of the computer, it was not popularized because people still do not understand the essence of hypertext and its effectiveness in everyday usage and in the system of education in particular.

Despite some shortcomings, hypertext has enormous potential over other means by which information can be presented effectively. The main task now is to develop vocabulary, syntax, and structure to achieve maximum benefit. Its effectiveness as a learning tool has already been proven; students improve creativity, mobility, determination, ability to evaluate, synthesize information, increase self-esteem. Hypertext program developers are working to address the shortcomings of the systems. If these systems overcome the problem of incompatibility, the mass introduction of hypermedia in the process of learning and self-education is inevitable.

As to the practical experience of using hypertext technology and the description of educational hypertext for ESL students, which includes the following stages:

1) The basic concepts on the topic are revealed and systematized, the thesaurus in the form of the structural-hierarchical scheme is made. Thus, we defined the general structure of hypertext.
2) The formation of semantic nodes containing text, video, graphics, an alphabetical index, and a system of hyperlinks are formed. The principle of constructing hyperlinks based on two types of systematization of information: lexical-grammatical/semantic and system of sub-objects.

The creation and development of e-learning resources are associated with the need to improve significantly the quality of teaching subjects in higher education institutions during the pandemic periods. To achieve this goal, the software product must have academic completeness, didactic value, and effectiveness (Bablyuk et al., 2020). Electronic textbooks and manuals, based on hypertext technology, provide many advantages: the ability to structure and organize educational information by external “unloading” of the text. Representation of information in a non-linear way contributes to implementing the principle of visualization in that the link allows you to learn different concepts, objects with the help of video materials and graphics. The visualization of information increases the interest of students and stimulates them to learn new material.
Conclusion

Analyzing the results of the introduction of hypermedia technologies in the educational process, we concluded that the main advantages of this technology are as follows: easy usage – the ability to follow links in different directions, active state of students during the educational process, interactive communication with the electronic system, i.e., learning environment, variety of forms and modes of behavior, modularity of construction – it is possible to refer to one text segment from different blocks, which increases the information saturation and reduces the amount of duplicated information, compatibility – several authors can work on one document, the flexibility of computer learning, ability to regulate, and control the speed and intensity of training, workload, optimization, and intensity of information, as well as update information. It should be noted that the use of electronic educational resources developed based on hypertext increases the potential of the teacher, offering more freedom for his creative search for new teaching methods and technologies that involve students in the creative process. Also, their use increases the students’ motivation, allows combining classroom, and extracurricular activities on an interactive basis. It improves the quality of graduate training.

The practicality of creating, and maintaining an educational environment in HEIs, especially during the coronavirus lockdown, is determined by several factors: increasing the speed of information and knowledge transfer; the need for dynamic adaptation of students to the environment, and social changes taking place in it; the need to reform the educational system in accordance to the requirements of the digital information society (increasing productivity, transparency, and flexibility of educational processes, learning according to needs, and abilities). Electronic educational resources and educational environments created on their basis have significant potential for improving the quality of training of future professionals. We see the prospects for further research in substantiating some other new sufficient organizational and pedagogical conditions of students studying in the educational environment of HEIs.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that introduction into the educational process of electronic educational resources developed on hypertext technology, including electronic textbooks, is not an educational panacea but only a new tool to modernize and increase the efficiency of the educational process. As Heick (2019) once said that there is now more information available to any student with a smartphone than the whole empire had three thousand years ago.

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References


Devices and Platforms Used in Emergency Remote Learning and Teaching During Covid19: A Case of English Major Students in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract
This study investigates the experiences of English major students at the College of Language and Translation (COLT) in King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, with Emergency Remote Learning and Teaching (ERLT) during the Covid-19 crisis. It focuses on the students’ preferences for devices and platforms, and gender differences influencing their choices. The study is of significance because it considers the student-centered learning approaches. The paper also seeks to answer the question as to the factors that lead students to make their preferences for the online teaching tools and devices. A total of 150 students, both men, and women, participated in the study. An online survey was carried out in the form of questionnaires to elicit their responses. The results showed that laptop computers were the dominant devices students used and preferred. They also revealed that the Zoom platform came first in students’ preferences, followed by Blackboard. Also, the findings showed that although participants used smartphones in their ERL, they did not recommend it, and it came last compared to laptops, tablets, and desktop computers in their order of preference. Gender differences existed in preferences to desktops and tablets in ERL. Another gender difference existed in preferences to platforms. Women students preferred Blackboard to Zoom while men students expressed the opposite.

Keywords: Blackboard and Zoom, devices and platforms, emergency remote learning and teaching, English major students, gender differences, Saudi universities.

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Introduction

The year 2020 has dramatically affected how different sectors work in the world. No single industry will stay as it was before 2020. Education is no different. The pandemic has affected all education levels, mainly tertiary education (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have found themselves confronting an unprecedented and unexpected situation, forcing them to go suddenly online and shift to Emergency Remote Education (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Colleges and Universities in Saudi Arabia are no exception. Three days before the declaration of the World Health Organization (WHO) that Covid-19 is a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020), Saudi Arabia shut down all schools, colleges, and universities on March 8, 2020 (Saudi Press Agency 2020). The Ministry of Education called all educational institutions to shift immediately to synchronous and asynchronous distance learning. All educational institutions were ordered to use all means of distance learning. According to a UNESCO report, 8,410,264 students were affected in Saudi Arabia, 1,620,491 were in tertiary education (UNESCO, 2020).

Fortunately, almost all Saudi Arabian public universities have ICT infrastructure since the beginning of the millennium (Al-Asmari & Rabb Khan, 2014) with variation in utilization. After browsing all of the 25 Saudi Arabian public university websites, it was found that each of them has an organizational unit, mainly deanship, and is either specialized in eLearning and Distance Learning (17 universities) or is managing the use of learning management systems and educational platforms, in addition to other information technology (IT) services (eight universities).

All these universities had taken up mainly Blackboard® as the primary learning management system (LMS), if only one, at the time of closure of HEIs in Saudi Arabia (Aljuhney & Murray, 2016; Al-Nofaie, 2020). All this wherewithal, namely technological and organizational resources, has mitigated the swift switchover to Emergency Remote Learning (ERL), although some obstacles, particularly the bandwidth issues and the Internet speed, especially in remote areas, and availability of laptops and tablets to students (AlHazizi, 2020), have occurred in the way. Other technical problems are linked directly to the Blackboard platform itself, namely the synchronous learning (Alkarani & Al Thobaity, 2020). This pushed many Saudi universities to adopt other platforms, mainly the video-conferencing platforms, among them were Zoom®, Microsoft Teams®, Google Meet®, and Cisco Webex®.

The goal of adoption of other platforms was to diversify the education platforms and devise backup for the learning processes during the ERL, in addition to solve reported connection and bandwidth problems with the only available Blackboard platform. King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is among the public universities that, in addition to Blackboard, has adopted different platforms, namely Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet to deliver synchronous ERT (Figure one).
Exploring students’ experience with this ERLT during the closure is a critical factor to future implementation of digital learning in HEIs in Saudi Arabia. Undoubtedly, adopting digital learning tools will move from remaining extra-curricular before the pandemic to co-curricular after it is over. The rationale of the present research is to enhance the student-centered learning approaches by obtaining a clear picture of real experiences of parties involved in HEIs in Saudi Arabia, specifically students. Besides, it would give the policymakers a clear picture in planning the inevitable future adoption of digital learning in HEIs in Saudi Arabia. These experiences include variables involved in ERL: the devices used on this ongoing ERL, device and platforms preferences, and gender differences. Hence, this study aims to shed light on these variables. The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the devices English major students at the College of Language and Translation in King Saud University use in their ERL?
2. What devices do students prefer in their ERL?
3. What are students’ preferences among platforms used in ERLT?
4. Are there any gender differences regarding these variables?

The research objective of the present study is to examine and find out the devices used by English language major students at the College of Languages and Translation in King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia during the ERLT and students’ device and platform preferences in their ERL. This paper also investigates whether gender differences are the distinctive markers with regard to devices and platforms.

**Literature Review**

**Defining Terms: Emergency Remote Learning and Teaching (ERLT)**

Different terms have been used to describe the teaching and learning process since the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus. These terms constitute digital learning, e-learning, distance learning, virtual learning, and online learning. Comparing the use of these five terms with the term Covid-19 in Google Scholars, from 2020 until the writing of this paper, it is found that online learning comes first with 9,890 results, followed by e-learning with 7,810, distance learning with 6,280, virtual learning with 2,680, and last of all digital learning with 2,480 marks. Although these terms may have different meanings (Basak, Wotto, & Belnger, 2018; Moore, Dickinson-Dean & Galven, 2011), they have been used interchangeably to describe what has
been taking place in HEIs during the pandemic. What has been happening in many HEIs worldwide was not more than a sudden and unplanned switchover from face-to-face teaching and learning to ERT and ERL due to the outbreak of the virus. Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond (2020) stated:

In contrast to experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face (page 7).

Hollweck and Doucet (2020) stressed that the pandemic has hurled educational systems into ERL and ERT. Bozkurt et al. (2020) differentiated between that emergency remote education and planned and purposeful online instructions. Schwartzman (2020) published a paper describing the shift during the Covid-19 outbreak as a sudden shift of course delivery to ERT and ERL rather than intentional online education. And that remote education applied different delivery modes and technological tools as a response to face-to-face instruction. In the Arab World, Hazaea, Bin-Hady, and Toujani (2021) blended English Language Teaching (ELT) and ERT to introduce Emergency Remote English Language Teaching (ERELT) to described the sudden switch from traditional language teaching and learning to virtual environments.

It is a postulate that is a considerable variation in the use of digital learning tools in HEIs for different reasons. These reasons are mainly cultural, economic, and political. Cultural reasons may come first since online learning has been stigmatized as lower quality than face-to-face learning, although findings point towards something entirely different (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). Therefore, choosing the precise terms that reflect the situation taking place in other HEIs would help in gaining more insights and making HEIs well planned and prepared for any future sudden closure, whether due to pandemic, war, natural, or ecological crisis or disasters. It will also definitely enhance HEIs’ policies of inevitable digital transformation in learning and teaching. Based on that, ERT and ERL are the precise terms describing the teaching and learning processes in all Saudi public universities since the beginning of 2020, except the Saudi Electronic University, since it applies the blended learning approach as its name accordingly implies. Therefore, this study intentionally prefers the term ERL since it reflects the actual situation in the College of Language and Translation at King Saud University during the pandemic.

**Students’ Experiences during Emergency Remote Learning and Teaching and English Language Teaching and Learning**

Different studies have been conducted throughout the world addressing other elements involved in ERL. Students’ experiences in different majors at university levels have been investigated worldwide during the pandemic. Experiences include students’ learning methods, readiness, access to synchronous and asynchronous distance learning, electronic learning platforms, acceptance and satisfaction, achievement, faculty preparation, performance, etc.

Almekhlafy (2020) sought to evaluate and assess in his study students’ perceptions on the use of language teaching tools and devices during the COVID 19 pandemic and reflected that in the emergency created by the COVID-19 outbreak in Saudi Arabia, ERT tools proved to be a
great help in motivating students to continue their education and improve their language acquisition. As the extraordinary situation necessitated the shift to an alternative teaching strategy and resources, students’ perceptions also underwent a significantly dramatic change making them more willing to embrace online tools such as Blackboard and the rest. Language teachers, too, recognized the utility of the technological devices as essential teaching resources, and language researchers have been carrying out extensive studies to evaluate the utility of Blackboard and other such teaching tools.

Hazaea et al. (2021) explored the significant and unprecedented computer-generated classroom challenges that Arab English language teachers have confronted during their virtual language lectures and stressed the need to make it more learner-friendly. They proposed remedies to make ELT more learner-friendly since online teaching appears to have become an inevitable part of academic education due to Covid-19, which might continue for a longer time than expected.

Oraif and Elyas (2021) claimed in their work that technology has influenced language teaching in a big way heralding it into a “new phase” (page 7), transforming communication into a digital form empowering students to communicate without “having to travel” (page 7). The researchers uphold the fact that classrooms have been replaced with the virtual and non-limitative world of technology, which can be significantly modified to respond to the learners’ needs and satisfaction. This potential of reaching out to distant geographical spaces has transformed remote teaching into a tremendously welcome opportunity in times of crisis. In terms of language teaching, students have found virtual teaching as easily accessible and suitably tailored to their needs. “The individuals choose what suits them according to their needs, which also affects how the acquired information is manifested to illustrate the knowledge gained. Learners can create various types of content from what they have learned, using videos, images or text, provided that they have the suitable means” (page 10).

In their research work on the willingness of language instructors and learners in Saudi Arabia, with respect to emergency switching over to virtual teaching during COVID-19 crisis, Alqabbani, Almuwais, Benajiba, and Almoayad (2020) maintained that the universities have developed a strong infrastructure and have deployed the application of e-learning as an enduring mode of teaching to realize positive learning outcomes. They suggested that Saudi HEIs must seize the opportunity to increase the number of courses offered online. Another significant finding of their study was that a good majority of students at different Saudi universities have found the virtual environment was useful and effective during the lockdown. Also, they found no difference in students’ understanding and accomplishment in the physical classrooms and the emergency virtual classes. On the basis of their research, Alqabbani et al. (2020) asserted that “the growing evidence supporting the effectiveness of e-learning in Saudi universities should encourage more utilization of e-learning or blended modes of teaching in higher education. This will overcome the challenges faced by higher education in Saudi Arabia to accommodate the increasing number of high school graduates and the high workload of instructors” (page 14).

Rahiem (2020) qualitatively investigated the experiences of 80 social science major students at a public university in Indonesia amidst the pandemic and found that they had both positive and negative experiences. Jacque, Ouahabi, and Lequeue (2020) studied the 63 junior and
sophomore electrical and electronic engineering students’ performance at the University of Tours, France, and discovered that distance learning did not downgrade the learning experience. Saritas and Barutcu (2020) surveyed both graduate and undergraduate university students in Turkey, and results showed that they were ready for online learning during the pandemic. Al-Nofaie (2020), in comparing synchronous and asynchronous experiences of English language major students in Saudi Arabia, found that students preferred asynchronous environments in their learning during the pandemic.

As for devices used in ERL, Shim and Lee (2020) questioned 393 students in a South Korean university and found laptop was the most preferred device students used in participating in their classes. In India, Muthuprasad, Aiswarya, Aditya, and Jha (2020) found that most of undergraduate agriculture students preferred smartphones in their learning, followed by laptops, then came tablets, and desktops came last. Edelhauser and Lupu-Dima (2020) investigated the devices used by 200 undergraduate and graduate students in Romania and found that most students used smartphones in their online learning during the Covid-19 closure. In Nepal, Nepal, Atreya, Menezes, and Joshi (2020) found that most of 226 medical students used smartphones during the lockdown due to the pandemic. Before the pandemic, Davison and Lazaros (2015) surveyed 20,503 graduate and undergraduate students in Indiana investigating the use of mobile learning devices and they found that laptops came first with 90%, smartphones with 60%, and finally tablets with 45%. They also found that “in every category of digital technology for studies, the laptop was favored” (p. 32).

Regarding the use of electronic platforms during the outbreak of the virus, Jacques, Ouahabi, and Lequeu (2020) stated that many universities all over the world have adopted Zoom due to its ease of use, modern digital ergonomics, and its easy accessibility from different devices like desktops, laptops, or tablets. In Saudi Arabia, Ibrahim et al. (2021) surveyed 340 medical students in King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah concerning their preferences toward the four platforms: Zoom, Blackboard, Hangout, Microsoft Team, and found that Blackboard and Zoom were the most preferred.

Surveying different scientific databases and search engines, it was learned that no single study conducted in Saudi Arabia, up to December 2020, the time of writing this research, has answered the questions posed in this study, particularly addressing students majoring in a foreign language.

**Methods**

*Design*

This quantitative descriptive study was a part of a larger project of research on ERLT in foreign language major students in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to find out the devices used and device preferences by English major students, in addition to platform preferences. The study also statistically explored any gender differences in these variables; the devices and platforms were the dependent variables of the research, whereas the gender was the independent one. To answer the four questions of the study, an online survey was designed using Google forms. Descriptive statistics was applied to answer the questions of the study.
Instruments

To achieve the objective of this study, a survey was designed to answer its four questions. It consisted of three parts. The first part addressed the demographic data, specifically, gender and age of participants. The second part of the survey was on participant’s self-evaluation of computer skills and the possession of devices: namely smartphone, laptops, tablets, and desktops. The last part of the survey was on the use of devices and platforms and participant’s preferences. All the questions in the survey were closed-ended questions.

The survey then was posted online through Google forms. All data in this study were collected electronically. Before distributing the survey, it was piloted to several students to ensure the clearance of the questions. The survey was published from December 27, 2020, until January 15, 2021. Data were processed using SPSS. The majority of the responses were collected in the first four days of distribution.

Context of the Study

The study was conducted at the College of Language and Translation at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in the fall semester of 2020. COLT offers undergraduate degrees in 10 different foreign languages: English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese, Farsi, and Hebrew. It offers only two graduate programs in English and French. All these degrees are available for male students at the Men’s campus. Only three undergraduate programs are offered at the Women’s campus: English, French, and Chinese. Graduate programs are offered on both campuses. This study was limited to undergraduate English major male and female students on both campuses.

Participants

The simple random sampling technique was used in the study. The survey distributed to all English major students at different levels and campuses through their university email addresses and WhatsApp accounts. The total number of students who voluntarily participated in the study is 174: 99 male students and 75 female students from different study levels. To answer the study’s research questions: namely, to statistically find any gender differences regarding the device use and preferences, and platform used and preferences, a randomly selected sample was taken from male participants to equal the number of female participants. All participants were undergraduate English major students with different levels of study. Table one shows the structure of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Selected Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selected sample of male participants represented 18% of the total population of the undergraduate English major students N=399. In contrast, the female participants represented 15% out of 700 English major students at the undergraduate level at Women’s Campus at the end of the year 2020. The average age of all participants was 21.29.
Regarding the participants’ computer skills, the majority of them stated that they have had advanced computer skills (38%), followed by those who believed they have had average computer skills (31.3), then came those who have had very advanced skills (29.3%) and finally a percentage of 1.3 stated they possessed weak computer skills. Figure two depicts the participants’ computer skills.

Figure 2. Participants’ computer skills

Results

Devices Used and Preferences

Before answering the questions concerning devices and preferences, the survey asked participants to list all devices they possessed. The findings of the study showed that all students own smartphones (100%). Having smartphone and laptop came in second place with 44%, then owing smartphone, tablets, and laptop in the third place (32%), followed by those who have had all the four devices; smartphone, tablets, laptops, and desktops (7.3%), then those with smartphones, laptops, and desktops (6.7%). Participants having the only smartphones represented 3.3%, and then came both, students who own smartphones and desktops, and smartphones, tablets, and desktops with 2.7% each. Finally came students with smartphones and tablets with 1.3%. Figure three represents the devices owned and utilized by the students.

Figure 3. Device ownership of participants
For the first question of the study concerning the devices used by students in ERL, the results showed that both male and female English major students at COLT used laptop computer (44.7%), then smartphone (28%), followed by desktop computer and tablets with 14.0%, 13.3%, respectively. Table two and Figure four show the findings of the research questions.

Table 2. Devices used by participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Devices used by participants in ERL

As for the devices the participants preferred and recommended in ERL, the findings (Table three and Figure five) displayed that 60% of the participants preferred laptop computers in ERL, followed by tablets with 21%, then came desktop computers (14.0%), and finally smartphones with 4.7%.

Table 3. Device preferences and recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Devices the participants preferred and recommended in ERL
Platform Preferences

As mentioned in the introduction, KSU adopted different platforms in ERLT to facilitate the learning processes during the pandemic. Different platforms were used to deliver courses at COLT. The findings showed that 99.3% of participants had utilized different platforms since the beginning of the closure due to Covid-19. That is, a total of 149 students had used different platforms, and only one participant experienced only one platform, hence excluded. Comparing these platforms and students’ preferences, the results revealed that students preferred the Zoom platform (53.3%), followed by Blackboard (44.3%), then both MS Teams and Google Meet with 1.3% and 0.7%, respectively. Figure 6 shows the platforms participants preferred.

Figure 6. Platforms the participants preferred

Gender Differences in Devices Used and Preferences

The findings showed a gender difference in devices used and preferences demonstrated regarding the use of devices in ERL, specifically desktop computers and tablets. As for the devices used, the results indicated that male participants used mainly laptop computers in their learning (36.0%), followed by smartphones (32.0%), then desktop computers with 25.3%, and finally tablets with 6.7%. For women students, laptop computers, as with the men, came first with 53.3%, smartphones (24%), tablets (20.0%), and last came desktop computers with 1.3%. Figure seven reveals the gender differences regarding the devices used.

Figure 7. Gender differences in devices used in ERL

As for devices recommended for ERL, there were no gender differences in preferences for laptop computers. The findings showed that both male and female students recommended and preferred using laptops in ERL (60% each). Gender differences were found in the other device choices. Male students recommended desktop computers in the second place with 26.7%, then tablets with 8%, and finally smartphones with 5.3%. Female students, on the other hand,
recommended and preferred tablets to be in second place after laptop computers with 34.7%, followed by smartphones (4%), and at the end came the desktops with 1.3% (Figure eight).

**Figure 8. Gender difference in devices recommended**

**Gender Differences in Platforms**

The analysis of the results showed a gender difference exists in the platforms participants of the study preferred. Male students chose the Zoom platform with 67.6%, followed by Blackboard (29.7%), and finally Google Meet and MS Teams with 1% each. For female students, Blackboard came first with 58.7%, followed by Zoom (40%), then MS Teams with 1.3%, and finally came Google Meet with 0%. Figure nine shows the differences in platform preferences in ERL.

**Figure 9. Gender differences in platforms preferences**

**Discussion**

The study was aimed to shed light on the experiences of English language major students in COLT at KSU in Saudi Arabia during the unprecedented conditions of the present pandemic. It focused on the devices the students used and the devices and platforms they preferred in their ERL. Also, it investigated if there were gender differences in these variables. The present research was initiated after students had experienced ERL for long time to give a clear picture of their preferences since they began using electronic devices for online lessons way back in early March 2020.

The findings of the study showed that laptops came first as the device both men and women students used in their ERL (44.7) compared to smartphones (42%), desktop computers
(14%), and tables (13.3%). This came in line with the findings of Shim and Lee (2020) and Davison and Lazaros (2015) and in contrary with other studies (Edelhauser & Lupu-Dima 2020; Muthuprasad, et al., 2020; Nepal et al. 2020). The results also revealed that students at COLT recommended and preferred laptops in their ERL (60%) in the first place, then came tablets with 21%, followed by desktops with 14%, and finally smartphones with only 4.7%. Participants showed paradoxical positions regarding the devices they used and the ones they preferred and recommended. Although they favored laptops in their ERL, a high percentage (42%) of them used smartphones, the least preferred device in ERL (4.7%) among the other three devices. It is not a matter of ownership since the majority of participants possessed laptops. This finding needs further investigation in future researches. These findings indicated that students understand the features offered by laptops over other devices. One of the main features of laptops is their mobility. It is quite correct to say that mobility was also available for the other two devices: smartphones and tablets. Still, laptops overcame those two devices in screen width, comfortableness, and mainly a device for information gathering (Sage, Piazzini, Downey, & Ewing, 2020). Compared to smartphones, several studies showed that laptops gave students more learning value and engagement other than not representing distractions or being detriments as smartphones (Albò, Hernández-Leo, & Oliver, 2019; Tossel, Kortum, Shepard, Rahmati, & Zhong, 2015).

The study also showed that students favored Zoom in the first place (53.3%), followed by Blackboard (44.3%), and finally came MS Teams and Google Meet (1.3% and 0.7%, respectively). The findings are similar to those of Ibrahim et al. (2021) concerning the preference for the Zoom platform by students. The results represented an exciting result about the Zoom platform. Zoom, as MS Teams and Google Meet, is new to KSU students, and it just appeared during the pandemic compared with Blackboard, which has been there for more than a decade. Blackboard is a complete learning management system, while Zoom is mainly a video-conferencing platform with some learning tools such as whiteboards, screen sharing, polling, and chatting. There are reasons for favoring Zoom, as Jacques et al. (2020) listed: ease of use and easy accessibility. Further investigations are needed, mainly qualitative studies, to probe more possible causes behind student preferences.

As for gender differences in devices used in ERL, the results indicated that both men and women students mostly used laptops in their learning, followed by smartphones. Differences existed in the use of desktops and tablets. Women used tablets more than men did in their education, and only a small percentage (1.3%) of them stated that they used desktops. In preferences, no gender differences existed regarding the favorableness of devices. Both genders put laptops first in their recommendation for devices in ERL. A difference existed in other devices: smartphones, desktops, and tablets. Men preferred desktops in the second place, followed by tablets and finally smartphones, while their women counterparts put tablets second, followed by smartphones and eventually desktops. The interesting finding is about smartphones. Although they came second in use by both men and women participants, men put them last in the recommendation, and women preferred them in the third place. Future research should address this point, as mentioned earlier.

The findings of the devices used and preferences demonstrated asserted without doubt that mobile learning (m-learning) was dominant whether in students’ use or choices. M-learning
is the use of tools like mobiles, laptops, and other such technological devices for language teaching and learning (Sung, Lee, Yang, & Chang, 2019). In the future, any planned policy addressing digital learning, contrary to emergency shifting to remote learning, should consider m-learning devices, particularly laptops and smartphones.

A gender difference existed in the preferences of platforms. Women favored Blackboard over Zoom whereas their men counterparts were the opposite. MS Teams and Google Meet came with little or even no use. Qualitative studies are recommended here as well for exploring the reasons behind this difference. Future planned integration of digital learning at KSU should consider the features that both platforms offer and not expand the adoption of platforms that do not attract students. Such a thing will save the resources and help in utilizing them in better ways.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The current unprecedented pandemic has dramatically changed the way the higher education was designed and delivered. Language students are one of the most affected elements of the changes due to the pandemic. Their behaviors and experiences during the pandemic are worth studying and investigating and for insightful analysis and comprehension of the lessons the students have learned in their language classrooms. The goal of the study was to reveal students’ experiences with the ERL. It aimed at investigating the devices they used and the platforms they preferred. It sought to examine whether gender differences existed in these two variables.

The results of the study showed that laptops and smartphones were the dominant devices students used in ERL. They also indicated that male and female students preferred laptops in their ERL, and interestingly smartphones came last in students’ preferences. As for the platforms used in the ERL, the findings revealed that the Zoom was the most preferred platform. A gender difference existed in device recommendation, namely desktops and tablets. Another gender difference was found in platform preferences. Female students preferred Blackboard over Zoom.

The findings of this study would help policymakers and decision makers regarding the inevitable integration of digital learning of language and conversion of some courses to be delivered entirely online when the pandemic is over. Further investigations are needed to address the differences in the study and other variables related to students’ experiences. The foremost among them is the acceptance of digital learning, the evaluation of teachers’ preparedness in the digital environment, and students’ acquisition and performance in virtual language learning.

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The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. Educause review, 27, 1-12.


Means of Foreign Language Teaching during Covid-19 Pandemic in Ukraine

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Abstract
The article deals with the description and analysis of the most important methods of foreign language teaching. The authors describe teaching English in Ukraine during the global pandemic caused by the spread of coronavirus disease Covid-19 in early spring 2020. The study aims at reviewing the most important works of Ukrainian and foreign scholars. They describe the most modern methods of teaching English in higher educational institutions of Ukraine. The scholars pay particular attention to the description of the latest English teaching methods, which they use at Uzhhorod National University. The observation process allowed us to summarize information about the features of distance learning at Uzhhorod National University. Analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, abstraction generalization, and the descriptive method are applied. The study found out the educational process has been reformed in Ukrainian universities by European quality requirements for education: informatization-globalization of academic space, integration of functions in modern education, establishing Ukrainian universities cooperation with European and Eastern educational institutions in the field of education and research as well as changes in the educational process associated with the rapid spread of Covid-19, which forced the entire civilized world to seek new types of learning, new methods, and tools. During the pandemic, it is vital to provide personality-oriented education. This knowledge provides optimal conditions for the harmonious development of each student. Further research into the latest computer technologies for foreign language teaching may be a prospect.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, information technologies in the educational process, modern methods of teaching foreign languages, Ukraine

Introduction

Teaching means a complex of training aids and technical appliances with the help of which teacher and students intercommunicate. Teaching includes basic categories of methodology. They facilitate the processes of teaching and language acquisition, and make them more effective. The method distinguishes training aids as well as audio-visual and technical aids. Teaching means comprise the content of the typical study-methodological complex, intended for work with a concrete contingent of students under the conditions of a particular profile of teaching. The obligatory components of the complex are a textbook, audio-visual supplement in computer programs, and video films.

At the present stage of development of science, it is safe to say that it is no longer enough to translate from a foreign language and apply this knowledge in practice, using for teaching ordinary textbooks made in print. Today the educational process in Ukrainian universities is being reformed by the European requirements for the quality of education: informatization-globalization of the educational space, integration of functions in modern education, the establishment of cooperation by Ukrainian universities with European and Eastern educational institutions in the field of teaching and research, international exchanges, etc., as well as changes in the educational process associated with the rapid spread of Covid-19, which forced the entire civilized world to seek new types of learning, new methods, and tools.

Under such conditions, the number of studies, the subject of the use of information technology in the educational process, has increased significantly. Researchers of such as Adami (2020), Akut (2020), Polat (2002), Todorova (2011), Tarnopilsky (2019), and others. HEIs in Europe and Ukraine as well are turning a university curriculum from the outdated conventional objective (no E-Learning form) to new high-tech contexts of global changes (fully E-Learning). The people are witness of the fact, how the pandemic Covid-19 lockdown caused the necessity of distant learning. (Babelyuk 2020).

Literature Review

Today it is impossible to imagine the educational process without the use of the World Wide Web. Kolonuto notes that World Wide Web "allows you to go on a virtual journey around the world, participate in international competitions and Olympiads, organize and conduct joint telecommunications projects." (p. 92). The latest tools and capabilities make us independent, allow us not to limit ourselves to space and time, to be in the usual for us in the comfort zone, and it is easier to overcome the psychological barrier that often appears in direct communication. Technical teaching aids provide students with access to non-traditional sources of information, increase the efficiency of independent work. They also provide completely new opportunities for creativity, and implement fundamentally new forms and methods of teaching. Computers significantly expand the capabilities of teachers, contribute to the individualization of learning. They enhance the cognitive activity of students, adapt the learning process to the individual characteristics of students.

"Each participant of the educational process gets the opportunity to work in their mode, to choose a pace at which the material is optimally assimilated. Electronic textbooks, electronic audio, and video tools and teaching materials, have access to and use Internet resources, which contain a huge amount of necessary resources." (Bilichenko, 2019, p. 27).
Currently, the possibilities of using information resources and technologies in the educational process are almost limitless.

Bilichenko singled out the need to use current conditions of information technology, Internet resources with the possibility of choosing acceptable for each individual. He believes that:

Modern scientific and technical advances make it possible to use the information, and reference materials on electronic media, electronic textbooks, electronic audio, and video tools and teaching materials, access and use Internet resources, which contain a huge amount of necessary resources. (p. 27).

One of the most common means of information technology is


The case-study method is worth mentioning (method of solving specific situations). "When students explore and discuss real situations in active communication, they discuss in groups and solve problems prepared by the teacher." (Bilichenko, 2019, p. 28). Many interesting scientific works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists appeared during the spread of coronavirus disease in the spring of 2020. They draw attention to the peculiarities of learning and teaching English in a global pandemic (see, for example, Adami et al, 2020; Akut, 2020; Alyekseyeyeva, Chaiuk, & Galitska, 2020; Babelyuk, 2019, Babelyuk, Koliasa, Kushlyk, & SmaglII, 2020; Huang et al, 2020; Katernina, 2020; Khalfan, Batool, & Shehzad, 2020; Martin, 2020; Sanchez & Inaki, 2020, etc.).

Methods
Specific research objectives of the scientific article led to the choice of methods and techniques of analysis. The teachers use a set of generally philosophical and generally scientific methods. In particular, the researchers used empirical and analytical methods: the observation process allowed to summarize information about the features of distant learning at Uzhhorod National University. At the practical level, they used general procedures such as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, abstraction, and generalization. The scholars also applied descriptive method to analyze and systematize the achievements of Ukrainian and foreign researchers in the field of methods of teaching and learning foreign languages, including English. The study suggests the need to move from the absence of e-learning to complete e-learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data Collection Procedures
The use of multimedia technology in listening classes is particularly productive. Developed presentations in PowerPoint allow you to represent new vocabulary, focus on the features of lexical and grammatical constructions; to systematize the heard information in the form of schemes and tables for training students to make the lecture summary; correctly and logically compose and quickly record the primary information; visualize complex concepts, clearly demonstrate the processes and phenomena referred to in the text. The material significantly expands the capabilities of conventional textbooks due to audio and video, and animation effects.
Auditory and visual channels of perception are activated, which allows increasing not only the amount of perceived information but also the strength of its assimilation.

Tsepko and Androsyuk (2020) believed that "the methodology of teaching the humanities in Ukrainian higher education institutions is currently undergoing significant transformations. This is especially true of teaching English both as part of a general university course and in English for professional purposes." (p. 39). They distinguish several modern approaches to learning English: multimedia, discursiveness, and online communication, interactive approach, competency approach, stimulating the continuous use of English, and seductiveness, subject-subjectivity (teacher-student partnership). Multimedia, online communication, and an interactive process, closely intertwined, are almost essential today. Multimedia, according to Tsepko and Androsyuk, can be of two types: 1) aimed at independent student work (watching movies, working with distance learning courses, working with programs for different English lessons); 2) aimed at acquiring foreign language competencies (group review and listening to English-language materials and their discussion in a mini-group, implementation of individual or group projects and their representation in class, etc.). Online communication is designed to engage discursive markers and is most related to the practice of language use, rather than the ability to translate or retell unrelated text. The interactive approach became especially common in the early 2000s. Still, it was actively updated in the pandemic context, as the possibilities of touch panels, whiteboards, projectors, various online platforms are virtually limitless and can completely replace classroom learning (Tsepko & Androsyuk, 2020).

Smovzhenko’s (2014) concept is exciting and perspective, which proposes to involve project learning in the educational process, which consists of the "project goal – the result (article, abstract, report, videos, etc.); subject of information search – step-by-step search with definition of results; analytical work on the collected facts – conclusions – correction, if necessary, further search for information" (p. 246). It identifies the following types of projects: research projects that require a well-thought-out structure, a defined goal, the relevance of the project for all participants, social significance, well-thought-out methods of work; creative projects, which usually do not have a well-thought-out structure, it develops, obeying the interests of project participants; game projects, the system of which remains open until their completion: participants take on specific roles; information projects aimed at collecting information, its analysis and generalization of facts, require a clear structure, opportunities for systematic correction during project activities; practically oriented, which are marked by a clearly defined from the beginning the results of the project participants, focused on the social interests of the participants themselves (newspaper, document, video, play, action program, draft law, reference material, etc.) (Smovzhenko, 2014). The relevance of such projects today is undeniable, because they had prepared them at home. The results reflect using a variety of modern technologies. The teacher himself determines the problems of the project, but most often, students suggest a topic. Accordingly, project tasks involve significant preparatory work for the teacher: it is necessary to think about what language material should be repeated or discuss with students. A vital criterion is the separate work of students, and the priority is to consider the current problem, which requires integrated knowledge to solve it. The project work is under application at all levels of mastering English as a foreign language during distant learning. The results obtained after the application of the project method have theoretical, practical, moral, cognitive significance.
Romaniuk (2016), describing the current state of e-learning tools in a foreign language, identified a number of the most popular modern distance learning platforms (Moodle, Google Classroom) and online services (LinguaLeo, Lang-8). A detailed analysis of the three dedicated distance learning platforms Moodle, Google Classroom allowed the author to come to the critical conclusion that:

“All of them are suitable for developing foreign language teaching methods, as they have all the functions necessary to effectively develop reading and speaking skills. Listening and writing, and therefore, the choice of one of them will depend entirely on the personal preferences of each teacher.” (Romaniuk, 2016, p. 323).

In a pandemic, Ukrainian universities combine traditional forms of online learning with Moodle learning management system technologies. The system provides an opportunity to implement the latest pedagogical, psychological, methodological developments. In the process of studying the courses, "Moodle" serves as a reliable platform for viewing presentations on particular topics of disciplines, testing, self-study of additional theoretical material, performing tasks for independent work, discussing discussion issues on forums, and more. The use of this distant form of learning provides flexibility (the choice of a convenient pace of learning the course material, taking into account the training). Conveniently, that there are no time restrictions for mastering the material. The distance learning system also has more significant opportunities to control the quality of learning, which involves the use of self-control, the absence of psychological barriers.

Currently, teachers apply many recommendations to study the Moodle system in detail. It is worth mentioning the Guidelines for the development of e-learning materials in the Moodle system, edited by Burlutsky (2017). Many interest facts include Methodical recommendations for students of distance learning system of postgraduate education edited by Isaenko (2014), and others as well as work by Ghounane (2020).

The Moodle platform has many advantages. Uzhhorod National University actively used that platform, and the various activities provided by the system have become crucial for conducting foreign language classes in distance learning. This module allows the teacher the opportunity to develop tests containing questions of different types, including multiple-choice, matching, short answer, and numerical. When learning a foreign language, mini-tests are actively used in individual tasks or at the end of the topic. Tests are also a component of testing knowledge during the exam.

Let's focus on the characteristics of some activities in Moodle:

Wiki

This is a module of so-called active elements, which allows multiple users to work on one document at a time, make changes to it without deleting the previous version. This activity is vital for the joint compilation and editing of a synopsis on a particular topic: each student has the opportunity to add their material, edit existing. The teacher, controlling the activities of participants, has the opportunity to evaluate the activities of each student, to correct mistakes. The action of Wiki, to some extent, reproduces the conditions of teamwork in the audience: in
real time, you can discuss the discussion aspects of the topic.

Survey

The module *Questionnaire* allows you to conduct various types of questionnaires for students to check the effectiveness of learning and learning material.

Glossary

For students of philological specialties, this module is fundamental and necessary, which allows you to place a dictionary of terms for the course. The glossary can be presented in the form of a dictionary ("term – definition"), as well as in the form of a task (students can fill it in themselves with further evaluation of their work). The glossary allows you to represent the definitions related to all course content (the term described in the dictionary automatically becomes a link). This ensures the systematic nature of the studied material. The *Glossary* component for a foreign language teacher is an essential tool for acquainting students with new vocabulary, checking the learned vocabulary.

Assignment

This module allows students to set tasks that require training in electronic form, followed by uploading them to the Moodle server. The most common charges are detailed answers to questions, projects, short messages. The system allows you to rate for completed jobs. The teacher used this type of activity during the study of a foreign language to carry out traditional styles of control: written tests, written testing. The teacher writes a response to the student's answer and gives a grade for it, individually advise the student. However, the most critical advantage, we believe, is the ability to create and propose tasks aimed at self-repetition of the studied material.

Poll (Choice)

The *Poll* module allows you to ask questions with the ability to choose one correct answer. This module is often using for student voting.

Database

A powerful tool for creating documents, drawings, tables, diagrams, and the ability to download literature from the course. Students and teachers can fill the database module allows participants to create, maintain and search for sets of specific records of the same type. The teacher defines the structure of the paper as a set of fields. Field types include a check box, radio buttons, a pop-up menu, text areas, URLs, images, and a downloaded file. Working with the database is especially important for the teacher's activities. It helps to create a standard collection of web links, provides access to all components of educational material, which in real-time can replace a library collection of books.

Tests (Quiz)

It is one of the favorite types of work among students of philology. The system allows you to download tests with one correct answer or with several. Tests are the most effective forms of control testing students' knowledge during distant education. This is the element of the interaction system between teacher and student. Testing is very viral among students because the current survey in the form of tests helps systematize knowledge, structure the material, get grades "here" and "now." This module inables developing tests comprising questions of different
types, including multiple-choice, matching, short answer, and numerical. The teachers actively used mini-tests in individual tasks or at the end of the topic. Tests are also a component of testing knowledge during the exam.

Lesson

The Lesson module allows you to present the material in content modules, each of which is placed on a separate page and at the end contains questions for students’ self-control. This element helps to create conditions for independent study of the topic, to implement a differentiated approach to learning a foreign language.

Forum

Forum is one of the most common elements of studying the course, which allows students to express their thoughts, ask questions, ask the teacher, discuss with students and the teacher in particular. The Forum module is connected to e-mail, and then the student receives all messages in the forum by e-mail. During the study of a foreign language, the teacher, with the help of this module, solves the current topical issues of various kinds related to the course’s study (organizational, problem issues, placement of ads, etc.).

Chat

The course element is prevalent among university students because communication takes place in real-time. It allows you to ask short questions and get instant answers in text mode. The communication format reproduces the possibilities of communication in the audience. Still, it also has a significant advantage: the chat stores all the conversations, which allows you to return to them if necessary.

The use of activities through the Moodle learning management system helps to increase the point of teaching and has a positive impact on the effectiveness of learning a foreign language.

The International Economic Relations Faculty of Uzhhorod National University surveyed students on their assessing effective use of various activities on the Moodle platform. Students had the opportunity to choose from five activities in distant learning as an effective tool for processing materials and testing knowledge (self-control). The survey was attended by 258 students in 1–5 courses majoring in "International Economic Relations" and "Philology. Applied Linguistics." The results of the study showed that 122 students (47%) prefer tests, 64 (25%) – forums, 31 (12%) – Wiki, 27 (10%) – glossary, and 14 students (5%) would more often performed different types task.
Interactive forms of learning, such as group assignments, seminars, and online discussions include web-quests, arouses interest, provides practical orientation, and increases the course’s effectiveness.

Of course, the choice of platform and online distance learning tools depends on the teacher. Numerous advantages of online synchronous means of communication, they allow maintaining personal (audiovisual) contact with students. They also create a situation of spontaneous speech, close to the natural environment, provide timely support of voice communication through instant feedback from the audience.

In a pandemic the main tasks are to implement personality-oriented technology, to create optimal conditions for the formation of individual language personality of the student, the development of his communicative competence.

The use of technical means in teaching a foreign language significantly affects the intensity of the educational process. The computer also provides comprehensive control over the learning process. The Internet creates unique opportunities for those who learn a foreign language, allows you to use authentic texts, listen and communicate with native speakers. That creates a natural language environment. Communication through a computer monitor eliminates various negative psychological factors: fear of making a mistake, articulating their thoughts aloud. Such obstacles can prevent the student from showing their actual knowledge. The use of a computer provides many technical specialized possibilities, creates a situation of informal dialogue, and this makes it an essential tool for student-teacher interaction. The newest specialized technologies of training allow to organize independent actions of each student, and the task of the teacher – to provide effective interaction.

The attitude of teachers and students to the lecture as the primary classic type of work in higher education also changed at the beginning of March 2020. During the spread of Covid-19, teachers changed their lecturing approach because the student was tired of sitting in front of the screen for 90 minutes, losing attention and concentration. Thus, a lecture-conversation develops, where 70 minutes the teacher explains new material, students watch videos, and 20 minutes is left to discuss with students. They express their thoughts, visions, discuss, clarify unclear points, and during the lecture can write questions in forums and chats. This lecture must be accompanied by a presentation in MS PowerPoint and posted on the Moodle platform. According to Kukharenko and Bondarenko (2020), "allowed not only to ensure the transition from machine learning to master the skills to acquire new knowledge and skills but also to optimize the educational process." (pp. 172-173).

The approach to conducting seminars, which are mainly aimed at discussing problematic issues, has also changed. Students grouped into micro-groups, made collective decisions, reasonably defended their own opinions, and had the opportunity to present their results on online boards. Such learning is "active, team-based when students interact with classmates and the teacher. It develops divergent thinking, motivates students, they are interested in interaction and achievement of personal and group results" (Kukharenko & Bondarenko, 2020, p. 173).
course, the students don’t want to turn on the video camera. Then the teacher cannot see the reaction and also does not see if the student is working in a certain period.

The use of interactive forms of learning, such as group assignments, seminars, and online discussions, the use of web-quests, arouses interest, provides practical orientation, and increases the effectiveness of foreign language learning.

Discussion

The use of technical means in teaching a foreign language significantly affects the intensity of the educational process. The computer also provides comprehensive control over the learning process. The Internet creates unique opportunities for those who learn a foreign language, allows you to use authentic texts, listen and communicate with native speakers. It creates a natural language environment. Communication through a computer monitor eliminates various negative psychological factors: fear of making a mistake, articulating their thoughts aloud. Such obstacles can prevent the student from showing their actual knowledge. By communicating on the computer, the student can get rid of embarrassment and try to show the maximum of their learning. The use of a computer provides many technical possibilities, creates a situation of informal dialogue, and this makes it an essential tool for student-teacher interaction. The newest specialized technologies of training allow to organize separate actions of each student, and the teacher’s task – to provide effective interaction.

Uzhhorod National University has developed several educational projects that improve the learning of foreign languages, especially English, in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. Uzhhorod National University published these projects regularly on the official website, at the Media Center, on the web pages of faculties and individual departments. Foreign language training is actively represented on the Zoom and Google Meet platforms. These platforms provide an opportunity for active two-way communication between teachers and students. Foreign lecturers, native speakers of foreign languages studied at Uzhhorod National University, including English, are also invited through electronic communication. The organization of international scientific conferences in the form of distance learning also contributes to improving English language learning due to the limitations associated with Covid-19. For example, the International Scientific Conference "Phraseology in the Context of Related Sciences" was held online at the Faculty of Philology of Uzhhorod National University in October 2020, during which researchers delivered their Reports in seven languages, including English. It is valuable that scientists from Ukraine and foreign countries in their research touched, among other problems and issues, on the new terminology that emerged during the coronavirus pandemic. Such reports of scientists combined cognitive and educational factors, and this is extremely important for students.

Uzhhorod National University has joined the "Project to Promote Academic Integrity in Ukraine" (SAIUP) "Honesty Begins with You." In this project, there were meetings with students, heads of courses of all faculties. The aim was to form a group of "agents of influence" who would acquaint their classmates with the principles, basics of academic integrity (students need it when writing term papers, dissertations), disseminate information about it in their faculties, and learn relevant information is essential to learn English language, knowledge of
which contributes to acquaintance with the experience of foreign countries on this issue in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Uzhhorod National University also successfully selected for the Academic Integrity and Quality of Education Initiative project. The University implemented to the American Councils for International Education with the support of the US Embassy in Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, and the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. The scholars surveyed 1, 629 students and 429 teachers, and the results of this survey, new methods and tools have been introduced to ensure the quality of education at Uzhhorod National University, in particular during the study of English in a pandemic.

The context of distant education associated with the worldwide distribution of Covid-19, and the priority is technical means of learning: audio, video, and devices for their reproduction, slides, photographs, diagrams, drawings, inscriptions, tables, demonstrated through technological devices, other materials supplied through computers, smartphones, tablets, etc. (Tarnopolsky & Kabanova, 2019).

Conclusion
Today, more than ever, distant education has been helped by scientific and technological advances in the computerization of all areas of human activity. Computer technology allows you to solve various educational problems: understanding of language phenomena, formation of linguistic abilities through language and speech exercises, automation of speech and speech actions, creating interesting communication situations. Each multimedia learning tool differs in its originality. Still, it is universal only in the complex application of the latest information technology learning tools, taking into account their characteristics and didactic capabilities. Their use in foreign language teaching will increase the efficiency and quality of the educational process. During the pandemic, it is essential to provide personality-oriented learning. This learning provides optimal conditions for the harmonious development of each student as an individual, a person, the formation of his subjective experience of personal communicative competence, personal growth, and self-realization. Learning interaction involves a partnership of participants in the educational process, based on the ideas of humanism, stimulation of the creativity, and self-realization of both students and teachers, especially in learning foreign languages in difficult times of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

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Engaging Students Online with Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic effected a sudden shift to online teaching, prompting teachers to implement many uncommon or even unusual teaching techniques in this unforeseen context. This precipitous move to online teaching has radically altered our teaching practices, where teachers have had to either completely do away with traditional practices or modify them in significant ways. One of the primary concerns of online teaching voiced by many teachers is to hold students’ interest and keep them engaged in the virtual classroom. Another challenge has been to make students interact with each other and the teacher. The authors of this paper believe that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) addresses these concerns head-on. There are two reasons for this: first, its emphasis on real-life language through meaningful tasks; and second, it is student-centered. This paper provides a brief background of TBLT and technology-mediated TBLT. It will show how some coursebook materials could be used in TBLT to help online learners improve their language skills. The paper also outlines with examples how technology-mediated tasks could be deployed to encourage learners to use language in productive ways. Finally, the authors discuss some of the anticipated challenges concerning the application of TBLT in online teaching and learning contexts.

Keywords: collaborative tasks, online interaction, online teaching, student-centered teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, technology-facilitated tasks

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic effected a sudden shift to online teaching, prompting teachers to implement many uncommon or even unusual teaching techniques in this unforeseen context. This precipitous move to online teaching has radically altered teaching practices, where teachers have had to either completely do away with traditional practices or adapt them in significant ways. The new-age digital technologies are attempting to address every educational need in the current scenario. Innovative applications and hi-tech platforms have enabled teachers to enhance the language learning ability of their students. Further, the forced remote teaching necessitated by Covid-19 has compelled educators, institutions, and organizations to quickly upgrade teaching technologies and create awareness of how these could be adapted and integrated into their particular contexts.

Among the different methods that have been used for online language learning, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has yielded promising results. Though TBLT is not a new method in language teaching, research on its application in virtual contexts has been limited. Let us first look at what TBLT is, and then discuss how it can be integrated with technology in online learning.

Literature Review

Definition of Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching, as the name suggests, relies entirely on communicative tasks, and has its roots in the Communicative Language Teaching method and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). TBLT came as a viable option to transcend the limitations of methods that focused on form. One of the limitations noticed by educators was the students’ inability to communicate adequately in English despite having learnt the accurate use of grammatical forms taught in the Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) approach. Prabhu’s (1987) success in his Communicational Teaching Project in primary and secondary schools of Bangalore prompted many researchers and academicians to use TBLT, since the focus of this method is almost entirely on meaning rather than on grammatical structures. TBLT does not look at language learning as processing internally with grammar systems, expressions and vocabulary. Instead, TBLT proponents believe that learners would be able to acquire language easily if they work through meaningful tasks that prompt them to use the target language in natural contexts (Long, 1985; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). The tasks and outcomes should have some kind of practical significance and application. Rod Ellis, an exponent of TBLT, also emphasizes that TBLT can make use of learners’ natural abilities and help learners acquire language incidentally when they engage with language as a meaning-making tool in tasks.

A Task in Task-Based Language Teaching

A ‘task’ has been defined differently by different researchers. A task, according to the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (2010), is “an activity which is designed to help achieve a particular learning goal” (p. 584). Task is defined as “a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward” by Long (1985, p. 89). In other words, a task is many different things that people do in their daily lives and that there should be an apparent significance to ‘real-world’ activities. Prabhu (1987) defines task as “an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information”, while a task, according to Breen (1987), is a “structured language learning endeavour” (p. 23) and refers to a variety of...
workplans, from simple exercises to complex lengthy activities such as problem-solving. He also argues that tasks provide the best means for teachers and students to jointly negotiate the content of a course (Breen, 1989).

Willis (1996) described task as a “goal-oriented activity” (p. 53) where the target language is used by the learner to accomplish a communicative purpose. Task, according to Skehan (1996), is an activity that has meaning as its principal focus; tasks should relate to real-world activities and the assessment of a task depends on its outcome. Lee (2000) defines task as a classroom activity in which learners achieve the outcome only by interacting mutually using language and by focusing on the exchange of meaning. For Ellis (2003), task consists of “a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome” (p.16). A task, as defined by Nunan (2004), is:

a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form (p. 4).

He also differentiates between real-world or target tasks and pedagogical tasks. While target tasks denote the real-world language use outside the classroom, pedagogical tasks imply the tasks that take place in the classroom. Van den Branden (2006) defines task as, “an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language” (p. 4). According to Lai and Li (2011), “Tasks should be holistic activities in which learners make use of their language and (cross-) cultural and communicative resources to achieve some nonlinguistic outcome through stretching their linguistic, (cross-) cultural, internet-based communication, and digital literacy skills” (p. 501). Whatever the definition be, the underlying common features of tasks would be that they are meaning-oriented, communicative in nature, and consider both cognitive capacities and linguistic abilities of a learner.

**Types of Tasks**

There are a number of task types given by TBLT proponents. For the purpose of this paper, the authors will look at the kinds of tasks mentioned by Ellis (2003) and Willis (2007). Ellis (2003) identifies the following kinds of tasks based on their characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Characteristics of tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-way vs. two-way</td>
<td>The way communication happens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open vs. closed</td>
<td>Many possible solutions vs. one possible solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergent vs. divergent</td>
<td>A single outcome of the task vs. different possible outcomes based on their opinions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Situational vs. interactional authenticity</td>
<td>Real-life/target tasks vs. tasks based only on interaction without any situational authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input-based vs. output-based</td>
<td>Tasks that involve receptive skills vs. productive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused vs. unfocused</td>
<td>One intended for students to practice using a particular</td>
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</table>
grammatical structure vs. one intended to elicit general samples of language as learners communicate while doing a task.

Willis and Willis (2007) categorize tasks into the following seven types:

- **Listing** – brainstorming/fact-finding.
  - e.g., things, qualities, people, features, etc.
- **Ordering and sorting** – sequencing, ranking and classifying.
  - e.g., sequencing story pictures, ranking according to cost, popularity, etc.
- **Matching** – listening and identifying, listening and doing, matching phrases/description to pictures, etc.
- **Comparing** – finding similarities and differences.
  - e.g., comparing ways of greetings, ‘spot the difference’ activities, etc.
- **Problem-solving** – logic puzzles, real-life problems, etc.
  - e.g., logic problems, giving advice, predicting a story ending, etc.
- **Sharing personal experience** – storytelling, anecdotes, opinions, reactions, etc.
  - e.g., early schooldays, embarrassing moments, personality quizzes, etc.
- **Projects and creative tasks** – doing and reporting a survey, planning a TV show, etc.

**Task-based Learning Models**

Based on how tasks are used, various models of TBLT can be differentiated. The model suggested by Willis (1996) comprises pre-task, task-cycle and language focus. The modified model by Jane and Dave Willis (Willis & Willis, 2007) consists of pre-tasks, tasks and post-tasks. On the other hand, the models suggested by Long (2015), Norris (2009), and Van den Branden, Bygate, and Norris (2009) have pedagogic tasks sequenced in order of difficulty (as cited in González-Lloret, 2014). However, this model entails analysis, task selection and sequencing them into pedagogic tasks, materials and instruction development, teaching, assessment and program evaluation (Norris, 2009). It is important to note that Ellis (2003) is of the opinion that an approach based on ‘themes’ or ‘topics’ is more useful compared to a needs-based approach (as Long has suggested) for foreign language learners. Though many models have been recommended by various TBLT proponents, the models of Ellis (2003) and Willis and Willis (2007) have been considered for this research paper.

**TBLT Model Proposed by Rod Ellis (2003)**

Ellis presented a model that focuses on meaning and real-world activities that demand learners to process language for real situations. He also proposed a framework with task as its principal element sequenced pedagogically in three stages: pre-task, main task and post-task. The pre-task phase has all the different activities that learners do to plan the performance of the task. In the during-task phase, different options related to task performance are planned by the teacher, who might want students to perform the task under a specified time, or allow them to look at the input data as they do the task, or introduce a surprise element in the task.

The third phase, post-task, contains activities such as ‘consciousness-raising’ activities to follow-up on task performance and to repeat the task. This phase also encourages learner reflection on their task performance. According to Ellis (2006), “only the ‘during task’ phase is
obligatory in task-based teaching” (p. 20). However, other phases play an important role in making sure that the learners perform tasks to optimum effect.

Table 2. *A framework for designing task-based lessons (Ellis, 2003)*

| Pre-task (consciousness-raising activities) | • Framing the activity  
• (e.g., establishing the outcome of the task)  
• Regulating planning time  
• Doing a similar task |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| During task                              | • Time pressure  
• Regulating topic |
| Post-task (Focused communication activities) | • Number of participants  
• Learner report  
• Repeat task  
• reflection |


Willis’s (1996, 2007) TBLT model has three phases for instructors to design a task. First, there is a pre-task phase in which learners are introduced to the topic and the task. They are introduced to the target language and are provided the vocabulary and structures essential to complete the task. The teacher may also show a model of the task to the students. The next phase, the task cycle, comprises a task phase, a planning phase and a report phase. During the task phase, students discover the structures of language and vocabulary they should use based on the given model and learn from one another. Here, the teacher takes the role of a facilitator ensuring task progress and participation from all groups. In the planning phase, learners make plans on how to report to the other groups about the work given by the instructor. In the report phase, learners report on the task either orally or in written form and compare the results with other groups. In the last phase, which is the language focus or focus on form, learners’ language is analyzed (e.g. through consciousness-raising activities), and they are made to notice the important aspects of language items. Finally, to improve their language accuracy, they are given oral or written language practice.

Table 3. *Task-based lesson plan model (Willis, 1996, p. 38)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction to topic and tasks</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases.  
Learners may be exposed to examples. |
| **Task cycle** |
| Task | Planning | Report |
| Students do the task in pairs or small groups. Teacher monitors; mistakes do not matter. | Students prepare to report. Accuracy is important, so the teacher stands by and gives advice. | Students exchange or present report. Teacher listens and then comments. |
**Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching**

The new framework of TBLT which is called ‘technology-mediated TBLT’ talks about how “task-based language teaching can be fitted integrally into the new language education and digital technology realities” (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014, p. 1). Many distinguished researchers such as Doughty and Long (2003, 2009), Skehan (2003) and González-Lloret (2003, 2014) have acknowledged TBLT as a suitable framework that could be incorporated into technology to shape instructional designs for learners. Shrooten (2006) mentioned that there are innumerable advantages of integrating technology into language education including accommodating different learner-needs and abilities, motivating and involving learners greatly. González-Lloret (2007) developed modules based on second language acquisition principles and incorporating methodological principles suggested by Doughty and Long (2003). These modules contain task-based, computer-assisted materials for high-intermediate to advanced language learners.

Al-Balushi (2010) and Thomas and Reinders (2010) delved into the correlation between tasks and technology-facilitated communication. Al-Balushi (2010) explored task-based, synchronous, computer-mediated communication among EFL learners. He examines how students interact through technology and negotiate for meaning; the correlation between interaction time and task type; and students’ insights into technology-facilitated TBLT. Similarly, the collection of articles in the book edited by Thomas and Reinders (2010) deal with ‘synergies’ between TBLT and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and recommend ways to design and carry out tasks with various technologies to promote language learning.

Technology, according to Reinders and White (2010), helps us in creating and delivering language learning materials in an effective way. Lai and Li (2011) examine how TBLT could be employed in technology-facilitated environments and also delineate several critical issues for further research in the area. Thomas (2013) discusses pedagogical implications associated with CALL and TBLT, and highlights the importance of CALL and TBLT researchers working together to improve planning, classifying and understanding tasks. González-Lloret (2015) provides hands-on information about the successful integration of technology into TBLT and the development of technology-mediated materials. Ziegler (2016) too is of the view that technology-mediated TBLT enhances second language performance. He also outlines that technology plays a great role in helping us realize the positive impact of TBLT features such as task design and task implementation on the success of second language acquisition.

González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) have pointed out that technology could be integrated by using any available task-based model. However, complete integration entails three conditions:

1) First, one should define what ‘task’ is to distinguish between a traditional classroom...
exercise and a virtual learning activity. The tasks in computer-mediated environment should focus on meaning rather than on form. They should be student-centered, reflect students’ needs and wants and their digital skills. They should allow for higher-order learning by presenting a variety of opportunities to make students use real-life language and reflect on their learning process.

2) Second condition is that we should be aware of the fact that “technology is never neutral”, and integrating technology into our syllabus brings along a variety of real-world tasks which “should become targets tasks and part of the curriculum”.

3) Third, technology should be fully integrated into a TBLT curriculum at all levels, right from needs analysis to assessment and evaluation.

Task-based language teaching is one among many other methods to facilitate writing and speaking skills in an engaging way. A number of researchers (Colpin & Van Gorp, 2007; Prabhu, 1987; Sachs, 2007) have employed collaborative writing techniques using TBLT to improve the writing skills of students. Research (Prabhu, 1987; Barkley, Cross & Major, 2014) has shown that collaborative learning promotes student-centered learning, active interaction among learners and engages them in such a way that students take the lead for deeper learning. In addition, the successful performance of a task gives students a sense of achievement. Collaborative technology-mediated tasks also foster better communication among learners and students get motivated to enhance their language skills (González-Lloret, 2020).

The roles of students and teachers in TBLT change as the latter become facilitators and focus on students’ needs. Teachers, according to Willis and Willis (2007), coordinate discussions, supervise pair/group work, and provide feedback on task performance. The important thing here is for the teacher to know to what extent they are responsible for facilitating language learning. Similarly, students play the role of active participants and become leaders in their own learning. Students, Van den Branden (2006) adds, negotiate course content or choose linguistic forms to perform tasks, thus becoming autonomous learners.
Richards and Rodgers (2004) say that teachers and learners are equally responsible for promoting classroom interaction in TBLT.

**Available Technologies and Task-Based Language Teaching**

Like other curricula, the TBLT curriculum is also based on analyzing the needs, wants and goals of learners. Additionally, technology-mediated TBLT requires the needs analysis (NA) of technological tools required to complete tasks, available technologies, learners’ technical skills, resources and support. This NA is essential, according to González-Lloret (2015), to identify tasks that are appropriate for the learners, language points associated with these tasks, and the language that learners already know. Many researchers and educators have successfully tried to integrate TBLT with various technologies such as emails, chats, forums, blogs, wikis, Google docs, social media, online games, etc. as they meet the principles of TBLT, which are: learning by interaction, focusing on meaning, using authentic language and having a clearly defined goal. In fact, these technologies have increased opportunities for collaboration among learners and changed the way teachers and learners look at second language writing (Lee, 2010; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). In a case study, Gasparini (2018), used WhatsApp for technology-mediated tasks and discovered that the experience increased student motivation and interest to learn the Italian language. Reinhardt (2020) suggested a set of new metaphors (such as Windows, Mirrors, Doorways and Playgrounds) to describe the capacity of each to provide different authentic learning opportunities. He also indicated that social media could be integrated effectively to promote second language teaching and learning as the collaborative and participatory nature of most web2.0 technologies give teachers and learners several contexts for interaction. Wikis are adopted in collaborative writing by a number of researchers and educators (Lamb, 2004; Richardson, 2010). TBLT was implemented online using Google Classroom by Tusino, Faridi, Saleh & Fitriati (2020) and their findings revealed that students perceived it positively and the method helped in improving students’ writing skills. Learning Management Systems such as Moodle, Blackboard, Google Classroom, Edmodo, etc. could be used to assign a range of tasks to students in online environments. Platforms such as MS Teams, Zoom or Google Meet can provide students with the required opportunities to interact with their peers and teachers.

As the focus of the authors of this paper is on integrating technology using a TBLT model to create language/technology tasks based on the already established needs and syllabuses, we have worked on what technologies could be incorporated into these tasks to improve students’ language skills and whether they possess the required digital skills to complete the tasks. To illustrate the point, if a target-task identified is opinion/discussion essay, we need to include the language required (giving personal opinion, disagreeing with someone, responding to an opinion, clarifying one’s opinion, etc.) by the students to complete the tasks successfully. Along with these, what we also need are technology tasks that enable students to perform language tasks on e-platforms effectively, such as organizing information on Google docs, doing a language task using H5P, Padlet or Kahoot, or making a PowerPoint presentation using Zoom on a laptop or a smartphone. In this manner, technology dependent pedagogic tasks not only allow students to develop their language skills but also play a role in developing digital literacy. Since not many studies have been conducted on the application of using TBLT in online EFL contexts, we have come up with a few ideas to implement TBLT on the speaking
and writing performance of students. But before we do that, let us first look at how coursebook materials can help teachers in planning for TBLT lessons.

**Adapting Coursebooks for Task-Based Language Teaching**

Academicians working in various educational institutions and using coursebooks produced by different publishers understand that not many textbooks organize their material following a TBLT approach. In such a case, teachers do not have to prepare TBLT materials afresh, but can fine-tune the existing activities – such as changing the order of activities, avoiding some activities, or adding relevant goals – to suit their context. These strategies would certainly help teachers prepare TBL lessons with minimum effort (Hobbs, as cited in Willis, 2011). The first thing to do is to identify given tasks in textbooks and find out ‘how task-like is it?’ Willis provides six questions to teachers to determine if an activity has all the qualities of a task. He says, “The more confidently we say ‘yes’ to each of the questions, the more task-like the activity” (p. 13).

- a) Does the activity engage learners’ interest?
- b) Is there a primary focus on meaning?
- c) Is there an outcome?
- d) Is success judged in terms of outcome?
- e) Is completion a priority?
- f) Does the activity relate to real-world activities?

Ellis (2009) extends the discussion by proposing the following criteria for a language activity to be considered a task:

- a) The primary focus of a task should be on meaning.
- b) A task should have a ‘gap’ (the learner needs to do something so as to complete the task).
- c) A task requires the learners to use their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources.
- d) A task should have a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language, i.e. the language should be just a medium to achieve the outcome.

In other words, the questions and statements given above by Willis (2011) and Ellis (2009) respectively lay down certain rules to design activities that promote real language use. After having looked at some fundamentals of technology-mediated TBLT, we will now see how to adapt different stages of the TBLT framework provided by Willis (2011) and Ellis (2003, 2009) in a virtual classroom.

We find all kinds of tasks mentioned by TBLT advocates in coursebooks. However, the difference in the application of these tasks in TBLT lies in their treatment. For example, we find numerous exercises, matching activities, giving opinions, problem-solving, ranking discussions, presentations, interviews, etc. We will see how a ‘task’ can be differentiated from ‘a grammar exercise’ on the basis of criteria given by Ellis (2009). Ellis says that a grammar exercise may satisfy criteria ‘b’ and ‘c’ mentioned above, but does not meet ‘a’ and ‘d’. While learners spontaneously use a variety of language structures in a task to achieve the outcomes, they learn a specific grammar structure in advance to do a grammar exercise. As virtual learning was new to most learners in our context, we initially created input-based tasks to provide some language input to make learners use English comfortably. Learners were then prompted to use the same
input in production tasks later in the virtual classroom. The primary aspect of technology-mediated TBLT is to chalk out the basic format of the lesson. Therefore, for our classroom tasks, we decided to adopt the model proposed by Willis (1996, 2007).

**TBLT Sample Lessons Using Online Collaboration**

Based on the essential principles of TBLT and Willis’s model of TBLT, some tasks have been prepared by the authors using available coursebook materials that are integrated with technology in order to improve the productive skills (speaking and writing) of Arab students in a virtual teaching context. The tasks are not designed with any particular linguistic focus but the aim is to facilitate EFL learners’ comprehension of the textbook topics and to enable them to speak on those topics.

*Lesson Plan One – adapted from Pathways 3 – Listening and Speaking (Chase & Johannsen, 2012)*

**Learner level: Advanced**

This task requires learners to listen to a text presented by the teacher to get the main ideas on the topic ‘Human Migration’. Students work in pairs/small groups to practice the given questions on migration and take turns to report their answers to the rest of the class after the pair/group work.

**Aims (Task outcome)**

- What are the reasons for people’s migration and what problems people face when they go to a new country?
- Finally, decide what are the two most common reasons for people’s migration and two common problems encountered by people when they migrate to other countries.

**Extra questions:**

- How does assimilation into a new culture mitigate their problems?
- What makes people happy in other countries?

This task-based lesson consists of three stages: pre-task, task-cycle and language focus. Along with the stages, the technologies that could be used are also mentioned. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. Since there are numerous technologies, the issue is not which technology to choose, but how skillfully we put the technological tool we know into use at various stages.

**Table 4. Lesson Plan 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction to topic and task</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technologies that can be used</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting the context – five minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher introduces the topic of migration by showing pictures of different nationalities working together, pictures of people moving to different countries, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher arouses students’ interest and activates their schemata by asking the following questions: What do you notice about the people in these pictures? What is something unique about those people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students respond to the pictures. Students give their responses based on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web conferencing platform – MS Teams/Zoom/Google Meet Show pictures in the book or on PowerPoint.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why do you think people go to other countries?
What are some problems that people face when they immigrate to other countries?

Vocabulary activity – 10 minutes
The teacher elicits useful words and phrases, gives the class some more exposure to language related to human migration by carrying out a vocabulary activity on p. 44.
Focus: preparing students for the main task by drawing their attention to learning new vocabulary, phrases, and the context.
The teacher sets the task and gives task instructions by asking them to find out the reasons why people migrate to other countries. The problems that people face when they go to other countries.

Listening activity – 10 minutes
The teacher will introduce a listening task (noticing task) to students to explicitly provide them language clues that will help them in the main task, which is finding out the reasons for migration or the experiences of people in the context of human migration. The students will listen to a recorded conversation and understand a few reasons why people migrate to other countries. They will then compare their answers with the reasons they gave during the brainstorming session.

Task cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task (breakout rooms)</th>
<th>Planning (breakout rooms)</th>
<th>Report Whole class</th>
<th>Breakout rooms, Interactive whiteboard, chatbox, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students plan to describe the reasons for human migration and the problems people face in new countries. They brainstorm ideas and discuss with their peers.</td>
<td>Students plan the outline of their report based on the points they gathered in the previous phase. The teacher monitors and provides necessary help in the</td>
<td>Students come back from breakout rooms. They take turns to present their report to the whole group. Teacher guides turn-taking, notices the language to give corrective feedback.</td>
<td>Corrective feedback can be typed simultaneously in the chatbox itself as students report or type in a word file to share it later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to gather ideas.</td>
<td>breakout rooms.</td>
<td>feedback in the next stage.</td>
<td>benefit from their own learning and from their peers’ presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher monitors them from a distance and encourages all attempts at communication.

**Language focus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher reviews new words and forms/errors that came up in the report stage. These will be informed orally and typed simultaneously. The teacher will elicit the correct answers/forms by various techniques such as recasting. Encourage learners to compare their task performance, discuss with other groups to find out the two most common reasons for human migration and the two most common problems faced by immigrants. Students will tell why their answers are better than the others’, negotiate and come to an agreement.</td>
<td>In this stage, the teacher asks students to repeat the task to improve their awareness of language use. The teacher may conduct an interactive online quiz to reinforce vocabulary.</td>
<td>Students know their mistakes in using new words, forms/errors in reports given by their peers and themselves and correct them. Students repeat the task with fewer mistakes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lesson Plan Two** – adapted from *Q Skills 2 – Listening and Speaking* (Brooks, 2010)

**Learner level:** Pre-intermediate

**Aims (Task outcome)**

- Listen to a news report and a video, gather information and ideas to give a presentation about the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) technique you have learnt.
  - Extra questions:
    - Which, among the reported ones, is the most effective, easiest and most useful DIY technique?
Table 5. *Lesson Plan 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-task</th>
<th>Student activity</th>
<th>Technologies that can be used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting the context</strong></td>
<td>Students give answers.</td>
<td>Web conferencing platform – MS Teams/Zoom/Google Meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor introduces the task by giving them a list of things and asking them whether they do those things themselves or depend on others. The instructor can extend the conversation by asking them further questions, such as where they learnt those things, who taught them, etc., and ask them to jot down what other things they could do.</td>
<td></td>
<td>To get feedback through word clouds - Padlet/Answer Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary activity</strong></td>
<td>Students listen and watch the video.</td>
<td>Google docs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher will introduce the vocabulary (related to asking for clarification and giving clarification) through a listening activity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Watching a video</strong></td>
<td>Students respond to the questions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor will play a video (noticing task) to explicitly provide students language clues that will help them in the main task, which is finding out a DIY technique from YouTube. The instructor will ask students whether they have ever done something like that on their own. This will get them thinking about activities that they could do themselves; it will spark their interest and motivate them as it is a real-life task.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Task cycle**

In the task phase, the actual task will be performed by the students in groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will be in groups of three or four for this lesson. The teacher will ask them to come up with something that they could do in a group. Other students may not be aware of certain things and they learn it from one another.</td>
<td>During the preparation, one student from each group will note down the technique discussed and later organize the points. They will use all their linguistic and non-linguistic resources to understand the processes of DIY techniques to explain later. They</td>
<td>In the reporting phase, one student from each group presents their DIY technique to the whole class. While one student speaks, another student from the same group could show what they have written to the whole class. They could either upload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn new words, phrases, and forms from others.</td>
<td>Students prepare a report while using the newly learnt vocabulary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students need to prepare for a DIY technique and then report to the whole class. They will also use other resources like the internet to understand the vocabulary needed to explain. The class will decide whose technique is the easiest and most useful. They have around 20–25 minutes to think about a DIY technique, brainstorm ideas, discuss with friends, and prepare a report. Their image/technique or type the whole process in the chat box or on the interactive board. The teacher will also be able to engage the other learners from the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher will also come up with some language points and vocabulary they used and give them the required feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor will let the class discuss the most effective, easiest and most useful techniques and come up with one decision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lesson Plan Three – In-house materials (Writing Guide, 2018)
Level: Advanced – Level four – Foundation program
Students learn to:
- Watch a video and answer questions about the structure of a discussion essay; how various parts of the essay are written
- Collaboratively work on Google forms to produce a discussion essay

The Use of Google Docs
Google docs and Wikis could be used to make students collaborate and write essays. The features of these word processing tools are similar to Microsoft Word and benefit both students and teachers. We believe that these tools will help learners to improve their writing skills and achieve a better degree of coherence and cohesion in
their writing. One advantage is that learners can use these tools irrespective of their level of language proficiency. In addition, students can collaborate with one another and with the teacher real-time to develop and edit a collaborative writing text. In the following task, Google docs is selected to design all sequences of the task to be implemented in synchronous and asynchronous modes. This activity will also follow the sequence of pre-task, task cycle and language focus.

Table 6. Lesson Plan 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-task</th>
<th>Student activity</th>
<th>Technologies that can be used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting the context</strong>&lt;br&gt;During the pre-task phase, the instructor presents the topic and task to the students with the help of a few pictures and activates their schemata and background knowledge on the topic. The teacher will also encourage them to think about ideas related to the topic and write them freely. The teacher uses various techniques to elicit the ideas from learners (by giving prompts, by focusing on particular things in pictures, etc.)&lt;br&gt;<strong>Clarifying the goal</strong>&lt;br&gt;The teacher sets the task by adding a goal and telling students that they are supposed to write a collaborative discussion essay on whether a two-semester system is better or a trimester. The teacher presents a task model, highlights some language structures and draws students’ attention to certain expressions and phrases related to the chosen essay and elicits some other phrases/expressions/vocabulary that they could use during their writing.</td>
<td>Students respond to pictures and questions.</td>
<td>Web conferencing platform – MS Teams/Zoom/Google Meet breakout rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students learn new words, expressions, and forms to be used later in their writing.</td>
<td>To get feedback through word clouds - Padlet/Answer Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task cycle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Google docs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the task phase, the actual task will be performed by the students in groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task</strong></td>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Report</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this stage, the teacher asks the learners to organize their ideas on Google docs and write about the given topic. The learners will work in pairs or in groups based on the difficulty of the task and get the required assistance from their peers. The teacher also monitors and helps students to write</td>
<td>During the planning stage, the participants rewrite and draft their writing using the structure of a discussion/opinion essay. The teacher lets the students take advantage of peer inputs/feedback</td>
<td>The instructor asks the groups to present the essay on screen and explain their points to the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students prepare and present their writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
what they intend to say without intervening to correct errors of form. during this phase. class. 

**Language focus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher lets students focus on the structure and organization of discussion/opinion writing. The teacher will elicit answers from students by asking a few relevant questions on cohesive devices, grammar, content, and word choice.</td>
<td>Students will be advised at this stage to edit their essays once again and upload the final version of their essays on Moodle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students revise and rewrite their essays.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authors believe that these task-based examples allow students to accomplish the tasks initially by using their existing resources. Students will not be forced to use the language provided by the teacher during the pre-task, but will be encouraged to think about the required language features to improve the task performance in the repeat task. As the focus of TBLT tasks is on communication and fluency, the teacher can achieve a balance between both by facilitating proper guidance at suitable stages of the task. The tasks given above exemplify how tasks could be altered/edited from coursebooks to suit other topics/contexts.

**Assessment of Tasks Based on Performance**

Student assessment is a very important component of evaluation. It is understandable that normal classroom task assessment rubric is not enough to assess students, and it has to be modified to include a few other components. Formative assessment, according to Norris (2009), serves as a motivational factor for students (as cited in González-Lloret, 2014). It also offers a referential framework for teachers and students to understand the efficacy of virtual classroom activities. Teachers can also provide individual feedback to learners to motivate them to do better.

In our learning context, we provided a self-evaluation checklist of things for students to mark based on their understanding of the task and the process of learning. It has items related to task achievement, task relevance, task performance, task participation, language focus and task outcome. Such self-assessment enables students to reflect on their own learning and promotes autonomous learning too (Ellis, 2003). Besides, it also stimulates them to set goals for themselves and makes them conscious of what they should do and how they should prepare for next tasks. In EFL/ESL contexts, peer assessment is one aspect that teachers should not ignore as learners tend to have a very correct opinion of their peers’ performances. Apart from that, the teacher too can award a particular score to participants based on students’ language use and task characteristics mentioned above.
Anticipated Challenges and Solutions

On account of the fact that both students and institutions/educators have been suddenly thrust into the unfamiliar virtual environment and forced to adapt to the new conditions hurriedly, there is a possibility that they may not be able to meet the expectations in using technology-mediated TBLT.

- One of the challenges could be that teachers should be well aware of appropriate technological tools for different tasks and their use.
  
  A possible solution: The solution is always to be proactive and apply self-learning methods to keep oneself abreast of the latest tools and technologies.

- Lack of teacher creativity and adaptability (Carless, 2007) could be a problem as it can negatively impact students’ motivation levels and their language skills.
  
  A possible solution: Teachers should be as creative and adaptable as possible to create a variety of authentic tasks related to students’ real-life experiences.

- Another challenge could be student participation. Students might come up with network and connectivity issues when they feel that they cannot perform the task. In other words, task complexity and choice of tasks are two challenges because of which some learners show reluctance to speak and participate in tasks.
  
  A possible solution: Teachers should make sure that the goal and final outcome are clear to students. Often, task complexity and irrelevant tasks can become reasons for students’ lack of interest in participation. Teachers should take care to sequence tasks in increasing order of difficulty. They could also change the interaction patterns, from individual to pairs, to groups, whole class, etc.

- Lee (2001) identified problems with group dynamics, negotiated meaning, interaction and ‘focus on form’ components in technology enhanced learning.
  
  A possible solution: Teachers should make learners reflect on the tasks and make them repeat with other partners. Teachers should make sure that students collaborate beyond the virtual classroom by giving them collaborative task-based projects that will be later presented in class. Teachers should also give feedback on learners’ work regularly and encourage them to perform better.

- The duration of lectures is a commonly faced problem by many teachers.
  
  A possible solution: In the current forced online teaching situation, having student attention for longer periods of time is next to impossible. Therefore, teachers should consider breaking lectures up into two or three mini-lectures (including recorded ones), having online interactive quizzes (such as Kahoot, Nearpod, etc.) after each short lecture. Institutions should also deal with this issue at the policy level.
  
  Overall, universities/colleges must conduct professional development programs for teachers to prepare them for the challenges. Teachers should also keep themselves abreast of the latest technological developments in TBLT.

Conclusion

The authors are of the view that to have better interaction and engagement among students in virtual classes, teachers should use textbooks that offer some flexibility, modify materials to make the activities into suitable tasks and notice how learners use language with the available linguistic and non-linguistic resources. It is imperative to repeat tasks to observe improvement and evaluate what can be done better next time. If educators put these ideas into practice, it is highly possible that technology-mediated task-based collaborative approach will...
prove to be a viable pedagogical framework in improving the language skills of students and also establish the merits of a technology-mediated language learning environment.

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Developing Elementary EFL Learners’ Procedural Knowledge and Strategic Awareness in Reading Classes during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Algerian Teachers’ Challenges

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Abstract
The Covid-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading some scholars to scrutinise the consequences of lockdown and school closure on learners’ learning habits and teachers’ teaching practices. In this regard, this paper aims to explore the teachers’ challenges while implementing a reading strategy-based instruction for beginners during the Covid-19 pandemic, taking the Algerian middle schools as a case in point. It highlights the difficulties to achieving quality in developing learners’ procedural knowledge and strategic awareness in EFL reading classes. The leading approach to the issue is the interactive approach. To attain the objective of the research, the qualitative method was adopted. Classroom observation and structured interviews were used to collect data. The population targeted was composed of 20 teachers from 16 middle schools in Tizi-Ouzou. The collected data were subjected to qualitative content analysis. The results of the study reveal that most teachers are aware of the importance of reading strategy-based instruction. However, they do not teach them systematically or consistently. Indeed, lack of targeted teacher training, time constraints, and disregard of metacognitive instruction are likely to be obstacles to the efficient implementation of reading strategy-instruction. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has thrown up several psychological and cognitive learners’ difficulties, including decreased motivation and lack of cognitive focus, making the teaching process more challenging. The results imply a need for a revision of teachers' professional development programs and a re-consideration of the elementary EFL courses.

Keywords: Algerian EFL learners, the Covid-19 pandemic, elementary reading classes, procedural knowledge, strategic awareness, teachers’ challenges

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Introduction

Due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the development of learners’ procedural knowledge and strategic awareness becomes one of the urgent educational issues in EFL instruction. As a result of schools shut for months, it becomes crucial to direct language pedagogy towards developing learners’ autonomy. This can be achieved through developing appropriate reading strategies. Strategy-based models aim at, among other things, increasing learners’ strategic awareness and developing their procedural knowledge. Indeed, previous studies established a correlation between strategy-instruction and learners’ achievement (e.g., Pessley, 2002; Kucer, 2005).

Since the early 1970s, reading instruction has become the focus of many studies, and the reading skill an essential component of any reading program. Yet, researchers did not agree upon an adequate way of teaching EFL reading that helps learners become independent readers. Because successful reading requires both bottom-up and top-down processing, a balanced reading instruction approach is suggested (Birch, 2002). It draws on the merits of the interactive approach that perceives reading as an individual interactive process depending mainly on a myriad of factors (Smith, 1988 as cited in Emerald, 1991).

Teachers, among other factors, play a vital role in the creation of a supportive learning environment. Their main task is to facilitate the learning process. In the context of EFL reading instruction, they have a tremendous responsibility for providing appropriate language instruction to enable the learners to become lifelong learners. Indeed, “the great majority of students in the world learn language through the mediation of a teacher” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.82). The teachers’ role is to find a stratagem for creative use of the various reading activities and the available materials. More to the point, teachers’ role is to help their learners develop the procedural knowledge needed to interact with multiple types of texts.

At the end of 2019, the whole world was shaken by the spread of Covid-19, leading to many distinctive education changes. In the Algerian context, higher education institutions adopted the e-learning model, whereby teaching was undertaken on digital platforms. However, primary, middle, and secondary schools learners were out of their classrooms for more than five months due to the lockdown. By the beginning of September 2021, schools in different parts of the country started to re-open gradually. The lockdown has, undoubtedly, impacted on learners at the psychological and cognitive levels, making the task of teachers more challenging. Accordingly, this research addresses the issue of teachers’ challenges by attempting to answer two research questions

- How do teachers handle EFL reading strategies instruction at the elementary level?
- What are the challenges facing Algerian EFL teachers while developing learners’ procedural knowledge and strategic awareness during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The overall aim of this study is to highlight some of the difficulties faced by middle school teachers as they struggle to integrate reading strategies instruction into their reading classes during the Covid-19 pandemic. It strives to identify their practices while teaching procedural knowledge and developing strategic awareness among elementary EFL learners.
Literature Review

EFL Instruction during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Algeria

The unexpected lockdown imposed by the Algerian authorities since mid-March 2020 led to the closure of schools and universities. Higher education institutions shifted to distance learning to resume the academic year. However, the ministry of education asked the various authorities to cancel the last year term; they suggested some alternative teaching methods for the candidates for the baccalaureate exam. As a result, different pupils from different levels found themselves out of school for more than six months.

Some Algerian scholars endeavoured into research to scrutinize the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown on teaching and learning. Benkhider & Kherbachi (2020), for instance, examined the new learning habits of Algerian learners to maintain remote learning. A correlation study was conducted to depict the different factors that influence students’ learning habits. The results revealed that “digital technologies used awareness of self-learning progress, and knowledge needed to maintain environmental development and the format of digital resources provided” (p.425) were the most influencing factors.

In another study, Chelghoum & Chelghoum (2020) investigated the most common difficulties faced by university teachers in online teaching. An online questionnaire was addressed to 387 university teachers in Algeria, from different disciplines, through their email addresses. The results revealed that teachers face “many problems especially internet accessibility and students' motivation” (p. 118).

In the studies mentioned above, a variety of issues are addressed in terms of practices, perceptions, or challenges. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that all the published studies so far in the Algerian context focus on virtual learning in higher education contexts. The present study, however, finds its niche in the challenges of teachers at the elementary level in a real context after the re-opening of schools.

Defining Reading

The goals of current reading research are twofold. First, it seeks to gain a better understanding of the nature of the process. Second, it strives to design effective methods for reading instruction. In an attempt at providing a systematic definition of reading, researchers elaborated various reading models that describe what happens in the readers’ eyes and mind during the reading process. Three models are to be found in the literature: bottom-up, top-down, and interactive.

Developed during the 1940s and the 1950s, bottom-up models describe the reading process in terms of serial steps in which “the direction of processing is from bottom-level features of text to higher levels” (Davies, 1995, p. 169). Stated differently, the bottom-up models perceive reading as a decoding process that involves reconstructing the author’s meaning via recognising the letters and words (Carrel, Devine, & Eskey, 1988).

Developed within psycholinguistics, top-down models of the reading process define reading as a psycho-cognitive process. To these models, the reader, rather than the text, is at the heart of the reading process. They emphasise the reader’s interpretation of texts by guessing the
meaning based on their background knowledge. The best-known top-down models of the reading process are suggested by Goodman (1970) and Smith (1971).

As regards the interactive model, which is also known as the interactive approach, it focuses on the various kinds of knowledge that readers use to understand texts. The roots of this approach go back to a theory developed by Rumelhart in the late 1970s. He defined reading as a bi-directional perceptive and cognitive process that involves the reader and the text alike (Davies, 1995). In simpler words, getting meaning from a text results from the interaction between the information presented in the text and the specificities of readers’ background knowledge. According to the interactive approach, texts do not “contain meaning”; they, rather, have “potential for meaning” (Wallas, 1992, p. 39).

**Developing Learners’ Procedural Knowledge and Strategic Awareness**

At the heart of the interactive approach lies the principle of text-processing. This suggests that meaning construction is the result of the interaction of the reader with the text. Based on the latter theory, the pedagogical focus shifts from the text to the interactive process between the text and the reader. Some kind of processing mechanism is crucial to the achievement of this interaction. The processing component, also known as procedural knowledge, consists of a variety of strategies and skills. They allow the reader to take the text as a source of information, and drawing on their background knowledge as another source to make sense of what is on the printed page (Birch, 2002). Theorists and practitioners believe that teaching reading strategies for text processing leads to literacy development (Carrell et al., 1988).

As far as strategic awareness is concerned, it relates to learners’ consciousness about their cognitive reading strategies together with the way they can regulate their thinking. According to Carrell et al. (1988), developing learners’ strategic awareness is of paramount importance because they need to know the kind of reading and thinking required to understand different types of texts.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The targeted population involves twenty Middle School English language teachers working in sixteen schools located in urban and rural areas of Tizi-Ouzou, a medium-size town, 100 Km from Algiers, Algeria. Due to the impracticality of observing all the teachers in their classrooms, a representative sample is selected through convenience sampling. The latter is a practical sampling strategy as the researcher chooses a group of individuals willing to participate in the study. Hence, volunteered teachers have been interviewed and observed on the basis of their availability. Accordingly, the present study is an exploratory case study. In this context, Bell (1987) states that case studies give “an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale” (p. 06).

**Instruments**

Since the objective of this study is to explore the challenges and the techniques used by teachers in EFL elementary reading classes, classroom observation, together with structured interviews were, used to collect appropriate data. Classroom observation is “a technique that can often reveal characteristics of groups of individuals which would have been impossible to
discover by other means” (Bell, 1987, p. 88). The aim of its use is to tap as fully as possible the teachers’ daily instructional practices as part of strategy-based instruction. An observation scheme is designed by the researcher to make the observation systematic. A total of 20 reading classes were observed on a one-time basis for a sixty-minute period. The majority of the observations were recorded on a videotape. However, because some teachers refused to be filmed, written field notes were collected by the researcher during the observations.

Concerning the structured interview, it is a common research technique in reading research. It aims to gather the informants’ opinions and experiences within a real context. It is composed of five items devoted to the teachers’ perceptions of EFL reading instruction and their daily difficulties.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews and classroom observations of teachers in their reading classes have provided us in-depth descriptions of their practices. The data analysis tool employed is Qualitative Content Analysis. The latter is a well-known flexible technique used to analyse qualitative data to interpret meaning. Its core principle is “to conceptualise the process of assigning categories to text passages as a qualitative interpretive act” (Mayring, 2014, p.10). It suggests identifying predetermined coding categories by using existing theoretical backgrounds. After scrutinising the observational transcripts together with the interviews with teachers, issues for discussion emerged.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Teachers’ Practices**

When asked about the objective of reading classes, most of the interviewed teachers have shown their awareness about the importance of reading-strategies instruction. However, they do believe that the teaching environment is hardly auspicious. The lockdown of learners for weeks led to the development of a new conception of learning. Their only objective, as learners, according to one interviewed teacher, is to pass first time as she stated:

I am disappointed at the learners’ attitude towards English subject. They are only interested in marks, and how to pass […] learners perceive reading instruction as a process of vocabulary building, grammar construction, and sentence analysis […] rare is the focus on comprehension, information gathering, or reading strategies development.

Reading instruction requires a particular set of teaching techniques that aim at developing learners’ strategies. Any professional teacher is supposed to receive training on those techniques. Yet, the classroom observations have shown that there is little use and, sometimes, a total absence of the reading teaching techniques credited by solid theoretical or empirical support in the literature. In fact, the result reached is consistent with some empirical researches indicating a lack of connection between strategy-instruction models and classroom practices (Pressley, 2002). Some reasons for this may include the fact that the Algerian middle school teachers attached more importance to grammar teaching. They tended to emphasise teaching reading as a means to practise the language. Oppositely, they neglect developing reading strategies and skills. The reading instruction model followed by the observed teachers is ‘the traditional comprehension-testing model’. According to Anderson (1999), the classroom, in this model, is teacher-
dominated, and the role of learners is to receive the instruction in order to complete comprehension-testing activities passively.

During the observation sessions, it has been noticed by the researcher that most of the participants started their reading classes by a pre-reading stage. Its aim is to activate learners’ schematic knowledge and ensure purposeful reading. However, it is worth noting that, if it is not well implemented, the pre-reading is not likely to help learners develop their reading strategies.

In most of the observed sessions, when teachers started with a pre-reading phase, it seems at first sight that learners would make some predictions about the content of the text they are about to read, but teachers did not link the first phase to the second one. Furthermore, even though teachers succeeded in activating the learners’ background knowledge, their procedure failed at getting the learners involved in the text since they did not state a purpose for reading. Given that in real life, we usually have a purpose for reading; we read because we want to, it is crucial to set out some reason for reading. The learners should go beyond the idea of reading a text because the teacher instructs them to do it; or simply because it is there and it is the next activity to perform. One can come to the conclusion, then, that the teachers are acquainted with the three-phase procedure without some practical orientations about applying it in the classroom. Teachers’ practices are partially, due to their unawareness about how to put into practice their theoretical background. By the same token, it is worth mentioning that due to the spread of Covid-19, the number of classes is reduced, and the time allotted to various school subjects is limited. These factors are likely to make learners less motivated and teaching practices more challenging. Likewise, one of the findings of Chelghoum & Chelghoum (2020) regarding the challenges of Algerian university teachers is the lack of motivation among students as a consequence of lockdown.

**Strategic Awareness**

A significant finding of the classroom observation is the poor development of strategic reading among the learners. Evidence of this problem includes learners’ inability to read and comprehend the activities’ instructions. One of the causes identified in the present investigation, which is consistent with some educational scholars’ findings, is the lack of metacognitive instruction. This result is in line with the conclusion reached by Benkhider & Kherbachi (2020), who established a correlation between metacognitive awareness and learners’ achievement. In the same vein, Anderson (1991) claims that successful second language reading comprehension is not a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but the reader must also know to use it successfully and know how to orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies, but a reader must also be able to apply them strategically.

(As cited in Carrell, 1998, p. 07)

In order to gain a good understanding of texts, strategic readers reflect on what they are doing while reading. In other terms, they constantly think about the strategies they need to interact with the text.

Strategic awareness is an integral part of success in learning how to use reading strategies. Teachers’ explanations include “information about what the strategy is, why and how it should be learned, where and when to use the strategy, as well as how to evaluate the use of the strategy” (Anderson, 1991, p. 470). However, the classroom observations demonstrated that most
teachers did not use strategy terms, did not inform the learners about the lesson objective, did not discuss the usefulness of strategies, and did not model them. Besides, they neither explained the reasoning behind their thinking nor encouraged them to select the needed strategies to facilitate the decoding and understanding of texts.

**Teachers’ Difficulties**

Many studies in the literature testify to the fact that implementing reading strategies instruction is challenging (Pressley, 2002). Time-consuming is one of the difficulties experienced by the Algerian EFL teachers; they keep struggling to complete the course. When asked about the difficulties encountered, one respondent pointed out: “am not satisfied with the way we are teaching [...]I don’t have enough time to cover the material[...] I can’t let my learners think for a long time…I don’t have enough time to work with each learner”. Teaching reading strategies is a complex and long-term process that needs a long period of time for teachers and learners alike.

The interviewed teachers reported the increasing demotivation noticed among their learners. The psychological impact of the pandemic seems to be worse than the physiological one. Besides, it was noticed that learners lack some cognitive focus during the different classes. One of the teachers acknowledged that “such environment is not conducive to effective learning and much less to efficient reading strategies instruction”.

Teachers today are dealing with a multitude of challenges that they have never faced before. They do not feel appropriately prepared to meet the new roles assigned to them regarding the available resources. Perhaps more disappointing is the lack of professional support mechanisms that may foster the implementation of the new learner-centred teaching paradigm. Additionally, the teachers have to adapt the new teaching paradigms to the teaching conditions of the Algerian middle school. They made it clear that they needed extensive professional development support for that. The majority of the respondents stressed the need for adequate training to cope with the latest teaching paradigms.

Consistent with the conclusions reached in the previous studies, though in different contexts, lack of professional support and learners’ decrease motivation are depicted as significant problems for teachers. Nevertheless, unlike the previous studies (Benkhider & Khebachi, 2020; Chelghoum & Chelghoum, 2020) that stressed technical issues related to the use of digital devices in distance learning, the present study highlights daily challenges of teachers in face-to-face teaching, namely time constraints and lack of learners’ cognitive focus.

**Teachers’ Commitment**

The results reveal that while some teachers exclude reading-strategy instruction from their classes, others, mainly newly recruited teachers, are convinced that the pedagogical benefits of strategy-instruction are worth the challenges and the difficulties that they confront while implementing them. Through the various observations, it was noticed that some enthusiastic teachers expressed the desire to be more involved. One teacher showed her will to implement the strategy-instruction model faithfully. She held a quite constructivist view to reading instruction: “I try to depict some knowledge that my learners have experienced in their lives to relate it to the text […] then I model for the way to follow in order to make their reading more efficient”.

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**Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on Covid 19 Challenges April 2021**

Developing Elementary EFL Learners’ Procedural Knowledge

AMMOUR
Her performance has shown her degree of commitment to support independent-learner learning through strategy instruction. However, when asked about theory, she said that more explanations and modelling in in-service training courses were needed. What helps this teacher succeed in her job is her conviction that, as Brown (2001) puts it, “one of the most invigorating things about teaching is that you never stop learning” (p. 426).

Conclusion

This research article has explored the Algerian teachers’ challenges in EFL elementary reading classes during the Covid-19 pandemic. In conclusion, one can safely assert that the teachers’ practices are not consistent with the pedagogical philosophy embodied in reading strategy instruction due to several factors. Indeed, the findings showed that some of these factors include the working environment, time constraints, disregard of metacognitive instruction, lack of teacher training together with learners’ increasing demotivation, and lack of cognitive focus. Therefore, middle school teachers need more theoretical background and practical orientations to get involved in the new teaching paradigms and cope with the new conditions caused by the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A limitation of this study is that the informants’ number was relatively small, and much focus was put on teachers. It would be interesting to conduct other studies to explore learners’ perceptions and challenges to get a broader look of the state of the art in educational issues during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

About the author

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References


**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

*Classroom Observation Scheme*

- The teaching procedure:
  - Pre-reading phase:
    - Activating learners’ background knowledge
    - Setting a purpose for reading
    - Pre-teaching unknown vocabulary
  - While reading phase:
    - Word attack strategies
    - Comprehension and interpretation strategies
  - Post-reading phase
    - Comprehension questions

- The Classroom environment: Learners’ habits.

**Appendix B**

*Teachers’ Interview*

1. What is the objective of reading classes at the elementary level?
2. What are the difficulties you encounter while teaching reading strategies?
3. How do you perceive reading strategies instruction?
4. How can you describe your learners during the Covid-19 pandemic?
5. What are the teaching/learning conditions you think are more impacted by the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic?
New Challenges Imposed by the Pandemic on a Ukrainian University

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Abstract
The article’s main aim is to highlight the challenges English language education faced in Ukraine after the outbreak of the pandemic. Since Ukrainian education had traditionally been face-to-face before the crisis, and technology integration was slow, the lack of online infrastructure and distance learning methodologies in Ukrainian universities aggravated uncertainty and anxiety regarding learning quality. The authors show how the Vinnytsia State Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Pedagogical University (VSPU) withstands the challenge of reflecting on the experience, which might be typical of higher education institutions. The research engages 321 future teachers of English and applies mixed methods. The significance lies in consolidated effort and capacity to modernize that yield positive outcomes, despite insufficient experience and funding. It also states that student opinions count.

Keywords: English language education, online instruction, pandemic challenge, quality of learning, Ukrainian university

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Introduction

The COVID 19 outbreak, in the beginning, did not seem to become a global challenge. Starting in China, a country remote from Europe, it was not expected to become as internationally penetrating and aggressive as it happened to be. According to Lederer (2020), the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 23, 2020, defined the pandemic as the “make-or-break moment for humankind” that could lead to “a global disfunction,” “a script of an apocalyptic blockbuster, not the reality.” The governments had to respond by undertaking rigorous measures to limit the contacts minimizing the danger of contracting the virus. In this case, technological progress became a blessing (Matvienko et al., 2021, p. 20). Education that implied much of face-to-face communication and collaboration became an area of serious concern even in well-developed countries where distance learning had appeared years before the pandemic. Yet even universities and schools with time-tested distance teaching experience and professionally developed online infrastructure were apprehensive of the system viability because of the immense load it faced. No wonder traditional education and technology insufficiency made Ukraine especially vulnerable (Matvienko et al., 2020; Matvienko et al., 2021; Sakalo, 2020; Shevtsova & Kozubai, 2020; Volkov, 2020). Similarly, the official statistics did not keep much of a promise to withstand the pandemic challenges. According to the surveys, only 44.5% of professors of higher educational institutions utilized distance learning methodologies and technologies regularly in teaching. 27% of teachers had an acute need in consultations about teaching with technologies. 24.1% of university lecturers had never had the professional development training to improve technology literacy. 38% of university students didn’t have stable access to the Internet at homes and 25% of them did not have necessary technology. 41% of university professors experienced technological unsustainability of the educational process in their universities. What is more, only 45% of Ukrainian universities considered distance learning and informational technologies a priority in higher education. In 53.5% of Ukrainians, digital literacy was below average (Kucheriv, 2020; Sakalo, 2020; Volkov, 2020). According to Finance. UA. (2019), the number of Ukrainian universities is 652, and only about 20 universities had practiced distance teaching before the COVID 19 crisis. (Sakalo, 2020). Thus, the authors would not be mistaken to state that, practically, all universities lacked the experience to create online infrastructure, curricula, and system management (Matvienko et al., 2020, p. 465). Ukrainian educators faced such a crash course immersion in online learning that there were serious doubts regarding a successful completion of the school year.

Literature Review

The literature review provides coverage of the opinions and feedback on the forceful integration of online instruction (Amin, 2020; Asmara, 2020; Cheung, 2021; Kucheriv, 2020; Lesnichenko et al., 2020; Matvienko et al., 2020; Matvienko et al., 2021; Shevtsova & Kozubai, 2020; Sakalo, 2020; Zmievkaya et al., 2020). Distance learning is not a cutting-edge experience in many European, American, and Asian universities anymore. It is an integral part of teaching. Besides, online instruction is considered a reliable alternative to tradition and a tool to democratize educational practices (Powell et al., 2014; Powell et al., 2015; Powell et al., 2016). Having a well-developed online infrastructure and the experts capable of developing, and maintaining LMS, the university bulk of the academic load is divided into offline and online learning (Mastafa & Bali, 2020; Matvienko et al., 2021; Volkov, 2020; Sakalo, 2020). In our understanding, this leads to a more transparent academic environment, flexible working schedules, various formats of communication, a better quality of education. As it occurred, such
English language education has become a big concern in Ukraine and many non-English speaking countries. The teachers had to transfer to online instruction adapting the technologies and means they had at hand (Amin, 2020; Asmara, 2020; Cheung, 2021; Egbert, 2020; Naqvi & Zehra, 2020; Okmawati, 2020). Though English language education in Ukraine had utilized technologies in teaching phonetics, grammar, speaking before the Covid 19 crisis, teachers adhered to working in the actual classroom. Therefore, online methodologies were understudied and underestimated. The pandemic shook the very fabric of Ukrainian language education and revealed the condition of distance learning in Ukrainian education in general (Kucheriv, 2020; Matvienko et al., 2020; Matvienko et al., 2021; Sakalo, 2020; Shevtsova & Kozubai, 2020; Volkov, 2020)

Methodology

The purpose of the research is to consider the actual condition of online education in Ukraine and relate it to the experience of online learning integration into English language education at Vinnytsia State Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Pedagogical University (VSPU). The participants are 206 full-time and 115 prospective part-time teachers of English at the department of foreign languages. The analysis techniques provide an objective picture of how one Ukrainian university copes with language education issues arising from the pandemic challenges. Since a big part of the study is empirical, the authors apply the mixed methods that encompass the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The procedures included a literature review from Internet sources, the survey conducted by the administration of VSPU. The findings of the research show the adapted technologies, and platforms for language education. They also outline organizational issues for further studies, and analysis to improve the quality of language education in VSPU and other language educational institutions.

Results

The literature reviews provide an insight into the language teachers’ online experience. The authors would like to admit that there is not a country unaffected by the crisis (Amin, 2020; Asmara, 2020; Egbert, 2020; Cheung, 2021; Lesnichenko et al., 2020; Naqvi & Zehra, 2020; Okmawati, 2020; Shevtsova & Kozubai, 2020).

Concerning the experience at VSPU, the opinions are not homogeneous: some say distance learning is a successful endeavor and has brought benefits to future teachers, especially in terms of language education. Instant access to multimedia resources, listening to and watching videos with native speakers is beneficial. Opportunities for self-education, lifelong learning, self-organization, and self-discipline are unlimited (Matvienko et al., 2020, p. 467). Yet, others have not seen it as a viable alternative to traditional education. The most alarming issue is isolation from peers. What makes it worse, students are getting used to self-isolation, which negatively impacts communication and quality of life. The long hours before the computer cause health impairment, the quality of language education is going down, and academic integrity issues get more topicality.
VSPU students were offered a questionnaire at the end of the spring semester of 2020. The focus was on teaching quality, online methodologies and forms of instruction, and instructors’ accessibility. Students of the part-time (115 students) and full-time study (206 students) majoring in Secondary Education 014.021, 014.022, 014.025 and English Philology 035.043 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019), including undergraduate and graduate students, participated in the survey. The survey contained questions that helped identify learning quality, and probable challenges. In particular, the questionnaire comprised questions about the satisfaction with quality of teaching, methodologies, and forms of instruction. Students had to consider advantages, and disadvantages of distance learning, and to reflect on the platforms they adopted for learning online. According to the feedback, in percentage terms, full-time and part-time students are almost like-minded, judging by the responses they provide.

The feedback reveals that 78% of full-time students are satisfied with online learning and 14% do not like it at all. Only 5% of students state they would like to return to face-to-face study, but because of the pandemic, they understand the necessity to learn remotely. However, 2% of respondents say it depends on the teacher and subject; the others – either evaded the direct answer or left the answer area blank. (Figure 1.) The ratio of the students who choose a “50/50,” “ambiguous question,” “depending on the subject,” “in some cases,” “more or less disadvantages,” or “not exactly” answer is minimal. Many students supplemented their responses with some additional commentaries, which proves that the respondents hope their feedback counts.

The part-time students’ feedback engages more appreciation of the teacher effort since the part-time education has always implied more independence from the teacher. 76% of respondents liked online learning; 16% did not; 8% of students gave answers varying from: not precisely, in some cases, has its advantages, it depends on the subject, not all methodologies fit the remote mode of instruction (Figure 2).

![Figure 1. Satisfaction, full-time education (206 responses)](image-url)
The appreciative feedback included:
- teachers try to do their best;
- it is not easy for them too;
- they find exciting resources;
- I respect teacher’s effort;
- teachers are dedicated and good at technology;
- the teacher is helpful to find the resources;
- the teacher assesses objectively.

The similar commentaries of full-time and part-time students reflect they miss the habitual classroom practices:

- would like to return to the university classroom, but I understand the situation;
- it is OK to study online, but I miss communication with peers and teachers;
- would like to receive instant feedback about my work as it was in the university;
- I am tired of talking on my computer.

![Pie chart showing satisfaction, part-time education (115 responses)](attachment:image)

*Figure 2. Satisfaction, part-time education (115 responses)*

All the respondents admitted that the new format required to self-educate and self-discipline more. It is evident, learning more platforms and apps boost awareness of technologies for foreign languages. Considering that traditional language learning did not prioritize technology application as intensively as during the crisis (Matvienko et al., 2021, p.17), the advances made are significant here (Figure 3., Figure 4).

Looking at Figure 3 and Figure 4, it becomes apparent that Zoom, Meet, Google Meet, Classroom have won more student acclaim than the other mentioned platforms. These data allow the authors to refer the more intensive engagement with professors and students to the quality and accessibility of the services.
The identified advantages and disadvantages of the full-time and part-time students have much in common. Flexibility, safety, and protection from the virus, improved awareness of technologies are positive features. However, lousy connectivity and weak signal made joining the class frustrating. As the university did not have its platform in spring, students followed the teachers to the facility available with that particular teacher, which brought uncertainty with the organization. The absence of clear-cut and rigorous schedules added to the anxiety (Lisnichenko et al., 2020, p. 6685). Trying to compensate for the lack of face-to-face control, teachers unintentionally overloaded students with extra-tasks. Many of them were in writing, which required more work. Besides, students complain about bad reciprocity and delayed feedback on student performance. Some respondents confess it is hard for them to answer before the computer, not before a real teacher and peers. Focusing more on language education, the students regret that computers distort the sound and image, which hinders correcting mistakes instantly.
Discussion

By 2019, the Vinnytsia State Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Pedagogical University had become well-reputed, had had adequate student enrollment, and had advanced in the internationalization of campus. Supporting partnerships, motivating students and teachers to participate in cross-cultural exchanges, it had gained more credentials than some other teacher training universities of Ukraine. Although VSPU was one of the first universities in Ukraine that initiated web-blended learning (Powell et al., 2014, p.45), it had not managed to create the online infrastructure before the crisis due to many reasons common of Ukrainian universities. Therefore, with the pandemic outbreak and the imposed quarantine in March 2020, the university students and professors faced a challenge they had never had before. Figuratively speaking, the university had to become an online institution overnight (Matvienko et al., 2021, p. 16). Surprisingly, the university began to teach on the first day of the lockdown and did not cease working till the end of the semester. Despite many concerns, fears, anxiety issues (Lesnichenko et al., 2020, p. 6688), the students and teachers persevered in language education. Hence, the VSPU students completed the spring semester of the school year 2019-2020 in its due time. The state student certification was carried out in full compliance with academic programs.

Furthermore, the student performance, ongoing and final assessment did not differ much from face-to-face learning. The authors would like to attribute this to the teacher leadership, self-education, and lifelong learning skills of Ukrainian educators (Matvienko et al., 2020, p.464; Shah, 2017, p.243). What was disturbing during that time was the lack of “know-how” and one common space for teaching quality language skills, posting assignments, and for assessment to make the educational process more orderly. As the student surveys demonstrated, the number of the unsatisfied with the quality of language instruction was not high. But the surveys also revealed that not all prospective teachers felt comfortable and confident in a new environment.

To meet the needs of students better, the university reconsidered the teaching facilities in use and took steps to develop its online infrastructure during the summer of 2020. As a result, the university moved its practices to the platform “Collaborator” and adopted G SUITE as a learning facility. The created university email accounts [vspu.edu.ua] improved organization and accessibility. G Suite system integrating Gmail, Calendar, Google Classroom, Google Meet, and Zoom conferences, created the unified space for conducting the classes, exerting control, and student assessment. Professors disconnected students from personal email, VIBER, SKYPE, WHATSAPP, TELEGRAM accounts which they utilized for teaching when the university did not have the unified learning facilities. Accordingly, the university platform eased communication and collaboration with university colleagues and administration. Ukrainian language education had determined priorities regarding teaching foreign languages before the crisis. The interactive methods, live communication, individual approach to language instruction were well-experienced and appreciated both by students and faculty. In this respect, G Suite has become a solution since the platform invigorated engagement and collaboration, improved access to the learning resources, content delivery, and student assessment. The authors believe it facilitated language learning opportunities, reciprocity, and feedback, helping achieve academic goals “on any device from any location” (Appling, 2016; Cooper, 2018). G Suite assisted in reaching out to students, making the learning space more friendly and available for future teachers to benefit. Keeping in mind that to maximize the time...
of active speaking in the class is important, teachers and students at VSPU explored the opportunities of the created infrastructure with enthusiasm. What they found out brought satisfaction. Skillfully used, technology served to make the discrepancy between traditional education on campus and online education narrower. Moreover, the integrated technologies became efficient in making online education focused more on student learning but, simultaneously, required of teachers to self-educate vigorously. The “breakout groups” and “share screen” functions enable group conversations, discussions, and pair work. The functions enliven the class procedure and increase student engagement. The recording function ensures timely reflection and feedback. Lastly, the authors are unanimous that the created platform enhances English language education at VSPU, making it more orderly and effective.

Conclusion
The COVID19 crisis has taught us an important lesson that we should not take life today for granted and rely on prior knowledge only. The study underscores the importance of lifelong learning and self-education, and a consolidated effort for language learning. Although the pandemic threatens humankind and tests survival skills, it has revealed the potential of education. Despite many drawbacks in Ukrainian education and society: insufficient funding, low digital literacy, slow technology integration, the authors conclude that much depends on a desire to become agents of change. One university’s survival history proves that it is worth struggling for quality learning. Each university experience matters if it contributes to student professional training, teaching to withstand the pandemic, and thinking of a better tomorrow.

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English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Positive Outcomes

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Abstract
The pandemic of 2020 was a watershed moment for all educators worldwide as schools and universities were forced to close their doors to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Thus, a new movement towards widespread e-learning emerged with unknown consequences for learners and educators alike. The situation in Saudi Arabia was no exception. The purpose of this study is to explore how English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning at the tertiary level in Saudi Arabia was impacted negatively and positively by the move to online learning. It reviews research published since the onset of the pandemic, with a specific focus on English language teaching at Saudi universities, to analyze the challenges faced by Saudi EFL teachers and learners since the shift to e-learning. One of the biggest challenges observed was students’ lack of motivation, which upon further review was found to be linked to other contributing factors, such as technological issues, inapt learning environments, and students’ mental health. This paper also examines the unforeseen positive outcomes resulting from the digital transformation, including the benefits of the flexibility of place and time and promotion of particular language skills. The current research synthesis will help contribute to the knowledge of online English teaching in the Saudi context.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning, e-learning, English as a foreign language (EFL), English language teaching (ELT), remote learning, Saudi university students

Introduction

The global community was hit hard by the worldwide pandemic produced by the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, which caused the whole world to come to a halt in 2020. In such unprecedented times, educators worldwide were faced with the necessity of migrating to online teaching. In-person learning became too much of a risk for contracting and spreading the disease. This sudden, unprecedented shift comes with unknown consequences for educators, as the world is still observing its effects. Thus, this article aims to provide an overview of the educational scene in the Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context during the pandemic and delineate the challenges and positive outcomes of online learning in Saudi Arabia amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic. The following research questions guide the current review:

1. What challenges do university students and instructors face with online learning and teaching of EFL during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the perceived advantages to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

These questions will be answered through a review of the most recent literature published in the field of EFL and language education since the onset of the pandemic in 2020. Search words such as “English language,” “Saudi universities,” “COVID-19,” and “EFL” were used to carry out the investigation of the topic. The subsequent sections discuss Saudi Arabia’s response to the pandemic, how schools and universities proceeded with education after closures, and previous studies on e-learning in the Saudi context. Following that is a consideration of the most prominent challenges Saudi university EFL educators and students face in online learning, as well as positive outcomes observed as a result of the switch to online learning.

Literature Review

KSA’s Response to the Pandemic

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) was evident in its humanitarian message since the beginning of the pandemic. That is, that human life is more valuable than anything, regardless of race, gender, religion, or nationality. Therefore, within the first few days of March 2020, there was an immediate response to shut down anything that would compromise people’s health and well-being, including schools, universities, and public and private institutions (Nurunnabi, 2021).

However, this physical closure of buildings did not impede the country’s ambitious goals and aspirations. Instead, it only increased them. As a response to the closures, all Saudi sectors turned to digital technologies to help maintain services while thwarting the disease’s spread (Hassounah et al., 2020), including education. In a brief timeframe, the whole country began the transition to remote learning environments, whether it was televised on select channels or communicated through various online platforms: Telegram, Zoom, Teams, WebEx, and Blackboard. However, the situation at the beginning of the pandemic was far from ideal. Many students and teachers were not equipped with the necessary digital readiness or the internet bandwidth to connect to these online platforms. Nonetheless, they rose to the occasion and gradually adjusted to the new normal in education.
Schools and Universities in KSA

Beginning the 2020-2021 academic school year, the Saudi Ministry of Education launched a national Digital Teaching Platform (DTP) called Madrasati (meaning my school). The purpose was to provide a unified platform for delivering online instruction to over six million students in Saudi public schools, from first to twelfth grade (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). With the initiation of the new school year, educators began to recover learning that was missed during the pandemic and continued to cover new learning material. Middle- and high-school students attended classes online during reserved morning hours, whereas elementary school students attended classes in the afternoon. These efforts ensured that each level had an allotted learning time and reduced the internet traffic congestion caused by too many users at a time. The afternoon hours preserved for elementary school students also allowed parents to assist their young children in attending their online classes and support their learning (Oraif & Elyas, 2021).

On the other hand, Saudi universities were naturally better prepared to transition to the online learning environment, as most Saudi universities had already implemented digital communication and learning tools. For example, university students are set up with an official email account as soon as they enroll; therefore, university students’ communication with their institutions was not interrupted. Also, most Saudi universities utilized Blackboard®, a Learning Management System (LMS) designed to deliver both synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning. However, this software was not used extensively and served a supplementary role prior to the pandemic, and its e-learning users are still discovering its features.

E-Learning of English in KSA

In discussing technology use to deliver educational material, many terms are widely used, such as e-learning, online learning, electronic learning, digital learning, and technology-enhanced learning. These terms are all used to describe “a set of technology-mediated methods that can be applied to support student learning and include elements of assessment, tutoring, and instruction” (Wheeler, 2012, p. 1109). In other words, the primary and only method of delivering educational content and instruction is through digital and online tools. This could either be synchronous (i.e., teaching occurs live with students and instructors both present online in real-time) or asynchronous (i.e., the content and instruction are available for the students to access any time via recordings of the lessons or independent online activities).

Many previous studies have investigated the effectiveness of implementing technology in EFL learning in KSA universities. However, these studies approached technological tools as supplementary to face-to-face instruction in a method called blended learning, which is defined as “any formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning” (Maxwell, 2016, para. 3). That is, only part of the instructions occurs online, whereas the rest occurs in person. This method has shown positive results in learning English in KSA. For example, Alsowayegh et al. (2019) at King Abdulaziz University found that using online activities (i.e., watching videos related to the lesson and participating in discussion forums) in addition to in-person instruction improved university EFL learners’ listening and speaking skills. Other studies surveying university EFL students’ perceptions of employing the blended learning model in their English acquisition show positive attitudes towards this method (Al-Jarf, 2007; Alowedi, 2020; Bukhari & Basaffar, 2019; Gulnaz et al., 2019).
Nevertheless, these studies only consider technology’s role as a supplement to face-to-face instruction, not as a replacement which is the case during the pandemic. The blended learning model differs from the e-learning model in that the former offers some in-person instruction, whereas the latter occurs entirely online, making the results incomparable and should be discussed separately.

### Challenges in the Online Teaching of English During the Pandemic

Issues in English language teaching (ELT) have existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Though, existing problems only exacerbated with the sudden shift to online learning and the adjustments entailed. One of the most prominent concerns discussed in ELT is language learners’ motivation to learn (Al-Hoorie, 2017). Language educators in the Saudi context have widely observed the lack of student motivation (Elyas & Al-Grigri, 2014), likely caused by students’ low proficiency (AlMaiman, 2005), but also subject to alternative factors (MacIntyre, 2002). Previous literature suggests that online learning environments are more engaging and conducive to increasing learner motivation (Kim & Frick, 2011). However, distance learning is also “sensitive to situational conditions” (Hartnett et al., 2011, p. 20), influenced by external factors, such as time constraints, grades, and the students’ learning environment. The pandemic further compounds these issues. In fact, a recent survey of over one thousand academic English instructors in 99 countries revealed that student motivation during the pandemic was among the respondents’ top concerns (Wright, 2021).

A study conducted by ur Rahman (2020) surveying fifty English language instructors across the kingdom about their perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic reported that 68% of the respondents believed that students are less motivated to learn online. This lack of motivation is not necessarily due to the online learning environment itself. Other literature cites the significant causes for student demotivation during the pandemic are respectively: being socially isolated, having a weak internet connection, enduring distractions at home, and not being able to achieve class objectives (Hernández & Flórez, 2020). As almost all KSA schooling has moved online, students are obliged to attend school from their homes where they feel disconnected from their peers or distracted by siblings and other family members who are also learning or working remotely. Only those who need to attend practical training or laboratories continue to participate in face-to-face learning.

An additional reason for students’ demotivation could be due to mental health issues, given that motivation and anxiety are highly correlated (MacIntyre, 2002). Studies revealed that many Saudis suffered from some level of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder due to the pandemic, especially in its initial phase (AlKhamees et al., 2020; Joseph et al., 2020). Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic can be very stressful on students due to the sudden changes surrounding them and anxiety over the disease itself (Elsalem et al., 2020; Ghazi-Saidi et al., 2020). As a result, students may suffer psychological distress caused by the fear of halting their academic progress (Hasan & Bao, 2020). Although students and educators have managed to carry on with the educational process, they are doing so in less-than-optimal conditions and numerous barriers to overcome, all of which could affect motivation.

Digital readiness is another issue put forth by the pandemic of 2020. **Digital readiness** can be defined as “the degree to which people succeed or struggle when they use technology to
try to navigate their environments, solve problems, and make decisions” (Horrigan, 2016, p.2). The switch to remote learning took the world by surprise and left many students and educators unprepared for the new tasks they had to take on. Al-Nofaie (2020) carried out a Blackboard readiness survey with 25 students majoring in the English language department at Taif University. The findings indicate students’ lack of digital readiness and technology skills. The author also mentions instructing her students on how to download PDF files and write notes on them, which demonstrates the need to support students during difficult times. Indeed, in many cases, English language instructors have had to take on a technical support specialist’s role, teaching students, among other things, how to download, upload, and share their work. Especially when working with language learners, those with lower English proficiency levels may face additional difficulties accessing digital technology, as most of the technology is available in English (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020).

Furthermore, the availability of appropriate technology and reliable internet connection (on both the students’ and teachers’ end) is the only way students can access educational content and online courses. Therefore, internet connectivity and bandwidth influence learners’ online experiences significantly, seeing that their learning experiences are dependent on the reliability of their internet connection (Al-Nofaie, 2020). Qualitative interviews conducted by Bin Dahmesh (2020) with 12 EFL university students at King Saud University revealed that students faced technical problems while attending their classes on Blackboard, from incompatible devices, sound interruption to being logged out by the platform. These issues increased at certain times in the day with increased internet traffic accessing the platform simultaneously. Likewise, Mabrook’s (2020) survey of 20 EFL learners at Onaiza colleges found that 64.3% of the respondents indicated that they faced “repeated disconnections,” interfering with their learning and online exams. These interruptions caused by slow or weak internet connection affect the quality of the online learning experience. They may also negatively impact learning, as they could lead to student frustration and demotivation (Hashim et al., 2018).

Additionally, there is the issue of poor technical support. Due to a multitude of students and faculty needing support at any given time, students do not receive help when they need it (Ali & Abdalgane, 2020). Besides, students with disabilities face accessibility issues and lack the required support they received while attending their educational institutions in person. For example, those with visual impairments will have trouble seeing the digital whiteboard, reading material that the instructor posts, or participating in the classroom chat. They need access to voice-to-text software, which still does not support all digital platforms and file formats. Similarly, students with hearing loss do not always have access to closed captioning or subtitles of the oral or video lectures. These accessibility issues for students with special needs leave them excluded and prevent them from taking full advantage of online learning (Madhesh, 2021).

It is worth mentioning here that in KSA’s general education, one of the most impressive achievements by the Saudi Ministry of Education was creating 23 educational television channels called iEn for those who do not have access to the internet. These channels include interpretations using Saudi sign language for students who are hearing impaired. They have also created three channels for special education students with learning disabilities. These instructional accommodations help mitigate some of the accessibility concerns of distance learning for children with special needs. Yet, similar services are deficient at the university level.
On the other hand, lack of visual input during online learning is a significant challenge for EFL learners. Due to cultural constraints and respecting users’ privacy, turning on cameras and visibly appearing in the virtual classroom is not required of students and instructors, especially at the tertiary level. However, ELT theory and evidence argue for the importance of non-verbal input and facial gestures in language learners’ development. Visual cues are crucial for communicating critical information that conveys the overall meaning of the verbal message (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2017). Thus, the listener’s loss of the speaker’s visual input in an online language lesson is a disadvantage to EFL students. For that reason, many studies of online learning during the pandemic suggest the preference for face-to-face communication with peers and instructors in the Saudi EFL context (Al-Jarf, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020). In fact, participants in Dahmash’s (2020) qualitative focus groups mentioned that they preferred in-person classes due to “the absence of the eye contact between themselves and the instructor” (p. 228).

Assessments are also another challenge with ELT being carried out remotely for various reasons. First, many language instructors face the issue that there is no guarantee that what the students are submitting is their original work. Despite the availability of anti-cheating software and plagiarism tools, not all instructors are adequately trained to apply them, or students bypass them by using various academic dishonesty methods.

Ali and Abdagane (2020) noted that one of the obstacles faced in the online teaching of English is the “ease of penetration of the content of the test” (p.12). They mention several methods to reduce cheating, such as using a plagiarism checker to check the students’ written answers, paraphrasing the content of objective type questions, displaying single questions in random order, and reducing the allotted time for the test. Nevertheless, without being physically present or applying surveillance software (which would violate students’ privacy), there is no guarantee that the student is completing the assessment on his/her own. It also makes it more troublesome to evaluate students’ learning progress. For example, Mabrook (2020) found that students used a second device during exams to search for answers online or simply copy and paste responses from other sources. Due to these issues in evaluating students, remote assessments do not depict students’ development accurately.

Moreover, online learning and teaching are more time-consuming than in-person classes, creating yet another challenge. In a survey of academic English teachers worldwide, Wright (2021) showed that only 10% of English language teachers spent most of their teaching time online before the pandemic. Now, however, 55% of the teachers surveyed spend 100% of their teaching time online. In addition to teaching online, language instructors also prepare content, create materials, send and reply to emails, post assignments for students, and correct students’ work online, to name a few. As a result, language teachers spend between 10 to 12 hours in front of a screen daily (Hernandez & Florez, 2020). Similarly, in Mabrook’s (2020) survey of Saudi EFL university students, 85.7% claimed it takes them more time to prepare for online lectures than it does for in-person classes. It is also disconcerting because, as Shaibani (2020) suggests, the longer time spent online, especially using mobile devices, was highly correlated with academic procrastination and social media addiction. Furthermore, long hours of screen time and online communication cause many users to feel exhausted and drained from what has come to be known as Zoom Fatigue (Wiederhold, 2020).
There are also issues with learning platforms. In addition to Blackboard LMS, students and instructors have utilized alternative applications and software, yet they come with privacy and security issues. One of those is WhatsApp, a mobile application that allows its users to send text messages, photos, videos, voice notes, and even make calls with family and friends for free via the internet. A study by Alabasi and Alghamdi (2019) reported that WhatsApp is one of the most widely used applications by university EFL students who perceive the application as helping them learn reading, writing, and grammar. However, many privacy concerns have surrounded the application because of how users’ data is being used and shared. Recently, due to an update in January 2021 by WhatsApp’s owner company, Facebook, requiring users to share even more of their and contact information, most universities directed faculty and staff to switch over to Signal—a similar functioning app that offers more protection of data (Tashkandi, 2021).

The videoconferencing application, Zoom, faced similar concerns. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, hardly anyone had used Zoom for teaching, but as soon as schools went virtual, almost everyone was using it at first. Zoom offers various compelling features for teachers, such as live audio and video chat, a digital whiteboard, screen sharing, and uploading instructional materials. University students also found it helpful. Alfadda and Mahdi (2021) found a positive correlation between Saudi EFL university students’ use of Zoom and their acceptance and perceived usefulness of the technology. Nevertheless, security vulnerabilities were discovered after a series of Zoombombings, in which an individual attends “a Zoom session who has not been invited, with the potential for overt disruption” (Fudge & Williams, 2020, p. 197). Another problem was Deepfakes, which is “the imposition of someone else’s face on a different person’s body in video format using Artificial Intelligence algorithms” (p.197). As a result, most Saudi universities warned their faculty against using Zoom for teaching and web conferencing and requested that they replace it with a more secure alternative, such as Blackboard LMS, even though it does not offer all the same convenient features.

The Positive Outcomes of Online Teaching During COVID-19

Despite the drawbacks of the online instruction of English, many positive aspects have surfaced. One of the most significant advantages is the flexibility that online learning affords. Remote learning offers flexibility for students and teachers to attend classes anywhere and anytime (if learning asynchronously). It even provides versatility in the type of devices and software used by students and instructors. Aljaber’s (2021) investigation of Saudi university students revealed that they are most likely to use their mobile phones in e-learning environments, making it easier to access their lessons and learning materials. The author also maintained that virtual learning environments allow “students the freedom to study and finish the coursework anytime, anywhere” (p.138). For example, Mabrook (2020) points out that EFL students attended while at work, in the car, while seated with family, or from the comfort of their bed, even though this is not necessarily desirable. This flexibility has also saved students the time they spent commuting to and from their university campuses (Al-Jarf, 2020; Bin Dahmash, 2020). Surprisingly, even instructors stranded across borders—due to quarantine mandates and air travel lockdown—could teach from different countries, sometimes numerous time zones apart (Yandell, 2020). Thus, online learning during the pandemic has removed the physical constraints of space and time while paving the way for a new learning approach that transcends these barriers.
One of the other benefits observed as a result of the switch to the online instruction of English is that students who were too shy to speak up in front of a large class might be more willing to speak in front of a screen from the comfort of their home. For instance, Khafaga’s (2021) survey of 311 EFL university students from five major Saudi universities revealed that attending classes via Blackboard (instead of in-person) helped learners overcome their shyness in participating in class discussions. Similarly, online language learning has been claimed to boost introverted students’ confidence in class (Hakim, 2020) and promote peer interaction (Al-Nofaie, 2020). The (partial) anonymity afforded by e-learning provides a safe space that contributes to reducing students’ anxiety around speaking a foreign language.

The switch to online instruction has also accelerated the development of new skills in both language students and their instructors, seeing as the sudden shift has forced many to tread on uncharted territories. Among the new skills implemented by English language teachers for the first time since the pandemic are: teaching online, delivering presentations online, providing online practice for students, using electronic versions of coursebooks, and carrying out online assessments (Wright, 2021). Likewise, the virtual learning environment helped improve EFL students’ language skills, especially in listening and speaking (Khafaga, 2020; Hernandez & Florez, 2020) and their online searching skills (Bin Dahmash, 2020). Despite the difficulty many faced in adapting to online environments, the new experiences spurred novel skills acquisition and honed existing expertise.

Along the same lines, the move to digital learning has resulted in the incidental learning (i.e., learning without the intention of learning) of English which occurs through exposure to the language informally. Because English is the most common language used online, with 25.9% of online content being in English (Statista, 2020), EFL learners encounter more English outside their language lessons than they would in a face-to-face classroom. Also, Alqarni (2020) argues that Saudi EFL learners’ use of the internet promotes their informal acquisition of the language because students have access to content that piques their interests, such as music, movies, YouTube videos, and videogames. Hence, online learning may prove to be beneficial for students’ informal learning of English.

Furthermore, the need for novel skills for online teaching and learning created a universal need for professional development opportunities. With the surge of COVID-19 cases and the increased quarantine restrictions, there was a boom in online training and educational material. The result was universal access to a wealth of knowledge through online webinars, conferences, courses, and workshops—primarily free of charge (Shin & Borup, 2020). It has never before been this convenient to attend educational and training events in different places, without being limited to choosing only one. Saudi universities all participated in these events and provided access to university affiliates and non-affiliates alike. Additionally, many professors, educators, libraries, and even publishers offered free access to their materials to ensure that while the whole world comes to a standstill, education does not.

Discussion
This paper reviewed and synthesized over 40 recently published research concerning the online teaching of English as a foreign language in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic by highlighting the challenges and benefits discussed in the literature. The
current research on how distance learning influences EFL learning and teaching at the tertiary level implies several vital points. First, learners’ motivation is at risk. Although e-learning benefits students who struggle with shyness or foreign language learning anxiety by promoting their classroom interaction, many students lack the motivation to attend classes or participate in online activities. Part of this lack of motivation could also be due to complications students face with internet connectivity that affect the quality of lesson delivery. The other reason could be that the students are attending lessons in less-than-optimal learning environments.

Remote learning has allowed students to join their virtual classrooms wherever they may be. However, the flexibility of distance learning is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it removed the physical limitations of space and time, providing access to learning and development opportunities worldwide and saved the time it takes to commute to and from university campuses. On the other hand, it also allows for more distraction from learning. The home environment is replete with disruptions, especially with other family members working and learning from home. Furthermore, the absence of separation between home and school environments makes it harder for students to distinguish between leisure time and learning time.

The switch to online learning also highlighted several other issues that hinder students’ progress. One of the problems that surfaced is insufficient digital readiness skills in students and, sometimes, teachers, which is further compounded by the shortage of technical support. The various advantageous features of e-learning become inaccessible when its users cannot access and use them. Additionally, dealing with such issues and navigating online territories is time-consuming for both learners and instructors.

Mainly related to language development, students need to have visual input of the spoken language. Not activating the use of video features during the lesson may undermine the development of their speaking and listening skills. Alternatively, students’ vocabulary and research skills may improve due to the incidental learning that occurs while accessing the internet with all its English content. Nevertheless, assessing the development of these language skills online has proven to be a predicament that requires teachers to take extra precautions to help assure its validity.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, educators and stakeholders must consider the issues mentioned above when examining the efficacy of e-learning in EFL and evaluating its usefulness and application after the pandemic finally comes to an end. Future research in this area should investigate the discrepancy in learner motivation between those who are more inclined to join in peer discussions online and those who feel less motivated to participate when classes are online. Also, there is a need for larger-scale studies to measure the academic EFL learning outcomes at the university level in Saudi Arabia.

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Tapping into Bloom Taxonomy’s Higher-Order Cognitive Processes: The Case for Multiple Choice Questions as a Valid Assessment Tool in the ESP Classroom

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Abstract
This article describes the results of Action Research conducted in an ESP classroom of Dhofar University located in Oman. Following the call of Oman Vision 2040 to emphasize educational practices that promote the development of higher-order cognitive processes, this study raises the following question: Can an online multiple choice question (MCQ) quiz tap into the higher-order cognitive skills of apply, analyze and evaluate? This question was also critical at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic when Omani universities switched to the online learning mode. The researchers administered an online MCQ quiz to 35 undergraduate students enrolled in an ESP course for Engineering and Sciences. The results showed that MCQ quizzes could be developed to tap into higher-order thinking skills when the stem of the MSQ is developed as a task or a scenario. The study also revealed that students performed better on MCQs that tap into low-level cognitive skills. This result can be attributed to the prevalent practice in Oman to develop assessment tools that tap only into a level of Bloom’s taxonomy, which involves the cognitive process of retrieving memorized information. The significance of the study lies in its pedagogical applications. The study calls for the use of teaching and assessment practices that target the development of higher-order thinking skills, which is aligned with the country’s strategic direction reflected in Oman vision 2040.

Keywords: Bloom’s taxonomy, critical thinking skills, COVID-19 pandemic, ESP, multiple choice questions (MCQs), Oman vision 2040, online assessment

Introduction

One of the strategic directions of Oman that is reflected in Oman Vision 2040 (Oman, 2040) is to develop a high-quality, performance-based educational system, the goal of which is to equip university graduates with competitive qualifications and higher-level thinking skills. These qualifications and skills are to ensure the employability of university graduates and their readiness to cope with tremendous international challenges faced by Oman in its transformation from an oil-dependent economy to a more diversified and sustainable economy. At present, graduates of Omani universities face challenges similar to those faced by graduates in other countries. As stated by Delosa (2015), in today’s world, a university degree is no longer considered an important stepping stone and a prerequisite for landing a lucrative job and a successful lifelong career. Many employers assign more value to soft skills, such as creativity, collaborative problem, and critical thinking skills than to a university degree.

Educational institutions in Oman are aware of the necessity of bridging the gap between knowledge and skills acquired at the university and those required by the employers of a highly competitive modern labor market. Thus, the essential graduate attributes include critical thinking skills, creativity and innovation that university graduates should demonstrate (Dhofar University, 2021a). This emphasis on critical thinking resonates with the agenda set by other universities to prioritize the development of higher-order thinking skills in teaching and assessment (see e.g., Momsen, Long, Wyse & Elbert-May, 2010).

Following the research on the role Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) can play in the assessment of higher-order thinking skills (Scully, 2017), the purpose of this paper is to raise the question of whether or not an MCQs quiz is a valid assessment tool of higher-order thinking skills that ensure students’ academic and professional success. Specifically, the action research presented in this paper raises the following questions: Is it possible to develop a formative classroom assessment tool (i.e., an online quiz) that taps into different levels of Bloom’s taxonomy? The significance of the study lies in the fact that by administering an online MCQ quiz to 35 ESP students and comparing their performance on the MCQs that tap into lower and higher-order thinking skills, it is possible to identify the cognitive processes that students have problems with and address them in future pedagogical practices.

Literature Review

Bloom’s Taxonomy

To reflect the current needs of the labor market, the development of higher-order thinking skills (i.e., problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking skills) is included in the course syllabi developed at the university where the present study takes place (Dhofar University, 2021b). Instructors teaching in this university are required to develop course learning outcomes for teaching and assessment purposes as statements that target different levels of cognitive processes reflected in Bloom’s taxonomy, such as remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create with more emphasis on higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy that are associated with higher-order thinking skills.

Several scholars (see e.g., Scully, 2017) have noted that the original taxonomy of thinking processes proposed by Bloom et al. (1956) (as cited in Scully, 2017), does not separate them into the cognitive processes of lower and higher orders. The separation is due to the
interpretation of the taxonomy by other scholars who believe that higher-order thinking skills include application, evaluation and creation of novel ideas based on the knowledge and skills acquired in the course. Moreover, the base level of Bloom’s taxonomy (i.e., knowledge) does not represent a cognitive process that requires thinking skills of a higher order (e.g., critical thinking skills or creativity), as this level reflects a cognitive process associated with a simple recall from long-term memory.

According to Anderson et al. (2001), this interpretation of the taxonomy is inaccurate. While proposing a revised version of Bloom’s taxonomy, Andersen et al. (2001) expanded the knowledge dimension by fine-tuning it and presenting it as (i) factual knowledge (e.g., knowledge of terminology used in a subject area), (ii) conceptual knowledge (e.g., knowledge of theories), (iii) procedural knowledge (‘how to’ knowledge), and (iv) metacognitive knowledge or self-regulation (e.g., awareness of one’s knowledge level). Simple recall of information (i.e., reproducing a definition of a term on a test) and understanding of one’s learning processes (e.g., awareness of lack of knowledge in a specific area) require thinking skills of a different order.

In a study of introductory-level biology classes, Momsen et al. (2010) categorized the learning objectives (as stated in the syllabi of faculty members) and assessment items in the high-stake assessment tools (quizzes and exams) of 50 faculty members teaching 77 introductory biology classes in the USA against the six levels of cognitive skills (knowledge = 1, comprehension = 2, analysis = 3, application = 4, synthesis = 5, evaluation = 6) of Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives. The findings of the study are the following: (1) 93% of the assessment items and 69% of the learning objectives used by faculty members in quizzes and exams targeted levels 1 (i.e., knowledge) and 2 (i.e., comprehension) of Bloom’s taxonomy, (2) the assessment items were not aligned with the learning objectives. Based on the results of the study, the authors recommend that students should be exposed to multiple levels of cognitive processing skills from the beginning of their studies. The researchers expressed the belief that “students should begin practicing the skills of connecting, transferring, and modeling scientific concepts at the start, not end, of their degree programs” (Momsen et al., 2010, p. 439)

The present study contributes to the ongoing debate in the literature (see e.g., Javaeed, 2018) on the use of MCQs by bringing empirically-based evidence to support the view of the proponents of the use of MCQs as a valid assessment tool that teachers can use to tap into higher-order thinking skills.

Method

The goal of this paper is to describe the results of an Action Research (AR) study. This AR was undertaken by an ESP instructor who taught an undergraduate online ESP course for engineering and sciences during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the AR is to investigate the use of MCQs as an assessment tool that taps into different levels of Bloom’s taxonomy.

According to Burns (2015), AR is centered around localized practices. Its purpose is to bring change to the teaching and learning practices. AR represents an alternative research approach to a more traditional (quantitative/ qualitative) type of research due to its flexible, dynamic, and adaptable nature. Burns claims that AR is more meaningful to practitioners due to
its cyclical nature since it starts with a practitioner’s reflection on his/her current teaching practices. This reflection leads to raising questions, developing an action, implementing changes, and reflecting on the results brought about by this action. AR brings a conceptual shift in a practitioner’s understanding of his/her current practices.

Burns (2015) states that AR is not a method but rather an approach to doing research, the validity of which lies in its contribution to the improvement and change of current educational practices. Since AR as an approach to doing research utilizes different data collection methods, for the purpose of this study, the following data collection method has been implemented. The questions included in an online quiz, as a formative type of assessment that assessed students’ progress in the ESP course, were first coded for one of the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy that it targeted. To achieve inter-raters’ reliability, a co-instructor who taught a different section of the same course verified the codes. The average scores for each question that reflected a level of Bloom’s taxonomy were calculated and compared to identify the most challenging levels of the taxonomy for the students enrolled in the course. This information was then used as feedback to inform future teaching and learning practices.

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) as a Valid Measure of Higher Order Thinking Skills: Pros and cons

A typical MCQ consists of the following components: (i) a stem, (ii) the correct answer, and (iii) a choice of response options or distractors. In example (1) presented below, the question is a stem; the word permitted shown in (c) is the correct answer, and the words presented under (a) and (b) are distractors.

Example (1)
Which of the following words is the best choice to be used in the sentence: Smoking is not _______ on the company premises?

a. authorized
b. prohibited
c. permitted

Baker and Gravran (2019) claim that MCQs, when used for assessment purposes, are easy to administer and score. On the one hand, MCQs satisfy the principle of practicality. They are easy to grade, especially on Moodle, since the instructor can see the results immediately after the students submitted their answers to the questions. On the other hand, MCQs can be challenging in creating plausible distractors for the best possible answer and time-consuming while creating MCQ quiz banks on Moodle. Well-developed MCQs possess high reliability in scoring since the lack of proficiency in writing does not affect a test-taker’s ability to choose the best possible answer. MCQs can have a positive washback on teaching and learning since the results, which are available right after the students’ submission of their answers, can be used as feedback to inform future educational practices.

Opponents of the MCQs’ use of for assessment purposes claim that MCQs can test only a limited number of cognitive processes by tapping into the lower levels of Bloom’s taxonomy. MCQs are called pseudo-assessment since they can not assess the highest level of Bloom’s taxonomy (i.e., create). The central argument is that the process of identifying the best possible answer is not equal to creating a novel answer. Thus, MCQs can assess only surface knowledge.
and rote learning. Moreover, MCQs block critical thinking rather than encourage it, as it is suggested that there is one correct answer for any given situation.

Proponents of the use of MCQs for assessment purposes deny their limiting capacity. They argue that when properly developed, MCQs can access all the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy except for create. For example, MCQs can tap into the cognitive process of evaluation by asking students to make judgments based on a set of guidelines. MCQs can assess a test-taker’s ability to apply the knowledge acquired in the course to new situations. MCQs can assess problem-solving skills and the ability of making inferences based on the information provided to test-takers. All of these elements (evaluation, application, making inferences) constitute the components of critical thinking. The position that is taken in this paper is that MCQs can be used to tap into critical thinking skills represented as higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy when a stem of an MCQ is developed in the form of a task or a scenario.

Participants

35 participants (24 male participants and 11 female participants) enrolled in an ESP course for engineering and sciences took part in this AR study. The participants completed the requirements of the General Foundation Program. This program is a bridging program that prepares high-school graduates for academic studies at the university. All the participants had already finished taking the required prerequisite courses in English before their enrolment in this course. Their level of English proficiency is assessed at band five of the academic module of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which is a prerequisite for entering the university academic program in Oman. According to this band, the participants are described as modest users of their additional language. This level of proficiency means that they had “partial command of the language and cope[d] with overall meaning in most situations, although they [were] likely to make many mistakes. They [were] able to handle basic communication in their own field” (IELTS, n. d., paragraph 5).

The Context: Teaching During the World Pandemic

The institutions of higher education in Oman followed the government’s decision to suspend face-to-face classes and switch to online learning. The suspension of face-to-face classes was a preventive measure against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Since March 2020, teaching and learning have been taking place through the BigBlueButtonBN (BBB) activity module available through Moodle, where real-time online lessons can be delivered. BBB provided public and private chat rooms, video and screen sharing (BigBlueButton, 2021). An abrupt switch from face-to-face to online teaching and learning presented challenges to both university instructors and students. Before the pandemic, Moodle (Dhofar University, n. d.) was used as a teaching and learning platform for uploading class handouts, submitting assignments, and posting announcements. Before the switch to online classes, Moodle provided a supplementary platform that was not fully utilized by all the students to enhance face-to-face teaching and learning in the classroom. While learning during the pandemic, many university students encountered challenges. These challenges were weak Internet connection, lack of laptops and other electronic devices except for smartphones, lack of experience with online learning and assessment, and low level of computer literacy skills. For example, some students did not know how to upload their assignments on Moodle, access class handouts, and format their assignments according to the course requirements. Course instructors also had to go through
the learning curve of using BBB for online classes and Moodle for online assessment within a brief period of time. There was an abrupt switch from face-to-face to online teaching and learning, and course instructors did not have time to transfer to the online teaching mode.

The university administration informed the course instructors that the instructors had to administer online assessment through the quiz activity module available on Moodle (2020). This module allows course instructors to create quizzes that include various questions, such as MCQs, true-false questions, short answer questions, drag and drop questions, among many other types of assessment. Questions can be stored in question banks for later use. The Moodle quiz module allows for the time setting, the number of quiz attempts, type of feedback, and options for viewing students’ answers after the quiz attempt. The quiz module also provides course instructors with automated grading and with quiz reports. These reports contain information about the average quiz scores as well as average scores obtained on each question. In this context, the course instructor was facing the dilemma of developing a valid assessment tool that would (i) measure students’ progress in the ESP class and (ii) tap into different levels of cognitive processes represented as levels of Bloom’s taxonomy reflected in the course learning outcomes. Since one of the options presented in the Moodle quiz module was MCQs, the instructor decided to investigate this type of questions for assessment purposes. The next section provides a description of what Multiple Choice Questions are and the challenges and opportunities they represent for assessment purposes.

Research Tools

The course learning outcomes of the ESP course target the improvement of students’ specialist language knowledge in engineering and sciences and their professional communication skills. It also aims to expose students to a range of learning techniques and strategies, critical thinking, basic study and research skills to increase their academic, professional, and employment potential (Dhofar University, 2021b). Health and safety procedures and precautions was one of the themes included in the course syllabus. The teaching materials included in the lesson plan were structured around Unit seven of the prescribed course textbook (Ibbotson, 2008) and supplemented with a New York Times’ adapted article on safety measures to be taken while cleaning (Kerr, 2020), a video on the procedures to be followed during the workplace fire alarm drill (BBC learning English, 2016), and an excerpt from the Labour Laws in Oman that regulate health and safety rules in such areas as lighting, ventilation, heat stress, noise, uniforms, personal protection equipment, first aid and occupational diseases (Oman law blog, n. d.). At that time, the students were working with the following corpus of English words and expressions: (i) eight key vocabulary items related to the legal aspect of following health and safety procedures and precautions, for example stipulated by law, legislation, compulsory, contravene, adhere to; (ii) 21 key words related to health and safety procedures that have to be followed while cleaning your house or office during the pandemic, such as hazardous, fumes, inhale/exhale, sodium hypochlorite (i.e. chlorine bleach); (iii) six key expressions that are related to the fire alarm drill procedures, such as if you see a fire, raise the fire alarm, walk calmly to the nearest fire exit, meet at the fire assembly point, no smoking on company premises. In terms of language structure, students were implicitly introduced to the English passive, e.g., legal requirements are stipulated by law, you are not allowed to smoke on company premises, safety hats should be worn at all times, to name just a few. These key words, expressions, and grammatical structures were presented to the students and then recycled in reading, listening, and speaking activities. Many
activities introduced in the course targeted students’ critical thinking skills by asking them to apply the knowledge they received in the course, critically evaluate new situations, and make inferences. For example, the students were surprised to learn that Oman has the mandatory midday break rule during the summer, according to which blue-collar workers should not work outdoors between 12.30 pm and 3.30 pm. The students were engaged in discussing this regulation and a follow-up scenario of what might happen when this regulation has not been followed, and one of the company’s employees has had a stroke. The students and the instructor discussed the legal consequences of this incident.

While planning for a formative online assessment, the teacher faced the challenge of developing an assessment that would satisfy the main principles of assessment as well as adhere to the principles of academic integrity. The goal was to develop a test that should meet the following principles of assessment: (i) the principle of validity, that is, a valid test assesses what students learn in the course, (ii) construct validity, that is, a communicative test should tap into students’ ability to use language rather than to check their knowledge of grammar rules and decontextualized vocabulary items; (iii) positive washback to students and other stakeholders, that is, to ensure that the results of the test are valid from the point of view of academic integrity and its importance for further learning; (iv) face validity, that is, to develop a test that is considered fair to students. The teacher developed an MCQ quiz that satisfied the major principles of assessment, provided formative feedback on the progress made by the students in the course, and tapped into their higher-order thinking skills as specified in the course learning objective and course learning outcomes. The following section discusses the results of the MCQ quiz.

Results
Table one summarizes the results of the students’ performance on the MCQ quiz.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of the items included in the test pool</th>
<th>No of the items on the test</th>
<th>The targeted cognitive process according to Bloom/Anderson (Anderson et al., 2001)</th>
<th>Examples (the correct answer is provided in italics)</th>
<th>Average score/total score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 items</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Remember, as in locating knowledge of words and expressions in the long-term memory and retrieving that knowledge.</td>
<td>In this class, we studied several idioms, e.g., from the ground up, back to the drawing board. Which of the following best describes the meaning of the idiom? Please select one: The meaning of the idiom is nonsensical. The meaning of the idiom is compositional. The meaning of the idiom is non-</td>
<td>2.59/ 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Compositional

Which of the following words is the best choice to be used in the sentence?

Smoking is not _____ on the company premises.

- authorized
- prohibited
- permitted

### Apply

**Apply**, as in applying knowledge to a familiar or an unfamiliar situation or task based on the knowledge acquired from reading passages introduced and discussed in class

You work as an engineer on a construction site. Which of the following violations can have serious legal consequences for you? Please choose one of the following:

- when you do not wear safety boots
- when you call in sick
- when you do not show up for work

### Analyze

**Analyze**, as in breaking a situation or a task into its constituent parts and determining how the parts relate to one another for the purpose of coming up with the right solution

You work as an engineer on a construction site. Your workers do not wear any protective gear. Suddenly one worker injured himself. Who is responsible for the worker’s injury? Please choose the best possible answer:

- His injury is the stakeholders’ responsibility since everyone is responsible for adhering to health and safety rules.
- His injury is his own responsibility since it was his choice not to wear a safety hat.
- His injury is the management’s responsibility since your boss is responsible for the company.
- His injury is your responsibility since you did not enforce safety rules.

### Evaluate

**Evaluate**, as in making a judgment based on criteria

At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to wear a mask. Which of the following

- is essential
- is recommended
- is not necessary
Nine questions were selected out of a pool of 21 questions and included in the MCQ quiz. MCQs were presented according to the following categories that reflected the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy except for the highest level named create. Seven items included in the question bank targeted the cognitive process located at the foundation of Bloom’s taxonomy known as remember. Out of the seven items included in the question banks, the students randomly chose three MCQs that tested their knowledge of key words and expressions included in the lesson on health and safety procedures and precautions. The average score of the students’ performance for this category was 2.59 out of 3. The following seven items included in the question bank targeted the level of Bloom’s taxonomy known as apply. Out of the seven items included in the question banks, the students randomly chose three MCQs that tested their ability to apply knowledge obtained in the course to an unfamiliar situation related to health and safety procedures and precautions. The average score for this category was 1.49 out of 3. There were two items included in the question bank for the purpose of testing students’ ability to analyze, that is, their ability to break a given situation into its constituent parts and analyze their relationships to one another. On the quiz, the students randomly selected one situation out of the two included in the question bank. The average score of students’ performance on this question was 0.19 out of 2. Five items included in the MCQ quiz assessed the students’ ability to evaluate, i.e., to be able to make judgments based on the criteria and standards presented to them. Out of five items, the students randomly selected 2 MCQs from the quiz question bank. The average score of students’ performance on this question was 1.52 out of 2.

Table two summarizes the students’ performance according to the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloom’s level</th>
<th>Average scores obtained for each level of Bloom’s taxonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Students’ performance according to the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy in a descending order
Table two shows that the students demonstrated the best performance on the level titled remember in Bloom’s taxonomy. This level reflects a cognitive process that involves a simple recall from long-term memory. With regards to the higher-order thinking skills, such as apply, analyze and evaluate, the students show the following results, 1.49, 0.19, and 1.51, respectively, with the categories of applying and evaluating being the highest and analyzing the lowest results.

Discussion

The results of the study showed that an MCQ quiz could be used as a valid type of assessment that would tap into cognitive processes represented as different levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, such as remember, apply, analyze, and evaluate. The study showed that the students demonstrated the best performance on the MCQs that were developed to test a simple recall from memory. With regards to the MCQs that were designed to assess the higher-order thinking skills, such as apply, analyze and evaluate, the students obtained low average scores. The overall average score on the MCQ quiz was 5.78 out of 9, which is equal to 64%. According to the university grading system, the score of 64% is the next score after Fail, and it represents the passing grade (DU Grading System, 2021). The test results showed that the students experienced difficulties while answering the MCQs that were supposed to tap into the cognitive processes of the higher-order thinking skills. These results can be explained by the fact that most of the time while writing quizzes in the EFL and ESP courses, the students are exposed to questions that tap into one level of Bloom’s taxonomy, namely remember, when teachers ask the students to retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory. The findings of the study have significant pedagogical implications as they signify students’ inability to apply higher-order thinking skills in a formative assessment, and these are precisely the skills that are needed to succeed in their academic studies and to be employable in a highly competitive market. The students’ low performance on the MCQ quiz also reflected their experiences with studying and assessment where, for the most part, they are taught for the test and are asked to memorize the knowledge that is tested on the test. This pedagogical practice has been noticed by several Omani researchers who attempted to investigate the reasons behind the inadequate development of skills and abilities of Omani students. For example, Denman and Al-Mahrooqi (2019) have stated that despite the continuous educational reforms that took place in Oman, memorization and information retrieval are still widely used as some of the teaching methods in educational institutions of Oman. In a way, the results of the MCQ quiz reflect the experiences of the students who expect to be quizzed on the knowledge that they have to memorize and retrieve for assessment purposes. When presented with questions that are developed to assess students’ higher-order thinking skills, the students experienced challenges. These challenges are due to the fact that the students do not have the experience of writing MCQs quizzes that measure their abilities to use high order cognitive skills, such as apply, analyze and evaluate.

The researchers believe that the results of this study are significant from a pedagogical perspective. MCQs are one of the most widely used assessment tools both at the pre-university...
level and the university level. They are also commonly used in high-stakes standardized tests. For practicing teachers, MCQs are also very convenient to use and very easy to mark, especially when teachers are teaching classes with a large number of students. The widespread use of MCQs in various educational and professional settings points to the urgency of addressing their (in)validity as an assessment tool to measure high-level cognitive skills. Against this background, this paper is an attempt to reassure practicing teachers that MCQs, when they are well-structured in the form of a scenario, do indeed tap into the high-level cognitive skills that teachers are required to address in their assessment items (i.e., quizzes and test) and their learning objectives. The findings of this study are also in line with some recent studies which have made similar claims regarding the use of MCQs (Baker & Gravran, 2019; Scully, 2017).

**Conclusion**

In the context of the present study, Bloom’s taxonomy of cognitive processes is used when instructors develop the course learning outcomes. The taxonomy includes cognitive processes, which range from lower-order thinking skills, such as the ability to recall from memory to higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to apply, analyze and evaluate.

The spread of the COVID 19 pandemic and the switch to the online mode of learning has posed significant challenges to institutions of higher education in Oman, which strive towards realizing Oman Vision 2040 that prioritizes higher-order thinking skills.

Against this backdrop, the researchers have conducted the AR study in one of the ESP classes, namely English for Engineering and Sciences, in an attempt to answer the following question: Can higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to apply, analyze and evaluate, still be targeted in online MCQ quizzes considering the fact that some researchers have questioned their validity as an assessment tool to target higher-order thinking skills?

To answer this question, the researchers have developed an online quiz and created several MCQs that targeted both lower-order thinking skills, such as the ability to recall from memory, as well as higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to apply, analyze and evaluate. The study results showed that the students performed better on lower-order thinking skills than on higher-order thinking skills.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results of the study: (a) MCQs can be used to tap into both lower-order thinking skills and high order thinking skills; (b) the results of the study corroborate a claim made recently in the literature on the tertiary education in the Sultanate of Oman, namely, modes of teaching where students are asked to study for the test and to memorize rather than engage in critical thinking, are still regrettably rampant in the Omani context.

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Psychological Difficulties during the Covid Lockdown: Video in Blended Digital Teaching Language, Literature, and Culture

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Abstract
The recent COVID-19 pandemic has caused an urgent necessity for higher education institutions and their teaching staff to move the educational process online in the shortest possible time. It should be admitted that higher education worldwide is changing, and institutions face challenges when adapting to the new COVID-19 reality – blended digital teaching and learning. They are tackling several issues connected with the essence of virtual education, its technical aspect, and students' learning environment. During COVID-19 lockdown, teachers have to prepare and deliver their classes from home, simultaneously coping with numerous professional and technical challenges, often without any appropriate support. In addition to that, they were lack of technology literacy, professional knowledge, and experience needed for successful E-teaching. Besides, a new mode of blended digital teaching and learning also made them consider technical and administrative aspects of the current educational process, namely to use new educational platforms and tools, organize active workflows, and work out critical educational principles to design and facilitate practical online experiences. Along with the challenges that the teachers face in such conditions, they should be able to cope with the stress and psychological disorders of pupils and students. The article emphasizes the abnormal psychology of youngsters (pupils and students) as the result of stress and anxiety that appeared during Covid lockdown – the application of psychological science to understanding and treating mental disorders – and the use of video as a productive means of avoiding psychological disabilities. The research objective is to prove that video is an effective educational tool for avoiding psychological difficulties in blended digital learning during COVID-19 lockdown while teaching foreign languages, literature, and culture. Special attention is paid to psychological strategies of overcoming stress during COVID-19 lockdown, as well as to effective ways to students' adapt to a virtual learning environment, development and implementation of anti-stress methods, which heighten their motivation. The article also heads on and explores potential solutions to educational problems that one can encounter in the new educational process at the post-COVID-19 epidemic period, such as the quality of education offered, its cost and availability, internationalization, and employability.

Keywords: blended, Covid lockdown (COVID-19), culture, digital teaching, disabilities, language, literature, psychological, video, Ukraine.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the main reason for the significant disruption of current education systems throughout the world and impacted approximately 1.6 billion learners in 190 countries or even more. Closed schools and other educational facilities have amounted to 94 percent of students worldwide, while almost 99 percent of them in low-income countries. The COVID-19 crisis is increasing education differences due to reduced opportunities for learners mostly living in poor or rural areas with no access to the Internet. It is clear that in a predominantly "developed" country, new technologies and approaches are layered upon older ones. However, one can see teachers and students of "less developed" countries that would happily switch places. Hence, contemporary education depends on our perspective: one country's education crisis may be another country's aspiration (Babelyuk, Koliasa, Kushlyk, Smaglii, 2020).

However, it is assumed that after a short period of shock and a rather quick reorganization of the educational process, in current higher education worldwide, numerous innovative ideas are introduced, which had been worked out to support education systems in general, and training continuity in particular, such as special radio lessons, television educational programs, and take-home packages. Distance learning solutions were developed by governments and partners worldwide, including the Global Education Coalition established by UNESCO.

To hamper the spread of the COVID-19, in most countries, educational facilities have decided to suspend in-person teaching and learning temporarily and commence remote learning. Here we can trace some differences, which had been prompted, to our minds, by the peculiarities of the coronavirus spread in different countries. For example, in many countries (Malta, Portugal, Ireland, Ukraine), all educational establishments have been closed, since the beginning of March 2020, while in others (most of China and South Korea), this restriction was canceled since January 2020. In several countries, the formal education system was not re-opened, while in others (e.g. Denmark, Germany, France, Greece, Poland,) the standard education facilities have been successively re-opened already in April/May to enable their students' assessment and certification. These irregularities can be explained by different medical recommendations for de-confinement, which vary from country to country.

The COVID-19 epidemic has caused the closure of schools and universities all around the world. But as our observations show, in weak education systems, this interruption in the school academic year affected the students sufficiently. They had limited conditions to continue their education at home. In advanced education systems, online teaching has been provided through recorded lectures and online platforms. As a result, the blended digital teaching/learning during the COVID-19 lockdown caused modern teaching technologies to expand the scope of the educational process, broaden its practical orientation, contribute to the intensification of students' independent work, increasing their cognitive activity (Babelyuk et al., 2020).

However, these types of learning and teaching have been postponed by some universities, due to the lack of Information Technology (IT) infrastructure. In addition to that, there were also problems with adjusting semesters and academic calendars, as some programs due to their nature, can be successfully implemented online, and some cannot. These reflections may turn out to be helpful to policymakers in elaborating current interventions and strategies, whose objective is to reduce the harmful consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The introduction of blended digital learning/teaching in particular also had a negative influence on students' learning and motivation. Among the key reasons for such negative feedback we distinguish: virtual learning environment at home, apparent symptoms of stress or depression resulting from psychological disorders, essential changes in students' online interactions, a strict lockdown. However, apart from this, blended digital education, to our minds, is crucial for the continuity of a successful learning process when regular classes are suspended.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on our lives and the educational process in particular. Many current researches have already worked out some theoretical assumptions (SWOC) of using distance EdTechs for remote teaching/learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. To its strong points belong to time and location flexibility, covering a broad audience, immediate feedback. Technical disabilities, learners' technological awareness, stress, and lack of eye contact are among weaknesses. EdTechs development, academic flexibility are among opportunities. The absence of technical aids, quality of education, and digital illiteracy are among the challenges (Babelyuk et al., 2020).
Many students and teachers are facing challenges that can be stressful, overwhelming, and cause strong emotions in adults and children in such pandemic conditions. Public health actions, such as social distancing, are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but they can make us feel isolated and lonely. They increase stress and anxiety, and other results of psychological disorders.

Psychologists like Butcher, Mineka and Hooley (2007), Lopushanskyy (1996) stated that stress can cause the following: feelings of fear, anger, sadness, worry, numbness, or frustration; changes in appetite, energy, desires, and interests; difficulty concentrating and making decisions; difficulty sleeping or nightmares; physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and skin rashes; worsening of chronic health problems; worsening of mental health conditions; increased use of tobacco, alcohol, and other substances.

Recent studies in this field demonstrate that coronavirus lockdown caused stress and the feeling of danger and uncertainty among students who were closed in their homes during the lockdown. Sprang & Silman (2013) have proved that being isolated, children are prone to suffer from acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, and grief. These psychological factors may affect the process of learning badly, and as a result, all kinds of learners may suffer from depression, anxiety, and insomnia.

Educational researches show enough evidence that video can be an effective way of improving difficult psychological situations. Today it is considered to be an efficient means of avoiding stress in the process of online learning. Besides, video can be used to document and illustrate exemplary classroom practices and as a tool to allow pre-service teachers to reflect on their own and others' teaching practice (Anderson, Major, & Mitchell, 1990; Canning, & Talley, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Erickson, 2007). It is also helpful for teacher assessment and certification (Calandra, Brantley-Dias, Dias, 2006; Rich & Hannafin, 2009; Star & Strickland, 2008). The scientific resources on the use of video in teacher preparation tend to fall into two main camps. One side is pro-video, suggesting that video can aid self-reflection by allowing the student to view videos at the teaching process of multiple times (Brouwer, 2011; Calandra, et al., 2006). Another – viewing videos of their teaching allows pre-service teachers to switch perspectives between actors in their videos to the audience (Downey, 2008; Dye, 2007; McCurry, 2000; Shepherd & Hannafin, 2008).

As recent studies have proved, some of the main difficulties reported by teachers for web-based courses arise from the complexity of technical instructions for educators and shortcomings in their planning and organization. Besides the numerous challenges, the COVID-19 crisis has brought forth many valuable recommendations aimed at making the educational process more effective. Many of them focus on already well-known educational tools and didactic materials used by teachers in their face-to-face classes before the lockdown. Among them a video, which is indispensable in creating a unique relaxing atmosphere of avoiding stress and depressive mood while teaching foreign languages, literature, or country studies.

Methods
The research aims at detecting psychological disorders as consequences of coronavirus lockdown observed in pupils and students and finding possible digital aids and particular psychological approaches to help them to overcome some psychological difficulties. To detect certain psychological disorders, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Rorschach Inkblot Test, and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) can be used.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a document that helps to provide standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

From the point of view of methodology, the video method belongs to the group of visual methods. It contains teaching and upbringing functions, which is due to the high efficiency of the impact of visual images. Information presented in a visual form is the most accessible for perception; it is assimilated easier and faster. In addition to the content side of communication, video texts contain visual information about the place of the event, the appearance, and the non-verbal behavior of the participants in touch in a particular situation. Besides, the use of video in the classroom helps to meet the needs, desires, and interests of students and with the help of music to overcome the feeling of danger and disaster.

When using the visual method (video demonstration), several conditions should be observed: the video material used must correspond to the level of knowledge of the students; clarity should be used in moderation, and a
video should be shown gradually and only at the appropriate time of the lesson; observation should be organized in such a way that all students can see the demonstrated video material; it is necessary to highlight the central, essential; to think over in detail the explanations given during the demonstration of the video material; the demonstrated video material must be precisely coordinated with the studied educational material, correspond to the studied topic.

Data Collection Procedure

COVID-19 pandemic has been an unusual challenge for all educational establishments, which needed to move quickly into an online practice, ensure access to the virtual platform for all students, offer support to both teachers and students, and make plans the future in conditions of considerable uncertainty.

The pandemic caused much worry and stress. These stress elements can be a reason for mental health challenges, and acute symptoms may occur to people who might experience earlier definite mental health issues. To settle this problem, one can turn on mental health advisers who support students at risk for emotional problems by systematic screenings. Their ultimate goal is to facilitate the optimal development of each child. Within the screening process, teachers are those who know the best students' general behaviors due to the most frequent contact with students. Observant teachers can detect changes in children's mood, habits, and school practices.

Some of the typical indicators, which teachers use to identify students experiencing mental health difficulties, seem, at first sight, unavailable. Teachers may not be meeting their students in person or face the same student drop-ins. They should attempt to determine students are doing or how they are struggling with their emotional problems. Difficulties with students' anxiety or depression can be identified by systematic screening of the school population. In the case of elementary school, screening refers to teachers and students. They complete brief questionnaires concerning students' emotions and classroom behaviors. Screening contains student' questionnaires devoted to the frequency or severity of any emotional issues. Sometimes, teachers may appoint students who are excessively anxious or sad. Professionals, e.g., counselors, or psychologists can quickly identify students who are at risk for anxiety or depression using different tests to discover a type of disorder and its intensity (the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Rorschach Inkblot Test, and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)). The students are requested to complete the questionnaire again sometime later to determine whether their mental health issue has been improved.

Discussion

As stated above during, the COVID-19 pandemic, it is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry. All of these are the results of psychological disorders, which can be traced in pupils and students after coronavirus lockdown.

A psychological disorder is an ongoing dysfunctional pattern of thought, emotion, and behavior that causes significant distress, which is considered deviant in that person's culture or society (Butcher, et al., 2007).

The bio-psycho-social model of illness is a way of understanding disorder that assumes that condition is caused by biological (genetic makeup, brain structure), psychological (responses to stress, patterns of negative thinking), and social-cultural factors (cultural expectations, stigma, and prejudice, abuse).

Whether a given behavior is considered a psychological disorder is determined not only by whether a behavior is unusual (e.g., whether it is "mild" anxiety versus "extreme" anxiety) but also by whether a behavior is maladaptive—that is, the extent to which it causes distress (e.g., pain and suffering) and dysfunction (impairment in one or more essential areas of functioning) to the individual (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Psychologists have developed criteria that determine whether behavior should be considered a psychological disorder and which of the many disorders particular behaviors indicate. These criteria are laid out in a 1,000-page manual known as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a document that provides a common language and standard criteria for diagnosing mental disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

A vital personality test is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), to detect personality and psychological disorders. Another approach to measuring personality is to use projective measures, such as the
Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). These tests help to reveal psychological disorders and the level of stress and anxiety.

Each revision of the DSM includes a broader list of cultural norms about the disorder. The current version of the DSM lists about 400 disorders. The Covid lockdown will be listed in the next edition of DSM, and the great variety of disorders are still being studied. Still, it can be said, for sure, the results of the Covid lockdown will include the majority of the listed disorders (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DSM-IV_Codes_(alphabetical)) and some tens new… Covid lockdown psychological disorder can result in communication, conduct, elimination, feeding, learning, and motor skills disorders; attention-deficit and disruptive behavior disorders, attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); dissociative fugue, mood disorder, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, specific phobia (fear of viruses, people), sleep apnea, paranoid personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, avoidant personality disorder, dependent personality disorder, antisocial behavior.

When the World Health Organization released the instruction on protecting mental health during the coronavirus outbreak (World Health Organization, 2020), it was clear that the significant problem exists and is spreading with the speed of the light throughout the planet.

As Anxiety UK's Nicky Lidbetter explains, the fear of being out of control and unable to tolerate uncertainty are common characteristics of many anxiety disorders. So it's understandable that many individuals with pre-existing anxiety are facing challenges at the moment.

"A lot of anxiety is rooted in worrying about the unknown and waiting for something to happen – coronavirus is that on a macro scale," agrees Weatherley, a spokesperson for mental health charity mind (Brewer, 2020) especially vulnerable are children and teenagers who haven't suffered any pandemic fears.

So how can the teacher and parents protect their mental health?

Learning to cope with stress healthily will make students and teachers, the people they care about, more resilient. Let's discuss some practical ways to manage stress.

It becomes crucial to use one's skills and develop anti-stress methods, as well as use the psychological support of others. One can systematically reduce stress and be excessively exposed to stress factors and thus correctly "manage" stress. With this perspective in mind, it is needed to define what thoughts and situations trigger stress effectively. It can answer what strategy should be undertaken for anti-stress activities, which allow avoiding, reformulating, or adapting the stressful situation during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The avoidance strategy aims to eliminate the stress stimulus by turning it off. To avoid stress, one can keep away from stressful information (e.g., news on TV, from the coronavirus information center, or numerous Internet resources full of "coronavirus fatal news"). The epidemic situation needs not be checked all the time. People who support or cause stress (not only in the context of the coronavirus) also should be avoided. One should analyze, which stressful situations have the status of "duty," and which are "favors." The ones which are not needed to be attended for some reason are accepted, should be reduced.

The "reformulation" strategy is an indirect strategy used when a stressor cannot be avoided, but there is a chance to rearrange it. One can construct an appropriate schedule for the day. In the present situation, family members stay together on the same surface for a long time; this may cause many conflicts. They can be reduced if a plan of duties for the household members, rules for using equipment needed for study or work are established and strictly followed.

The strategy of adaptation and acceptance takes place when the removal of the stress stimulus cannot occur. In the case of the current epidemic; strategy that should be taken into consideration in the nearest future. The humanity can look for positive aspects of the post-COVID-19 situation and focus on what's happening in our lives due to isolation (maybe this is the time when the relationship with others can be improved. Maybe it is the appropriate time, when one can deal with things, that were missed long before or neglected, etc.). There may be many ideas, how to create present reality and what is positive in it even during the strict lockdown.
In a strategy of adjustment and acceptance, we can also respond to the "here and now" by using various anti-stress methods and techniques to minimize emotional tension. The time to relax is essential. It can take the form of activities that we enjoy, but also the use of special relaxation techniques.

A blended digital teaching process, video as a learning technology became an effective tool for overcoming psychological problems, thus creating a relaxing atmosphere at the lesson. It is interesting to know that since the middle of the 20th century, a notion of "learning technology" was associated with the technical usage of training tools only. At the end of the 20th century, a different meaning appeared in the concept of "learning technology." Under this term, one can understand the most rational ways of achieving learning goals (Babelyuk, 2019) in teaching foreign languages, literature, and culture.

The goal of teaching a foreign language is often formulated as teaching to communicate in a foreign language. This skill underlies the public sphere, the sphere of administration, and the service sector. Consequently, mastering the basics of foreign language communication serves as a basis not only for the formation of communicative culture and competence but also for the professional development of the student's personality.

Mastering communicative competence in English without being in the country of the target language is very difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, an essential task of the teacher is to create real authentic but still imaginary situations of communication in a foreign language, using various methods and techniques, such as role-playing games, discussions, creative projects, and video.

Along with this, it is vital to give students a visual idea of the life, cultural traditions, literature periods, linguistic realities of English-speaking countries. It is necessary to use modern technologies to solve this critical problem.

Despite some progress in blended digital teaching, such as the use of the Internet, various educational programs, one of the difficulties of teaching a foreign language is the very limited, if not meager, opportunity to communicate with native speakers and use speaking skills outside the university. Modern technologies allow us to expand the lesson scope and lead to the need to use new forms of teaching. One of these forms is a video tutorial.

Ready-made educational videos allow solving successfully critical tasks of teaching, upbringing, and education at once. First, when watching videos, most of which are produced in Oxford, students can hear authentic English spoken by native speakers. Secondly, videos enable students to see with their own eyes, what we talk about in the classroom, read in texts and dialogues. For example, sights of London, described by Ch. Dickens, various museums of Great Britain, the picturesque nature of Scotland, great cities in England. By watching videos, students learn more about the geographical position, history, economy, climate, religious traditions, and culture of the countries being studied.

The use of educational videos improves the quality of language knowledge, as it allows using key communication activities, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The use of video is justified psychologically: it is through the organs of sight and hearing that a person receives the bulk of information about the world around him.

It should be noted that the use of educational videos in the blended digital teaching process is not only using another source of information. It also contributes to the development of various aspects of the mental activity of students, and above all, attention and memory. During the viewing, an atmosphere of joint cognitive activity arises in the audience. Under these conditions, even an inattentive student becomes interested and attentive. To understand the content of the film, students need to make some effort. So, involuntary attention turns into voluntary. And the intensity of attention affects the memorization process. The use of various channels of information flow (auditory, visual, motor perception) has a positive effect on capturing regional and linguistic material.

Thus, the psychological characteristics of the impact of educational videos on students contribute to the intensification of the educational process, overcoming stress, depression and create favorable conditions for the formation of the communicative (linguistic and socio-cultural) competence of students.

It should be noted that there are positive and negative sides to using video in teaching listening. On the one hand, video recording, in comparison with audio recording, has a more vital character – you not only hear, but also
see the speakers, their facial expressions and gestures, and also receive information about the broad context of what is happening – the location of the action, the age of the participants, etc. On the other hand, all these factors distract the listener from the actual speech, and he may get carried away by looking at the picture instead of focusing on listening.

Therefore, especially at the initial stage, before watching, students should receive a concrete formulated task on the implementation of which they will have to focus.

At first glance, it seems redundant to prove the benefits of using video for educational purposes today and as an effective means of avoiding stress since they are pretty obvious. However, as our research has proved, realizing all this, teachers very rarely use videos in their classes.

Undoubtedly, the use of video in a foreign language lesson or teaching literature or country studies opens up some unique opportunities for the students in terms of mastering a foreign language culture, its history, especially in terms of formation their socio-cultural competence as one of the vital components of communicative competence in general.

**Media in Teaching Language, Literature and Culture**

The Internet’s role of the in the modern education system is only beginning to be understood by the broad pedagogical community. It is due to the rapid development of distance/remote education, the significance of which was prompted by the COVID-19 lockdown. It became apparent not only as a successful example of foreign educational experience but also as our own. Besides, technologically advanced countries need highly educated and highly qualified specialists, who speak several foreign languages, especially English. (Babelyuk, 2019) Knowledge and qualifications become priority values for future professionals. Thus, the role of information support in the blended digital educational process, including the Internet, becomes more evident.

The main functions of the Internet are related to its broadcast, interactive, and search services, as well as information resources of the network, that can be useful when learning English. In our case, Internet resources are considered on the YouTube service, which is considered to be the largest video hosting in the world. Hundreds of videos are uploaded to its servers every minute, most of which are in English. The learning system using this service should be built in such a way that students are to get acquainted with the culture of the country of the target language, traditions, and customs and be capable of intercultural interaction.

Teaching and learning a foreign language with YouTube allows to include authentic web materials (text, sound) in the training program; to carry out an independent search for information by students in the framework of work on any project; study English on their own; eliminate gaps in knowledge, skills, and abilities; to carry out independent preparation for passing the qualifying exam in English as an external student.

To sum it up, work on learning a foreign language in a broad sense using YouTube to a greater extent contributes to the development of listening and speaking skills.

YouTube is directly related to podcasts. Podcasts are mp3-format recordings of conversations posted on the Internet. Historically, podcasts have been associated with iPods where the name "pod + cast" comes from. Podcast from the English "iPod" and "broadcast" is an audio or video file is distributed free of charge via the Internet for mass listening or viewing. You can download files or listen online. Podcasts are constantly updated, and you can download them automatically.

There are three types of podcasts: audio podcast, video podcast, and screencast is a new phenomenon that has made it easier to teach people over the Internet. The screencast’s essence is that with the help of a particular program, actions are recorded on the computer screen along with audio comments, which is ideal for explanations using computer programs.

To get started, you can use three hosting channels, each of which has its focus: Learnamericanenglish (the study of American English); AlexESLvid, the author of this channel, Alex, is a Canadian teacher who works in the EngVid team. Alex's videos are designed for students with an elementary level of English proficiency. He pays
attention to both simple grammatical constructions and the use of idiomatic expressions. EnglishMeeting, where the emphasis is placed on the features of classical English pronunciation.

It should be noted that the Internet raises students' interest in learning activities, stimulates their growth of cognitive activity, which allows them to receive and assimilate more information, contributes to the acquisition of various skills, such as reading, speaking, listening skills, as well as "fun" teaching method within the blended digital educational process. Thus, the teacher has an excellent opportunity to "provoke” the activation of the student’s work using a computer, since many young people spend a lot of time in front of the monitor.

It is worth of underlining that the material based on computer technologies and its distribution in the course of study rebuilds the student to a new, more active mode of activity, which contributes to the highest manifestation of creative possibilities and creates the prerequisites for the successful assimilation of increased volumes of information. Combining all described above methods, namely listening to audiobooks, podcasts, watching movies, clips in a foreign language, and English in particular, will give better results than just traditional reading and learning grammar. Besides, with this training, students' fatigue may increase since the load on vision increases. Therefore, careful preparation of didactic means is required, taking into account the sensitivity of the human eye to a particular color scheme, as well as the "dosage" of the proposed material to avoid stress and feeling of anxiety.

Computer technology in the educational process should not be the primary means of presenting material but only an auxiliary means. It is difficult to argue about the merits of this method. However, it is still more advisable to use the so-called blended digital teaching/learning approach, i.e., mixing different techniques, both traditional and innovative, which is in the focus of our attention in this research. In this case, the effect will be the most optimal. In other words, the Internet does not replace traditional forms and methods of teaching. Still, it allows to quickly and more effectively achieve the goals and objectives in the educational process, especially in the present-day situation of COVID-19 lockdown and post lockdown period.

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**TV Shows in Teaching English**

There are boundless possibilities for using TV shows in the classroom while teaching a foreign language, literature, and country studies. The first step is to find appropriate shows suitable for both the language they use and the purpose to be achieved in the classroom. The second step is to find the proper scene. Teachers who already watch some TV shows just have to jot their memory and remember some scene they think could be helpful in the classroom due to some idioms, collocations, or an interesting cultural topic. Then, functional language is extracted from the clips – like colloquial expressions, that cannot be found in usual textbooks. Video clips have to be chosen based on the students' age and level of knowledge, the video’s offensiveness, and the video structure, which includes length, context, and the number of characters (Berk, 2009).

TV shows can be used in the same way as other classroom listening exercises for checking students' comprehension by asking questions, predicting what will happen next. Another way is to put students in pairs – one is facing the screen and the other is with his/her back to the screen and ask them in turns to describe what is going on in a show. In the end, students can be given an assignment to write a review of a TV show, to prepare a presentation about it.

Berk (2009) mentions eight steps for using a video clip in teaching a foreign language, which comprise choosing a clip, providing students with instructions for watching/listening, introducing a video, playing the clip, stopping it or replaying it, and finally, reflection, an active learning activity, and a discussion.

**Video Blogging**

Speaking about students’ technologies to enhance their creativity, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving in the language learning process, one cannot but mention blogging. Since the significant activity of blogging involves an oral activity in which students are required to narrate some stories in their life while facing the camera, it is clear that blog can be utilized for students to develop their communicative skills. According to Rakhmanina and Kusumaminingrum (2017), the blogging project can help learners develop their speaking skills, communication skills, and creativity. Blogs help improving students' oral skills because it allows them to practice their English either inside or outside the classroom, and they can get instant feedback from the teachers as well as watch their fellows' performance in the video. Therefore, it is an excellent idea to conduct a Blogging project in the English learning environment.
A blog is an online diary in a video form. Some notable blogs have emerged on YouTube. Students can be directed to them for extensive listening practice or any other authentic information in literature, history, or culture when authentic English realia is needed. Of greater use is the students' regular maintenance of their blog. This would entail them speaking before a web-camera for a limited period, watching and evaluating their recorded statements before deciding to post, and then watching and listening to the blog replies of their classmates or teacher. Due to YouTube's privacy settings, blogs can be uploaded to YouTube in complete privacy and made available for viewing only to the student in question, the instructor, and any invited classmates. The assessment could be performed following overall student pronunciation, vocabulary level, use of grammar, and general communicativeness.

Conclusion
English language teaching no longer consists of traditional face-to-face classroom instructions, even though many educators may be unaware that an integrated blended digital approach to teaching foreign languages, literature, and culture is commonly employed.

Based on the studied literature, it was revealed that for conducting lessons and classes using video materials, as well as when creating a set of exercises on video, it is envisaged that particular requirements are met during the preparatory work of the teacher when choosing the necessary vocabulary and video material, the procedure for introducing video content into the educational process and stages work with it, including pre-demonstration, demonstration, post-demonstration stages. Also, the selected video material must meet some criteria, including compliance with age and level of English proficiency, compliance with the topic and objectives of the lesson, the presence of a problem in the video, the absence of offensive, immoral elements, high-quality and well-prepared organization of the lesson using video materials. According to most methodologists, the duration of the video clip shown should be about five minutes so as not to overwork the students and not create additional difficulties for them, and the exercises should be offered in various types to interest the students.

Before implementing this type of blended digital teaching/learning, the following issues should be considered: the file size of the video, Internet speed, and availability of video cameras are essential for students, which may influence students' interests in learning speaking;

The described above teaching/learning blended digital model is not limited to be used in EFL courses but may also be used in other educational programs by educators, teachers, and administrators to balance and optimize course instruction and class activities and during the COVID-19 lockdown in particular.

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Innovative Practices in Instructor E-feedback: A Case Study of E-feedback given in Three Linguistic Courses during the COVID 19 Pandemic

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Abstract
This study aimed to investigate the instructor’s electronic feedback practices during the COVID 19 Pandemic in terms of the nature of the content of e-feedback, the formulation, the challenges, and the multimodal nature of the instructor’s e-feedback. This study used a qualitative case study to obtain data from the instructor’s e-feedback in three linguistic courses as delivered, practiced by the single English language instructor. The instructor’s e-feedback via Blackboard and WhatsApp platform and the follow-up interview were analyzed qualitatively. The findings indicate that (1) the highest number of instructor’s e-feedback focused on global issues as compared to local issues, (2) the instructor composed his e-feedback in the form of eight main categories: explanations, suggestions, clarifications, questioning, repetitions, statements, praises, and commands, (3) the instructor used more screencasts for providing e-feedback, followed by written and audio modes respectively. The thematic analysis revealed the instructor’s positive impression on providing e-feedback through these interactive modes (written, audio, and screencast) and a range of challenging issues such as students’ preference issues, technical issues, timing issues, financial and areal issues. This study is significant because it provides us with a comprehensive picture of the patterns of the feedback content, the formulation of the e-feedback, the multimodality of the instructor's e-feedback, and the significant issues that emerged from the instructor's e-feedback practices. However, further research should include a relative group of instructors to determine the impact of e-feedback on learners.

Keywords: Blackboard, Covid-19 Pandemic, e-feedback, linguistics, screencast, WhatsApp

Introduction

The outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic presents significant challenges for societies worldwide, with significant and complicated implications for higher education institutions, primarily in the field of English language learning and teaching (Draissi & Yong, 2020). During the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic and beyond, the direct shift to online education has fully emerged as an inevitable option in all schools and universities (Bao, 2020; Basilaia & Kvavadze 2020). A fully online course usually requires an extensive design of the lesson plan, instructional tools such as audio and video content, and technical support teams (Bao, 2020).

Instructors, regardless of their level of experience and training, generally find it challenging to produce and deliver clear, helpful, and timely feedback and actively engage learners with it (Stern & Solomon, 2006; Lunt & Curran, 2010). The integration of technology in the education system has broadened the way instructors provide electronic feedback (e-feedback) to their second/foreign language learners. Computer and human generated-mediated feedback can be delivered electronically, synchronously, and asynchronously (Ene & Upton, 2014, 2018; Goldstein, 2006). Generally, instructor feedback has conceived as information provided in a dialogic way by an instructor to the learners (Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020). Recent studies have emphasized the need for e-feedback due to its effectiveness (AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r, 2014; Ene & Upton, 2018; Henderson, Ryan, & Phillips, 2019; Lunt & Curran, 2010; Chang, Kelly, Satar & Strobl, 2017).

Instructors are increasingly relying on various electronic tools in providing e-feedback to their students, Google Docs (Alharbi, 2019; Saeed & Qunayeer 2020), screencasts (Bakla, 2020; Cunningham, 2019; Tseng & Yeh, 2019), track changes in the word processor (AbuSeileek, & Abualsha'r, 2014), WhatsApp (Susanti & Tarmuji, 2016); Microsoft word and screencast (Cavaleri, Kawaguchi, Di Biase & Power, 2019). However, providing feedback is a complex process; instructors need to determine if revisions are required for content or organization (Elola & Oskoz, 2016).

Studies that explored the written and audio-visual e-feedback have received little attention (Mahoney, Macfarlane, & Ajjawi, 2019). However, instructors are the ones who determine how to use the e-feedback; instructors’ e-feedback has been so scarcely studied (Ene & Upton, 2018). It suggests that instructors’ e-feedback needs to be explored in terms of the patterns of instructors’ e-feedback during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study is significant because it provides us with a comprehensive picture of patterns of the feedback content, the formulation of the e-feedback, the multimodality of the instructor's e-feedback, and the issues that emerged from the instructor's e-feedback practices. With the growing use of distance learning in teaching and learning of English language during the COVID-19 Pandemic, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

(1) What is the nature of content issues addressed via the instructor’s e-feedback in the three linguistic courses?
(2) In what ways does the instructor formulate the e-feedback in the three linguistic courses?
(3) What is the multimodal nature of instructor e-feedback in the three linguistic courses?
(4) What are the significant issues that emerged from the instructor's e-feedback practices in the three linguistics courses?

More specifically, this case study presents findings of an analysis of one instructor’s e-feedback given in three linguistic courses (sociolinguistics, phonetics, historical linguistics) in terms of the nature of content issues addressed via instructor’s e-feedback, the formulation of the e-feedback, the multimodal nature of instructor's e-feedback and the significant issues emerged from the instructor's e-feedback practices.

Literature Review
Theoretical Framework
E-feedback has grounded on Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory. The sociocultural theory sees feedback to be critical, and yet given that feedback is seen as a process of interaction between instructors and learners (Lantolf, 2006). Vygotsky’s concept of scaffolding covers how feedback is delivered through the dialogue between instructor and learner. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) classified some features of effective scaffolding in a second language context to help instructors provide effective scaffolding. They suggested that scaffolded assistance should be offered when needed and removed immediately as the student can perform the task, provided according to changing proficiency needs of the learner, and; must be given in conversational interaction; both instructor and student must be actively involved.

Instructor feedback is a kind of scaffold when it is offered dialogically and constructively to the learners (Alharbi, 2019). Instructors' feedback is also known as a scaffolding mechanism in which instructors support language learners to recognize the several issues and errors in their tasks (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). E-feedback is known as computer-mediated corrective feedback and technology-supported feedback refers to feedback that is conveyed using various technological tools (Ene & Upton 2014; Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020).

Supportive Technological Tools of E-feedback in an Online Environment
Electronically providing e-feedback on student tasks via various electronic devices has become popular among language instructors, particularly in university contexts (Ene & Upton, 2014; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Saeed & Ghazali, 2019; Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020). The multimodal options for e-feedback have developed from written to audio, video, and screencast feedback on foreign and second language (Chang et al., 2017). Language instructors have a wide range of new ways of developing and providing language learners with e-feedback, such as Google Docs (Alharbi, 2019; Neumann & Kopcha, 2019; Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020). These studies suggest that Google Docs can serve as an effective channel for instructor-learner and learner-learner interactions.

Other studies reported other ways for providing e-feedback such as Blackboard LMS (Ai, 2017; Basabrin, 2019), Wiki and Facebook (Demirbilek, 2015); blogs (Arslan, 2013; Dippold, 2009; Yaku & Aydin, 2015), WhatsApp (Susanti & Tarmuji, 2016), track changes (AbuSeileek, & Abualsha'r, 2014), discussion boards (Guasch, Espasa, & Martinez-Melo, 2018; London, 2019).
Previous research on instructor e-feedback Ali (2016); Elola & Oskoz (2016); Harper, Green & Fernandez-Toro (2018); and Orlando (2016) has focused on providing e-feedback via screencast. The majority of instructors valued multimodal screencast as more detailed lends itself to higher-level conceptual issues (Orlando, 2016), promoted more informal and supportive communication (Borup, West, & Thomas, 2015), more time-efficient, and promoting quality (Henderson & Phillips, 2015).

Bakla (2020) provided e-feedback via a three-format, namely screencasts, a free audio add-on (Kaizena), Written Feedback as marginal comments. The SL learners did not favor a particular feedback mode, but they highlighted the potential benefits and drawbacks of each mode.

Audio feedback has proven to be favored by both instructors and students. Instructors delivered e-feedback via recording audio to their students’ tasks on global issues rather than local concerns since the audio mode explains macro-level issues more freely compared with written comments (Cavanaugh & Song, 2014).

Additionally, Cavanaugh and Song (2014) reported that lack of training in using audio in distance class generated challenges in delivering e-feedback. Higher word counts generated via audio feedback, and more comments made for explaining misunderstanding, giving praise, showing good practice and justification marks (Chalmers, MacCallum, Mowat, & Fulton, 2014); providing audio feedback was found to be more detailed, supportive, and personalized compared to the written feedback (Gould & Day, 2013).

There are also other studies (Alvarez, Espasa, & Guasch, 2012; Cavaleri et al., 2019; Elola & Oskoz, 2016; Ene & Upton, 2014; Harper et al., 2018) that illustrated the various patterns of instructors’ e-feedback. Shariq (2020) reported that the active use of corrective feedback improves learners’ perception and attitudes towards the English language skills. Cavaleri et al. (2019) employed directive, suggestion, explanation, model, question, praise, and interpersonal feedback. Alharbi (2019) reported five types of e-feedback; question, statement, suggestion, directive, and correction; suggestions, explanations, examples, and advice (Harper et al., 2018), suggestions, clarifications, statements, praises, and commands (Elola & Oskoz, 2016), directive, explicit, principled and systematic (Ene & Upton, 2014), suggestions and questions (Alvarez et al., 2012).

Methods

The present study used a qualitative case study which is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam 1988, p. 16), to obtain data that enriches our understanding of the instructor e-feedback in three linguistic courses as delivered, practiced by the English language instructor.

Settings and Participants

The study was conducted in the college of sciences and arts, Methnab, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The instructor holds a Ph.D. degree in linguistics; he has been teaching English and Linguistics for eight years. The instructor exchanges e-feedback with third-year university students at the Department of English and Translation. Their ages range from 21-23
years old. As far as the number of students is concerned, there were (14) students enrolled in Sociolinguistics, (12) in Historical Linguistics, and (25) in Phonetics.

In the current study, the same instructor taught all of the three linguistic courses, namely: Sociolinguistics (ENG-365); Phonetics (ENG-354); Historical Linguistics (ENG-358), during the second semester in 2019-2020 academic year. The instructor and the students belong to different cultural backgrounds. Hence, the instructor, a native speaker of the Urdu language, whereas all of the participants were English learners whose first language was Arabic.

After the Pandemic began to spread in the Kingdom, the online teaching sessions started in March 2020 which ended in May 2020. Thus, the online teaching sessions ran for six weeks (three hours a week). The electronic platform was the only solution for the academic and other different activities during the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic.

All three linguistics courses were delivered using Blackboard, a learning management system. The instructor determined some delivery changes and created three WhatsApp groups for exchanging the e-feedback due to the restricted time of online classes. The students feel comfortable asking questions, clarifications, and exchanging e-feedback with their instructor in the WhatsApp group. The instructor synchronically as well as asynchronically provided e-feedbacks through Blackboard, WhatsApp and e-mail platforms, and he played an important role as a facilitator, source and provider of the e-feedback.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The study used two types of data: instructor e-feedback practices and semi-structured interviews. The data was obtained from the three WhatsApp groups, e-mail, and Blackboard platform. The data obtained from instructor e-feedback in the three linguistic courses, namely: Sociolinguistics (ENG-365) which covers the topics related to the relationship between language and society; Phonetics (ENG-354) which enables students to understand, describe and use all segmental and suprasegmental features of English and Historical Linguistics (ENG-358) which introduces students to the nature of language change during the second semester in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The instructor delivered e-feedback via three modes (written, audio, and screencast) in the form of written feedback via WhatsApp messages, Blackboard chat-box and posts, and e-mails; audio feedbacks include WhatsApp voice messages and blackboard sessions; while screencast feedbacks include Blackboard sessions conducted for online classes.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative analysis. The data of instructor e-feedback was analyzed in terms of its types, content, and delivery mode. The instructor's e-feedback type was categorized as the feedback provided (i.e., explanations, suggestions, clarifications, questioning, repetitions, statements, praises, or commands). The instructor’s delivery mode of the feedback was categorized as (written, audio, and screencast), whereas the content of e-feedback was categorized as (global vs. local issues).

The instructor also participated in a semi-structured interview that was guided by a set of open-ended questions. These questions addressed the issues related to the instructor's experience
in online teaching, his preference for delivery mode, and how it affected the way he constructs the feedback, content of e-feedback, type of e-feedback as well as challenging issues emerging from instructor e-feedback practices. Finally, categories mentioned above of instructor e-feedback were measured using a simple quantitative analysis, including the number and percentage of each category.

Findings

This section presents the findings obtained from this case study into three main conceptual themes: the nature of content issues addressed via instructor e-feedback, patterns of constructing the instructor e-feedback, and the multimodal nature of instructor e-feedback. In addition, four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview.

**The Nature of Content Issues Addressed via Instructor E-feedback**

Based on the qualitative analysis of instructor e-feedback, the instructor uses WhatsApp messages, Blackboard chat-box, posts, screencasts, and e-mail for teaching linguistic courses and exchanging e-feedback with his students. The analysis of the instructor’s e-feedback indicates that he exchanged e-feedback focusing on various content issues in linguistic courses. The qualitative study that started on the foci of feedback revealed that the different electronic platforms such as; Blackboard and WhatsApp helped the instructor to target issues in students’ activities in the three linguistic courses at the global and local levels. The instructor e-feedback concentrated on global (content, structure, and organization) and local issues (vocabulary and grammar).

As shown in Table one, the nature of content issues played an important role in promoting instructor–learner e-feedback exchange in the three linguistic courses. In other words, the quantification of the instructor e-feedback exchanged via Blackboard and WhatsApp presents a fascinating insight into the intensive engagement of the instructor and the learners in feedback on linguistic courses. The instructor provided a of total 402 e-feedback comments on the three linguistic courses; sociolinguistics, phonetics, and historical linguistics, via Blackboard and WhatsApp.

First, the findings show that the instructor e-feedback addressing global issues (313, 78%) in students’ activities in the three linguistic courses, such as content, structure, and organization, outnumbered the feedback focusing on local issues such as vocabulary and grammar (89, 22%). Therefore, most of the instructor e-feedback concentrates on global issues.

Second, the below instructor e-feedback exchanges (402 total) were also quantified to determine the amount and percentage of e-feedback exchanged in each linguistic course. The findings show that among the three linguistic courses, the instructor provided the highest number of e-feedback in Phonetics (206, 51%), (163, 41%) of which focused on global issues. In contrast (43, 11%) focused on local issues in phonetics.

Furthermore, this is followed by sociolinguistics in which the instructor provided a total number of (100, 25%) e-feedback distributed as global issues (75, 19%) and local issues (25, 6%). Finally, the Historical linguistic got the lowest e-feedback provided by the instructor as...
indicated by the total number of instructor e-feedback (96, 24%) that focused on global (75, 19%) and local issues in Historical Linguistics (21, 5%).

The above findings indicate that the highest number of instructor e-feedback focused on global issues compared to local issues in all three linguistic courses. This means that due to the type and the content of the linguistic courses, instructor and learners tended to focus on global issues.

Table 1. *Number and percentage of content issues addressed via instructor e-feedback*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foci of feedback</th>
<th>Sociolinguistics</th>
<th>Phonetics</th>
<th>Historical Linguistics</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global issues</td>
<td>75 (19%)</td>
<td>163 (41%)</td>
<td>75 (19%)</td>
<td>313 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Issues</td>
<td>25 (6%)</td>
<td>43 (11%)</td>
<td>21 (5%)</td>
<td>89 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>206 (51%)</td>
<td>96 (24%)</td>
<td>402 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following excerpt presented in Table two shows an example of instructor e-feedback targeted on the content issues; global and local issues:

Table 2. *Sample of the instructor e-feedback focusing on the content issues*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foci of feedback</th>
<th>Instructor e-feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Issues</td>
<td>Instructor: Your assignment is missing the conclusion and reference section. Watch the lecture again and arrange your assignment as discussed in the lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Issues</td>
<td>Instructor: Rewrite the answer to the fourth question, as there is an incorrect use of verbs in the passive sentences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Patterns of Constructing the Instructor E-feedback*

The qualitative analysis of the instructor e-feedback shows that the instructor composed his e-feedback in the form of eight main categories: explanations, suggestions, clarifications, questioning, repetitions, statements, praises, and commands. As Table three illustrates, quantification of the way instructor e-feedback presents a fascinating insight into the various ways used by the instructor in replying to the comments of his students across the three linguistic courses. The findings also show that among the three linguistic courses, the instructor constructed the highest number of e-feedback in Phonetics (206, 51%), followed by (100, 25%) in Sociolinguistics and finally (96, 24%) e-feedback in Historical Linguistic.

It is evident that explanations scored as the most frequently e-feedback formulated by the instructor (68, 17%), followed by commands (57, 14%), questioning (56, 14%), repetitions (55, 14%), praises (52, 13%), clarifications (47, 12%), suggestions (42, 10%) and finally statements (25, 6%).

This finding clarifies how the instructor constructed and varied his e-feedback according to the nature of the issue(s) provided by the students in the three linguistic courses. The way the instructor composes the e-feedback plays a role in creating opportunities for instructor-learner collaboration.
Innovative Practices in Instructor E-feedback  
AbuSa’aleek & Shariq

Table 3. *Number and percentage of instructor’s construction of e-feedback*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of feedback</th>
<th>Sociolinguistics</th>
<th>Phonetics</th>
<th>Historical Linguistics</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>20 (5%)</td>
<td>32 (8%)</td>
<td>16 (4%)</td>
<td>68 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>21 (5%)</td>
<td>9 (2%)</td>
<td>42 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifications</td>
<td>11 (2%)</td>
<td>26 (6%)</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>47 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>31 (8%)</td>
<td>15 (4%)</td>
<td>56 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitions</td>
<td>13 (3%)</td>
<td>29 (7%)</td>
<td>13 (3%)</td>
<td>55 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements</td>
<td>9 (2%)</td>
<td>13 (3%)</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>25 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praises</td>
<td>13 (3%)</td>
<td>24 (6%)</td>
<td>15 (4%)</td>
<td>52 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commands</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>30 (7%)</td>
<td>15 (4%)</td>
<td>57 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100 (25%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>206 (51%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>96 (24%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>402 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table four below illustrates samples of the various types of e-feedback formulated by the instructor targeted the eight main categories:

**Table 4 Sample of instructor's various types of e-feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of feedback</th>
<th>Instructor Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>The second part of the assignment deals with the transcription of Arabic text which you did not do carefully. You need to work more on Arabic fricative sounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>If you compare these Arabic sounds concerning articulation, you will more clearly know how they are different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifications</td>
<td>Let me clarify your mistake. English loanword in Arabic is cream, not ‘sukkar.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Before I move to the next topic, can you tell me the difference between accent and dialect? Your answer is partially correct. Let me explain to you again; Historical linguistics deals with language change over time, or we can say language development, while the History of linguistics deals with the development of linguistics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitions</td>
<td>Bilingualism is a language policy which enforces the status of a language as a national or official language. False statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements</td>
<td>Well done! Keep it up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praises</td>
<td>Transcribe the five sentences the way you transcribed the words given in previous chapters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Multimodal Nature of Instructor E-feedback**

The mode of delivery; written, audio, and screencast e-feedback via the electronic platforms like Blackboard and WhatsApp used by the instructor to deliver the feedback to students is another finding of the qualitative analysis of the instructor e-feedback, which indicate that the instructor uses a variety of providing e-feedback in the three linguistic courses. The instructor provided a total number of 402 e-feedback comments via three different modalities, written, audio, and screencast, as Table five illustrates, on the three linguistic courses; sociolinguistics, phonetics, and historical linguistics via Blackboard and WhatsApp.
First, the findings illustrate that the instructor provided screen-casts e-feedback (207, 52%) in students’ activities in the three linguistic courses, outnumbered the e-feedback offered by written e-feedback (102, 25%) and audio e-feedback (93, 23%). Therefore, most of the instructor's amount of e-feedback was offered via screen-cast across the three linguistic courses.

Second, the delivery mode used by the instructor to provide e-feedback exchanges (total 402) was also quantified to determine the occurrences and percentage of the amount of the instructor e-feedback offered through written, audio and screen-cast modes in the three linguistic courses. The findings show that among the three linguistic courses, the instructor provided the highest number of screen-cast e-feedback in Phonetics (108, 27%), followed by (54, 13%) screen-cast e-feedback in Sociolinguistics and (45, 11%) screen-cast e-feedback in Historical Linguistics. Written e-feedback was more frequent in Phonetics (50, 12%), whereas written e-feedback occurred less frequently in the Sociolinguistics (28, 7%) and (24, 6%) in Historical Linguistics.

Finally, audio e-feedback was more frequently provided by the instructor in the Phonetics (48, 12%), whereas (27, 7%) were communicated via audio e-feedback in Historical Linguistic. The lowest e-feedback provided via audio e-feedback indicated by the total number of instructor audio e-feedback (93, 23%) was in Sociolinguistics (18, 4%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of e-feedback</th>
<th>Sociolinguistics</th>
<th>Phonetics</th>
<th>Historical Linguistics</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>28 (7%)</td>
<td>50 (12%)</td>
<td>24 (6%)</td>
<td>102 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>18 (4%)</td>
<td>48 (12%)</td>
<td>27 (7%)</td>
<td>93 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screencast</td>
<td>54 (13%)</td>
<td>108 (27%)</td>
<td>45 (11%)</td>
<td>207 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>206 (51%)</td>
<td>96 (24%)</td>
<td>402 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above findings indicate that the highest number of instructor delivery modes of providing e-feedback was through screen-casts mode, followed by written and audio modes, respectively. The fact that screen-cast e-feedback appeared to be favor interactivity more than written and audio e-feedback because screen-casts have interactivity features such as a combination of graphics, text, voice, mouse movements, annotations, and highlighting. Moreover, the provided screen-casts e-feedback appeared to give detailed commentary. Therefore, the instructor may have found it relatively easy and interactive to use screen-casts mode rather than written and audio modes. Thus, the screen-cast is categorized as an innovative feedback mode for use in language classes.

Findings of the Qualitative Analysis of the Interview

The researcher conducted this semi-structured interview to identify the significant issues that emerged from the instructor's e-feedback practices in the three linguistics courses. The researcher adopts a qualitative approach and thematic analysis to gain insight into the instructor's perspective. Furthermore, the following four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview: instructor’s experiences in online teaching, instructor’s perception and impression of using Blackboard and WhatsApp platforms in providing e-feedback, valuing of e-feedback practices, and challenging concerns arising from instructor e-feedback practices.
First Theme: Instructor’s Experience in Online Teaching

The first interview question was asked about the instructor’s experiences in online teaching. He stated, “I attended several online training programs on online teaching using ‘blackboard collaborate ultra’ organized by the University that helped me a lot”. He added “I have a good experience in using computer applications”.

Second Theme: Instructor’s Perception towards Using Blackboard and WhatsApp platforms in Providing E-feedback

The instructor stated, “At the beginning of the task, the teaching and providing e-feedback online via Blackboard and WhatsApp was challenging for me. However, it became easier as I became engaged in doing so.” He also added, “It was a wonderful way to provide e-feedback through these interactive modes that contain great tools”. He stated that “There are several useful options such as; live sessions, screencast, chat-box, discussion forum, evaluation, etc. in blackboard program that make teaching and providing e-feedback interesting and easy” and “The use of WhatsApp and e-mails is not new to us, but they also play a great role in sharing written messages, voice messages, videos, and images, etc.”

Third theme: Valuing of e-feedback practices

The instructor expressed his preference and how the various delivery modes: written, audio, and screencast, affected the way he constructed the e-feedback on the local and global issues. The instructor stated, “The screencast mode is preferable, of course, as it covers other modes as well. We can share the screen, comment section, PowerPoint presentation, and e-books. This mode provides audio-visual feedback with more detail to the students”. He also stated, “The content of e-feedback depends more on the type of courses. Since these courses are different from skill courses, the feedback on global issues becomes more important rather than the local issues. Though, the serious local issues cannot be ignored as well”.

Fourth Theme: Challenging Concerns Arising from Instructor E-feedback Practices

The instructor reported various challenging issues emerging from instructor e-feedback practices. They are discussed under the following sub-themes.

Students’ Preference Issues

The instructor showed some challenging concerns regarding the students’ preferences while providing e-feedback. He asked the students about their preferences, and their answers vary based on delivery mode from written, audio to screencasts. Therefore, the instructor decided to use a mix of delivery modes in providing e-feedback that may suit the majority of the students. He stated, “I used a variety of delivery modes: written, audio, and screencasts; while providing e-feedback to meet the preference of a large majority of the learners.”

Technical Issues

The instructor reported that the technical issues faced by both the learners and the instructor hinder the providing and receiving e-feedback. The instructor stated, “Technical issues such as weak internet connection, unsupported file type, failure of microphone, speakers and camera, the large size of video files, unsupported documents, technological awareness hindered the providing and receiving e-feedback effectively.”
Timing Issues

The instructor reported challenges regarding the timing of providing and receiving e-feedback. He said that he could not offer immediate (timely) feedback based on the learners’ needs. The instructor stated, “As there was no fixed time for the students’ queries, some students were sending questions, messages late at night which made the situation difficult to respond at the same time.”

Financial and Areal Issues

The instructor showed challenging concerns regarding the students’ financial background and the place they are living. He said, “Some students with low financial background face the difficulty with managing computers, laptops, modern mobile devices and the internet expenses.”

Discussion

The present study was carried out in responding to the challenging issues in instructor e-feedback and the gaps highlighted in recent empirical studies surrounding the instructor e-feedback practices (Elola & Oskoz, 2016; Ene & Upton, 2018; Mahoney et al., 2019). This study contributes to existing research by identifying the nature of content issues addressed via the instructor’s e-feedback (global vs. local issues), presenting insight into the various ways used by the instructor in composing the e-feedback, the multimodal nature of the instructor's e-feedback, and the significant issues emerged from the instructor's e-feedback practices. This case study presented significant findings indicating that the exploitation of various electronic tools to provide e-feedback on student tasks supported the instructor's e-feedback practices.

The findings of this study confirm the results of other studies in terms of the nature of content issues addressed via the instructor’s e-feedback on both global and local issues. The findings show that the instructor’s e-feedback addressing global issues in the three linguistic courses outnumbered the feedback focusing on local issues. The feedback on global issues becomes essential rather than the local issues. However, the severe local issues cannot be ignored (Alharbi, 2019; Cavanaugh & Song, 2014; Elola & Oskoz, 2016; Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020).

Cavanaugh and Song (2014) found that instructors provide more e-feedback on global issues than local issues. E-feedback directed to global issues tended to generate more interaction (Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020). The instructor provided more comments on global issues via screencast and fewer comments via written e-feedback (Elola & Oskoz, 2016); Screencasts offer more explanations on global issues (Bakla, 2020; Orlando, 2016; Cunningham, 2019; Silva, 2012). Video feedback was used to discuss the global issues while local issues were discussed via written feedback in Microsoft Word (Silva, 2012).

The finding of the present study presents a fascinating insight into the various ways used by the instructor in composing/ formulating his e-feedback in the form of eight main categories: explanations, suggestions, clarifications, questioning, repetitions, statements, praises, and commands. This finding also supports the finding of a few other studies regarding the effective formulation of instructor e-feedback (Cunningham, 2017; Guasch et al., 2018; Elola & Oskoz, 2016; Harper et al., 2018; Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020). The various types of instructor e-feedback encourage instructor–learner interaction, as learners need to react to these feedback types (Saeed & Qunayeer, 2020).
Other categories have emerged from instructor e-feedback such as directive, model, question, suggestion, explanation, praise, and interpersonal commands were all influenced by the instructor’s perception of the learners’ individual needs and personalities (Cavaleri et al., 2019; Elola & Oskoz, 2016). Questions and suggestions lead to more students’ engagement as this form of e-feedback encourages them to respond actively (Guasch et al., 2018).

However, the ways the instructor formulated and varied his e-feedback according to the nature of the issue(s) plays an essential role in creating opportunities for instructor-learner collaboration. The in-depth explanation is provided via screencasts e-feedback (Alharbi, 2017), video feedback contains explanations, suggestions, and praise (Cavaleri et al., 2019). In this regard, the instructors employed suggestions, explanations, more examples and provided advice about the structure via screencast compared to written feedback mode (Cunningham, 2017; Harper et al., 2018). This study also contributes to earlier research. Our findings on the multimodal nature of instructor e-feedback suggest that screencast e-feedback appeared to favor interactivity more than written and audio e-feedback because screencasts have interactivity features such as a combination of graphics, text, voice, mouse movements, annotations, and highlighting.

This finding agrees with some previous research on the multimodal nature of instructor e-feedback (Alvira, 2016; Elola & Oskoz, 2016; Harper et al., 2018; Ghosn-Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2018). Screencasting encouraged the instructor to deliver more detailed feedback and explanation than written and audio e-feedback (Ghosn-Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2018).

Due to its multimodality, screencasting can enhance students’ uptake of e-feedback. The use of written, oral feedback is widely accepted by students, and the use of screencasting is promising (Alvira, 2016; Stannard, 2008). Bakla (2020), in this regard, reports that the highest number of correct revisions was made via audio mode compared to written or screencast, and the EFL learner highlighted the potential benefits and disadvantages of each mode. The instructors and learners valued multimodal screencast as more detailed (Harper, Harper, Green, & Fernandez-Toro, 2012; Orlando, 2016; Silva, 2012), whereas the audio feedback is efficient, practical, more detailed than written feedback (Lunt & Curran, 2010).

The interview analysis revealed a range of challenging issues such as students’ preference issues, technical issues, timing issues, financial and areal issues. Although the various technological tools of e-feedback in the online environment support and facilitate the instructor’s e-feedback practices, it sometimes poses challenges for the instructor and the learners. This finding is in agreement with (Alharbi, 2019; Cavanaugh & Song, 2014; Henderson et al. 2019), lack of skills, internet connection and formatting issues (Alharbi, 2019), feedback practices, contextual constraints, and individual capacity (Henderson et al. 2019), instructors' training (Cavanaugh & Song, 2014).

Conclusion

The present study was carried out in responding to the challenging issues in instructor e-feedback and the gaps highlighted in recent empirical studies surrounding the instructor e-feedback practices. The present study found that the instructor’s e-feedback more focused on global issues as compared to local issues. The instructor composed his e-feedback in the form of
eight main categories such as explanations, suggestions, clarifications, questioning, repetitions, statements, praises, and commands, the instructor used more screencasts for providing e-feedback, followed by written and audio modes respectively. Furthermore, a range of challenging issues such as students’ preference issues, technical issues, timing issues, financial and areal issues have emerged from the thematic analysis. The present study has several implications for EFL instructors. This analysis of instructor e-feedback has enabled us to have a comprehensive picture of the nature of content issues addressed via the instructor’s e-feedback. How do the instructors formulate/construct their e-feedback electronically, and the various significant issues that emerged from the instructor's e-feedback practices. The ways the instructor prepared and varied his e-feedback according to the nature of the issue(s) play an essential role in creating opportunities for instructor-learner collaboration. In turn, this collaboration leads to engagement and successful revision.

In this view, instructors need to consider the learners’ individual preferences and need concerning the delivery mode from written, audio to screencasts to help them respond, negotiate and address the e-feedback effectively. Furthermore, the instructors need to consider the various challenging issues that may emerge from the instructor's e-feedback practices.

This study also addresses several limitations that need to be addressed in future investigations. First, this case study is based on analyzing one instructor’s e-feedback in three linguistics courses that might have affected our findings. Therefore, future research should include a relative group of instructors’ e-feedback. Second, this study involved only the analyzing one instructor's e-feedback delivered via Blackboard and WhatsApp platforms. Therefore, future studies are recommended to investigate the use of other electronic platforms and explore how EFL learners respond to the instructors' e-feedback and their perception of the e-feedback.

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Virtual Mini-Lecture in Distance Learning Space

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally affected all the spheres of human life, including education. Universities worldwide have established distance learning, which demanded combining and improving both traditional and innovative education forms. The article offers a comprehensive analysis of pre-recorded mini-lectures in the educational space of distance learning for different scientific-educational Internet projects (Coursera, PostNauka, Udacity, edX, LinguaLeo, EdEra, etc.). Mini-lectures are complete pieces of speech limited in time and accessible to multiple reproductions; that is why they are quite a representative material for the research of the generation of cognitive processes and perception of a verbal educational message in asynchronous online learning. The significant results of the study include: the definition of invariable characteristics of virtual mini-lectures (distance, virtuality, mediation, situational incorrigibility, multimodality), defining cognitive strategies of the speaker and the listener in an asynchronous lecture interaction, finding the points of contact (motivation and interest in transferring and receiving information) between them. The article also describes the linguistic features of virtual mini-lecture. These conclusions can find practical application in the development of methodology for the distance teaching of linguistic disciplines.

Keywords: asynchronous online learning, cognitive strategies, distance learning, invariable characteristics, lecture interaction, scientific-educational discourse, virtual mini-lecture

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Introduction

The SARS-CoV2 pandemic has radically changed the life of the whole world. It has introduced adjustments to all spheres of activity of the world community, including the higher education system. Universities around the world had to take up distance education, and consequently, educational programs changed, as well as educational technologies and evaluation systems. The vital part of the educational process, the paradigm of communication between teacher and student, has changed too.

Since the 1990s, computer-mediated communication has become a new reality for various discourse practices, including the scientific-educational discourse, the World Wide Web offers unprecedented opportunities for access to scientific and educational online resources. Internet users can have distance learning and professional training. They use the web for individual development and self-education. Internet repositories of scientific and educational information are very diverse – electronic versions of traditional scientific and popular periodicals, textbooks, monographs, dictionaries, various scientific and educational multimedia portals, individual and group communication of specialized scientific-educational Internet projects, e-mail, chats, thematic forums, etc. Language is the mediator between a separate person and “mega-knowledge” concentrated on the Internet. At the same time, the importance of the language is growing drastically, and the language itself is going through significant changes. The Internet offers the opportunity of multimodal receiving of information using the whole complex of external perceptual stimuli – verbal, prosodic, and visual, which causes a kind of erasure of boundaries between the oral and written modes of communication and, respectively, to the increase of the role of an oral form of receiving information (Valigura, Kozub & Sieriakova, 2020). It causes the increased interest of researchers towards functional-pragmatic aspects of language activity in the virtual space of the Internet, related to the peculiarities of perception, structuring, storage and transmission of knowledge in new conditions. Researchers study the issues of generation and adequate perception of oral texts of scientific-educational character and the causes of successful scientific, educational, and business communication (Crystal, 2001; Herring, 2004).

Online learning can be classified into two groups – synchronous and asynchronous, depending on the nature of Internet facilities. Synchronous learning is the simultaneous interaction of a teacher and students from different locations. Asynchronous learning involves indirect communication between the teacher and students. The teacher offers students pre-loaded materials and instructions and, if necessary, gives them feedback, evaluates their work (Bailey, Almusharraf & Hatcher, 2020; Clark, 2015).

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of pre-recorded mini-lectures in the educational space of asynchronous learning. Despite the evident advantages (mobility, globality, relative cheapness, the absence of territorial limits, shorter time and physical expenses), the attitude towards asynchronous receiving knowledge through the Internet among the world scientific-pedagogical society is ambiguous: psychologists, teachers, sociologists, and linguists have repeatedly mentioned the “mosaic”, chaotic, superficial character of this way of receiving educational information, and the formation of the new type of thinking – clip thinking – within the youth (Carr, 2010; Chernigovskaya, 2013; Girenok, 2016; Kuznetsova, 2015). Still, getting an education and further professional training on the Internet actively continues to evolve and get
more and more advocates. COVID-19 has accelerated this process; it made scientific methodologists and practical teachers direct their efforts not only on criticism of distance learning but also on its development and improvement (Astleitner, 2020).

The video lectures of famous specialists in various spheres of knowledge have been growing in popularity. These lectures are available on various scientific and educational Internet portals Coursera, PostNauka, Udacity, edX, LinguaLeo, EdEra, etc. The leading universities are partners of these sites. Research organizations from different countries of the world contribute to them. Their users are, as a rule, educated people who need additional knowledge in a particular field of activity, and people interested in self-improvement.

The person who receives scientific-educational information in the virtual space of the Internet can learn according to one's schedule, in the time free from their primary employment and be independent of the location, following various goals – both pragmatic and simply informative. At the same time, the practice of distance learning has revealed some limitations. When the user can choose the time for receiving knowledge on the Internet, they are likely to fail to get organized and perceive information long-term, for various reasons. People with clip thinking, as a rule, are not able to concentrate for a long time; they remember only the information that interests them at the present moment. They need additional visual effects for attention support. Therefore, short lecture video materials are becoming one of the leading methods in distance online education, we can call the mini-lectures.

The aims of this article are the systematization and interpretation of the invariable characteristics of a virtual mini-lecture, and the description of the cognitive strategies of the speaker and listener in the online processes of generation and perception of lecture information in successful communication. The article discusses the issues related to increasing the motivation of students in the context of distance education. It outlines theoretical approaches to the study of an asynchronous virtual mini-lecture, and outlines the essential components of the structure of joint attention of the speaker and listener, which are necessary for successful asynchronous lecture interaction.

Literature Review

In pedagogics and psychology, the issue of distance learning has been researched for quite along time. The main factor influencing the fact that the students who start online learning break it up more frequently than they do with traditional education is insufficient oral, visual and emotional contact with the teachers and the other students (Bartley & Golek, 2004; Thompson, 1997). The student life suggests not only learning but also personal emotional communication, full participation in the social life of the university. The educational activity takes place in a broad social and cultural context. Keller (1997) has suggested bringing the model of instructional design model over into the distance learning space; he offered this model earlier, and it consists of the following components: Attention – Relevance – Confidence – Satisfaction (ARCS), aimed at the motivation increase among the learners. This model has been successfully used and modified in the other studies on increasing motivation in distance education (Visser, 1998).

Tomasello (2008) presented a five-step model of successful human communication, consisting: 1) the joint intention of the speaker and listener for successful communication; 2) the
joint attention of the communication participants; 3) general prosocial motives; 4) common assumptions (and even norms) of cooperation between participants; 5) shared human language conventions. (Tomasello, 2008, p. 107–108). Compliance with all of these components is difficult, so the responsibility for the successful learning communication lies on both the teacher and the student. Shared knowledge and the ability to share the intentions of other people in the learning process are the primary conditions of human communication. For successful communication in real life, besides the direct knowledge of the language system in which the communication takes place, the whole complex of other knowledge and skills is needed: motivation, turning to the previous experience and memory, developed attention and imagination, the consideration of the addressee factor, the awareness of the existing limitations and the correct use of various communication strategies in different communication situations, the timely switching between the verbal and non-verbal culture codes, in other words for the productive generation and perception of language signs in verbal communication the so-called “accomplice cooperation” is necessary (Tomasello, 2008, p. 72). When the speaker produces text, he expects the listener to understand it. It is aimed at a kind of influence on the listener: to form new ideas about an event or a phenomenon of reality; to influence their emotional condition or call to a specific action, etc.

When the addressee perceives the audial message, he tries to forecast the purposes and attitudes of the speaker, foresee the intention of the utterance, and activate his knowledge on the topic of speech in his consciousness. The quality of a communicative interaction depends on both the extralinguistic and linguistic components.

This way, to perform successful and effective communication, the individuals taking part in it, no matter what their roles are (the speaker or the listener), are active subjects. Recent neurobiological research has proven this fact and has shown that the generation and perception of verbal messages are tightly linked and are practically mirror processes about each other. The group of neurobiologists in Princeton University, researching the links between the brain areas of the speaker and the listener in the process of natural communication employing magnetic resonance imaging, have concluded “that average the speaker’s production-based processes precede and likely induce the mirrored activity observed in the listener’s brains during comprehension” (Stephens, Silbert & Hasson, 2010, p. 3). They also established that although the brain activity of the listener mirrors the brain activity of the speaker with an unavoidable delay, some listeners show preemptive reactions towards the perceived information. With such connections between the speaker and the listener, the understanding becomes easier (Stephens et al., 2010). These connections are essential when perceiving educational information asynchronously.

**Methods**

The present study fully represents the newest interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the issues of methodology and methods of foreign language learning. During the investigation of virtual mini-lectures considering cognitive strategies of the speaker and the listener, we used a whole range of research methods: general scientific and traditional linguistic methods (observation, induction and deduction, generalization, collation, and description) provided for the revealing and the definition of regularities of generation and perception of verbal scientific-educational messages in online way, systematization, and interpretation of the functional
peculiarities of language units in the vocal mode of scientific communication. The cognitive discourse method of research has united the procedures of discourse and cognitive analyses directed from the discourse towards the linguistic units that form it.

The actual research materials are oral mini-lectures on linguistics and cognitive sciences from various educational Internet portals (Coursera, PostNauka, LingLing, etc.), which led to the following results.

Results

A pre-recorded mini-lecture on the Internet is video performance containing logically coherent theoretical material, which lasts between 10 and 40 minutes. An online mini-lecture is gradually becoming an independent genre which is growing in popularity. Within the sociolinguistic approach, it is a kind of scientific-educational institutional discourse. According to the information channel, it is to actively develop computer-mediated Internet communication.

The invariable characteristics of a virtual mini-lecture are:

- **distance** and **virtuality**, i.e., the independence from space-time coordinates;
- **mediation** and **situational incorrigibility**, i.e., the absence of immediate feedback between the participants of communication which is always present in synchronous communication;
- **multimodality** of the acts of transmission and receiving of information which consists in uniting the audial, visual, and prosodic signals;
- **possibility** of multiple reproductions by the user.

Any linguistic activity suggests the presence of two active subjects: the **speaker** and the **listener**. They perform generation and perception of information. The cognitive strategies of the participants in a communicative act are inextricably linked but at the same time they differ significantly from each other.

These differences are particularly distinctly actualized in the processes of distance communication. With the absence of the immediate feedback characteristic of traditional lecture interaction, the active role of the addressee of the message is more distinct along with the uncontrolled perception of the information by the addressee. When we look at the characteristics of asynchronous virtual communication (a mini-lecture), it is necessary to point out the speaker's and the listener's positions. They define cognitive strategies. Seeing the intersection points between them is needed for successful communication.

The **listener** of a virtual pre-recorded mini-lecture:
- is as a rule motivated, interested, and ready to perceive complicated information, as every Internet user can decide on their own which information is of interest to them;
- is independent of space-time coordinates, although the virtual reality can imitate the “effect of presence” at the lecture in the space relation for them;
- can reproduce mini-lecture many times to achieve an understanding of the material, and at the same time, they can use hypertext and interactive Internet capabilities for the independent search of necessary materials on the topic of the lecture;

- can remain anonymous, if desired. Anonymity will help listeners feel free and independent, to criticize indirectly, to ask questions, and to communicate with the authors of the lecture. Users can also share with the other site users in the chat and commentaries to the watched material.

The speaker (author) of a mini-lecture:
- is oriented towards a sufficiently educated, motivated, and interested listener, and still, while the social certification of the audience in the virtual space of the Internet is only presumptive, they need to simplify the text delivery of the information both in the content and in the choice of linguistic means for its embodiment;

- is dependent on the space-time coordinates: the listener listens to the recording of a mini-lecture here and now, and the speaker must fit in its time format set for this or that educational-informative portal;

- combines the pre-thought content filling of the lecture with the improvisation of its verbal embodiment in online mode, as a rule, producing the verbal message without relying upon the previously written text;

- is always personalized (the anticipatory comments usually contain sufficient data about the lecturer and their sphere of research interests: the academic degree and title, the place of work, the list of scientific works on the topic of the lecture, and the other necessary information which should interest the user and motivate them for the perception of the lecture material).

Listening to a pre-recorded mini-lecture on the Internet, the same as a usual lecture with the immediate contact between the subjects of lecture interaction, the listener perceives it through three information channels – verbal, prosodic, and visual, and the virtual reality of the Internet imitates the effect of the unique presence. The main peculiarity and the difference of a virtual mini-lecture from its traditional analog for the listener lie in the opportunity of its multiple reproductions, due to which they achieve a possibility to reach the understanding of the necessary material. However, it may be difficult to estimate the correctness of the understood material because of the absence of feedback with the lecturer.

The communication is successful for the addressee if he is readily interested and motivated to receive necessary information. High communicative competence and the rhetoric mastery of the lecturer are also crucial for the addressee.

The speaker doesn’t receive feedback from the communicative partners at all. He cannot see his audience; it is anonymous. The author of a mini-lecture cannot verify if the assimilation of the learning material is in progress because there is no immediate contact with the listeners. Consequently, a good orator should think over the volume and the content of the information input and take care of the accessibility of the linguistic means. The speaker should pay great
attention not only to the choice of vocabulary and grammar but also to the speed of the narration, the intonation, pauses, and the use of paralinguistic means.

In the dynamic process of speech generation in online mode, the author of a mini-lecture is put in the condition of time limits, that is why constant control over one's speech is crucial: the elimination of ambiguities, the differentiation between the main and the secondary, providing the text coherence. All this brings to the appearance of various kinds of hesitations, corrections, rearrangement of syntax in the course of speaking, the unplanned change of the text structure, etc., in oral speech.

In the biosocial approach to language characteristics of contemporary cognitive linguistics and methodology, the abovementioned speech failures in oral communication are not a deviation from the norm but rather a natural characteristic of oral discourse. As a whole, they do not reduce the quality of the sounding speech. The repetitions, pleonasm, syntactic parallelism, the duplication of referential forms (the Noun / the Pronoun), syntactic priming, the presence of discourse markers (such as especially, well, so, I think, it is clear, it is essential, etc.), etc. typical for the oral discourse organization, consolidate the effort of the speaker and the listener in the shared communicative process. This facilitates the process of generation of an oral utterance by the addressee and at the same time the restoration of the meaning of the uttered material in the process of the perception by the addressee.

We can conclude that, despite the absence of immediate contact between the participants of a virtual pre-recorded mini-lecture, the “joint attentional frame” (Tomasello, 2008, p. 74) still exists between the addresser and the addressee of the scientific-educational message – without it, successful communication would be impossible. This genre wouldn't have become so popular in the virtual Internet space. Such psychological factors as motivation and interest in conveying and receiving information unite the participants of the lecture interaction, as well as Internet technologies that provide multimodal presentation of the information and the option of multiple listening to a mini-lecture, which allows alleviating its perception. The communicative competence of the speaker provides the linguistic characteristics of a virtual mini-lecture directly ensuring the transfer of new knowledge to the listener. Minimization of the content of the represented learning material and the inevitable simplification of grammar structures and the shortening of the number of the used terms, the linguistic redundancy, and recursiveness allow not to lose the sense of the presented material. To anchor the heard in the consciousness of the listener, – all this works for the adequate perception and understanding of the necessary educational information (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Communicative interface SPEAKER ↔ LISTENER](image)
Discussion

The tension caused by the virus SARS-CoV2 is global, and it generates anxiety about the quality and level of higher education in the world society. Methodologists and practical teachers strive to optimize the educational process as much as possible based on synchronous and asynchronous distance education. Virtual pre-recorded mini-lectures are increasingly used on various educational platforms, and their effectiveness is becoming more and more prominent (D’Lima, 2020; Li, Guo & Han, 2018). Also, virtual mini-lectures are quite a representative material for the research of cognitive processes of generation and perception of oral educational messages in the online mode, the linguistic components of this genre of scientific-educational communication, and its optimization in the conditions of distance learning. Mini-lectures are complete pieces of speech limited in time and accessible for multiple reproductions, and, as a result, they are helpful as theoretical and experimental material for research.

According to sociologists, most teachers and students would like to go back to the traditional form of education. But it is becoming clear that after the pandemic, society will not fully return to intramural education. Most probably, it will be a mixture of classical education forms with the newest digital designs. A reasonable combination of traditional and innovative technologies in the space of distance learning can be a fairly successful step towards the education of future generations.

Conclusion

The present article aimed to observe a virtual mini-lecture as a new genre of oral academic communication in the space of distance learning. In the course of our research, we identified the invariable characteristics of this genre. We have defined the peculiarities of its language design and possible intersection points of the participants of lecture interaction. We have studied the cognitive and discourse positions of the speaker and the listener in successful communication.

The new genre of scientific-educational discourse studied in the article is a virtual mini-lecture. It provides a quiterrepresentational language material for the research of the functions, peculiarities, and new forms of language use in cognitive processes of knowledge acquisition, organization, and storage, and transferring it to other users of innovational virtual communication. These conclusions can find practical application in methodology development for the distance teaching of linguistic disciplines while preparing lectures, tutorials, and functional grammars in digital format, including those for the students learning the English language as a non-native language. By teaching, we learnourselves.

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of COVID-19 on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners’ anxiety at the University of Bisha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The differences between male and female learners and learners of the different study levels in terms of anxiety caused by COVID-19 were investigated. Moreover, the study sheds light on two factors which are the internal factors and external factors that increase learning anxiety during COVID-19 and the strategies used by the learners to decrease the negative effects of COVID-19 on learning anxiety. The data of the study were collected from 80 EFL learners (40 males and 40 females) at the University of Bisha. This study is considerable as it deals with something that is important in the learning and teaching processes these days. The study revealed that COVID-19 causes normal anxiety to the EFL learners at the University of Bisha. It was also revealed that there is no significant difference between the male and female learners in terms of anxiety caused by COVID-19 and external factors. There is a significant difference between them in terms of the internal factors and strategies used by the learners to decrease the negative effects of learning anxiety during COVID-19. Lastly, there was no significant difference between the learners of the different study levels in terms of anxiety, internal factors and external factors that increase negative learning anxiety and the strategies used by the learners to decrease the negative learning anxiety during COVID-19.

Keywords: Covid-19, EFL learners, learning anxiety, University of Bisha

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Introduction

The current era is witnessing several effects and a necessary change in the education system due to the spread of COVID-19, which shifted education from offline education to online education on educational teaching platforms. These effects and changes have caused unbelievable disruption not only in the educational system but also to many several sectors like business, and commerce, tourism, etc. UNESCO (2020) has declared that over “60% of the world’s student population” have been affected because of the effects and changes of Covid-19 on the education system. Also, “Never before have we witnessed educational disruption on such a large scale” declared by UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay (cited in Demuyakor, 2020, p. 133). Till now, there is still a dim view of this battle with Covid-19. Governments worldwide are still uncertain about when regular classroom teaching will go in its standard system. Consequently, the schools and universities are now emphasizing online instruction with all possible means of education and technology. There has been a remarkable surge in the usage of various online teaching and learning platforms (Li & Lalani, 2020). On the other side, COVID-19 has incredible effects on learners’ anxiety who are learning English as a foreign language through these teaching platforms and educational technology. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on Saudi EFL learners during this pandemic, with hopes to have a significant contribution in this field.

Rationale, significance and questions of the study

As learning anxiety has an essential role in learning second or foreign language, and as COVID-19 is a new pandemic that causes anxiety, there is a need to examine this problem. In KSA, there have been no more studies on learning anxiety caused by COVID-19. So, this study will undoubtedly provide the decision-makers with some vital information and help them know the details of the problem and make decisions accordingly.

The current study tries to answer the following research questions:
- To what extent does COVID-19 cause anxiety on EFL learners at the University of Bisha?
- What are the effects of COVID-19 on EFL learners’ anxiety at the University of Bisha?
- Is there any significant difference between male and female EFL learners in terms of learning anxiety caused by COVID-19?
- The internal and external factors that increase the negative effects of anxiety.
- The strategies used by EFL learners to overcome the negative effects of anxiety caused by COVID-19?

Objectives of the study

As the title of the study suggests, the general objective of the study is to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on learning anxiety. The study also aims to find:
- To what extent COVID-19 causes learning anxiety, particularly that of EFL learning.
- The differences between the male and female EFL learners in terms of learning anxiety caused by COVID-19.
- The internal and external factors that increase the negative effects of anxiety.
- The strategies used by the EFL learners to overcome the negative effects of anxiety caused by COVID-19 in EFL learning.
The Effects of COVID-19 on EFL Learners’ Anxiety

Mohammed & Mudhsh

Literature Review

Since the early beginning of 2020, Saudi universities have been experiencing an exceptional massive “Shifting” from the normal classes that are face-to-face classes to online classes due to the extensive spread of Coronavirus disease COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the world. During this time, many studies and researches have investigated the effects and the changes that COVID-19 led to the education system. Moreover, in the following paragraphs, the researchers will discuss few of the studies relevant to the effects and changes of COVID-19 on learners’ anxiety and the other psychological aspects.

The effects and changes caused by COVID-19 not only affected both learners’ strategies and primacies but also their level of concern in joining courses online. Also, while some learners have indicated that they were having good experience with the online classes, whereas others have said that they are facing negative experiences while returning home during the COVID-19 in disturbed family situations (Killian, 2020).

Furthermore, several studies have stated that the psychological impact of COVID-19 such as anxiety, fear, depression, anger, and confusion, etc, have affected many learners especially in the initial stage of COVID-19 outbreak in China (Chew, Wei, Vasoo, Chua & Sim, 2020; Li, Wang, Xue, Zhao & Zhu, 2020; Qiu, Shen, Zhao, Wang, Xie & Xu, 2020; Wang, Pan, Wan, Tan, Xu, Ho & Ho, 2020). Similar results of these studies were always noted in studies by (Cao, Fang, Hou, Han, Xu, Dong & Zheng, 2020; Wang & Zhao, 2020) that college learners have experienced many levels of psychological stress, health anxiety and depression.

Another study by Arënliu and Bërxulli (2020) investigated the psychological distress of the COVID-19 on learners belonging to different departments. The study revealed that 11.4 % of the learners said that they face very abnormal psychological distress, 13.3% said temperate psychological distress, 24.7 % stated slight psychological distress, whereas 50.6% did not state any psychological distress.

Wang and Zhao (2020) elaborated the early effects of the COVID-19 including its effects on anxiety and stress; these effects were related to some factors like home restrictions and health concerns. Among other factors, they reported that learners underwent extra stress, anxiety, and sadness than those who are not learners. Numerous researchers have expected that physical distancing and universal anxiety feelings over the COVID-19 have originated a wide-ranging collection of effects and challenges in classes together with poor academic presentation (Rundle, Park, Herbstman, Kinsey & Wang, 2020; Sintema, 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

In the Saudi context, Moawad (2020) explored the effects of stress on online learning among Saudi university learners. The researcher carried out his exploration on 2271 male and female learners at King Saud University. He observed that a total of 514 learners were fearful of the sudden shift from the old-style face-to-face classes to online classes. They were scared of exams, homework, internet connectivity, lecture timing, etc. Furthermore, Rahman (2020) conducted a research on the various challenges of online EFL teaching during COVID-19 at Qassim University. His study revealed that there were promising results in online EFL teaching during COVID-19 at Qassim University. On the other side, there were some discrepancies. The study concluded that during the quarantine, online teaching had repaired some of the damages to
education caused by COVID-19. However, questions remain unanswered regarding whether online EFL teaching can meet the learners’ needs and desired goals. Another study in Saudi EFL context by Mahyoob (2020) investigated the online learning challenges and problems during COVID-19 faced by EFL learners at Taibah University. The study revealed that learners faced difficulties in accessing the Blackboard platform. Further, around 30% of the learners could not attend the classes and other assignments using Blackboard, and they moved to other applications during online learning. Moreover, there were significant challenges like technical issues faced by the EFL learners. Finally, it is revealed that the EFL learners’ satisfaction with online learning is low (less than 50%) and “and 43 % of learners are not fully supporting continuing online education if there is no crisis” (Mahyoob, 2020, p. 360).

Despite the hard work of these previous studies on the effects and challenges of COVID-19 and on learners’ anxiety, there is still no vast of studies conducted mainly on investigating the effects of COVID-19 on EFL learners’ anxiety at the Saudi universities. Therefore, this study is conducted to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on Saudi EFL learners’ anxiety.

Method

This study is a cross-sectional study that was conducted in 2020, i.e. during COVID-19 pandemic. A questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information and data from respondents about learning anxiety caused by COVID-19. The questionnaire was reviewed by some experts in questionnaire designing and statistical analysis. Their feedback led to some changes in the questionnaire and a pilot study was suggested to be done. The pilot study was conducted on 30 learners and some modifications were made.

The questionnaire was distributed among the undergraduate learners of the Department of English at the University of Bisha as a Google form in December 2020. After collecting the data, the data were inserted into SPSS (Version 22.0) for analysis. The tools that were used in the analysis were descriptive statistics, One-Way ANOVA and Kruskal Wallis H test.

Participants

Eighty respondents of the EFL learners at the University of Bisha were taken randomly out of 98 respondents. Eighteen female respondents were dropped out of the study because the researchers intended to take the male and female learners' respondents equally as the gender factor is essential in this study. Forty male learners and forty female learners were taken for the study. All the participants are Saudi citizens. Their ages are nearly ranged between 18 years and 26 years. They have almost the same educational background living accommodations.

Instruments

In this study a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The final version of the distributed questionnaire was of two sections. The first section intended to elicit demographic information (profile) of the respondents. The second section that is of 20 items of 5-point Likert scale ranging 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' intended to elicit data from the respondents about their learning anxiety caused by COVID-19, the internal factors that increase their learning anxiety, the external factors that increase their learning anxiety and the strategies that they use to decrease the negative effects of anxiety on their language learning.
Results

Before analyzing the data, reliability of the data of the second section of the questionnaire was tested and it was found that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.829 as shown in Table (1). This indicates that the consistency of the data is highly reliable.

Table 1. Reliability statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.829</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that the EFL learners experience learning anxiety during COVID-19. The descriptive statistics, as shown in Table two shows that the mean is (3.35) indicating that learning anxiety is normal and it is not high.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of anxiety among EFL Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxiety Statements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>267.80</td>
<td>3.3475</td>
<td>.37753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>267.80</td>
<td>3.3475</td>
<td>.37753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was found that the respondents have anxiety and fear about their learning during COVID-19 but it is noticed that this anxiety does not decrease their ability to learn. The results show, as shown in Table three, that the means of four statements related to anxiety were above (3.5), the mean of the statement that elicited information about whether COVID-19 anxiety decreases the learners' ability to learn or not was (2.33). This means that most EFL learners have a belief that COVID-19 anxiety does not decrease their ability to learn.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the responses on learning anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I anxiously think about English learning during COVID-19</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>283.00</td>
<td>3.5375</td>
<td>.72816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel uncomfortable with English learning during COVID-19</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>293.00</td>
<td>3.6625</td>
<td>.96710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry that COVID-19 may prevent me from learning English</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>294.00</td>
<td>3.6750</td>
<td>1.04063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a worry of my learning activities during COVID-19</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>282.00</td>
<td>3.5250</td>
<td>.67458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that COVID-19 anxiety decreases my ability to learn English</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>187.00</td>
<td>2.3375</td>
<td>.95392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using One-Way ANOVA test to calculate the difference between the male and female learners, as shown in Table four, the analysis does not approve a significant difference between the male and female learners on the level of anxiety (P = .597 > .05). The analysis of the statement "I worry that COVID-19 may prevent me from learning English" shows a significant difference between the male and female learners(P = .017, < .05). As there is a significant difference between the male and female learners in the statement, Kruskal Wallis H test was used.
to calculate the mean ranks and it shows that the female learners are more worried about the possibility of preventing their learning by COVID-19 than the male learners.

Table 4. ANOVA between the male and female learners in terms of anxiety caused by Covid-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>11.219</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.260</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table five, it was found that there is no significant difference between the learners of the different study levels in terms of anxiety (P = .386).

Table 5. ANOVA between the learners of the study levels in terms of anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.068</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>1.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>10.191</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.260</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internal Factors That Increase the Learners' Negative Anxiety about Learning during Covid-19

The internal factors that may increase the learners' negative anxiety towards learning during COVID-19 were also considered and tested. Table six reveals that there was an agreement that the internal factors play a role in increasing the negative anxiety of COVID-19 towards EFL learning (Mean = 2.93).

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the internal factors of anxiety during Covid-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal factors of anxiety</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>234.20</td>
<td>2.9275</td>
<td>1.03128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N valid (listwise)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By comparing males and females on the level of the internal factors that increase the learners' negative anxiety towards learning during COVID-19, as shown in Table seven, it was found that there is a significant difference between the male and female learners (P = .001<.05). Using Kruskal Wallis H test to calculate the mean ranks, as shown in Table (8), it was found that, during COVID-19, the female learners' learning anxiety is increased by internal factors more than that of the male learners.

Table 7. ANOVA between male and female learners on the level of the internal factors of anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>10.805</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.805</td>
<td>11.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>73.215</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.939</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84.020</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. The mean ranks of male and female learners in the internal factors of anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>54.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing the learners' levels of study, there is no significant difference between the respondents' internal factors that may increase the learners' negative anxiety about learning during COVID-19 ($P = .098 > .05$).

### Table 9. ANOVA between the study levels in term of the internal factors of anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>12.576</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.797</td>
<td>1.811</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>71.443</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.992</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84.020</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### External Factors That Increase the Learners' Negative Anxiety towards Learning during Covid-19

The external factors that may increase the learners' negative anxiety towards learning during COVID-19 were considered and tested in this study. As shown in Table (10), the mean of the respondents' responses is 3.76. This indicates that the external factors play a critical role in increasing the learners' anxiety about their learning during COVID-19. The external factors that play such role are like hearing and reading about COVID-19, seeing the preventive measures and social media news. These factors prove negative effects on the learners' anxiety towards EFL learning.

### Table 10. Descriptive statistics of the external factors of anxiety during Covid-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Factors of anxiety</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>301.00</td>
<td>3.7625</td>
<td>.50022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>71.443</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.992</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84.020</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 11 and 12 reveal no significant difference ($P = .690$) between the male and female learners in terms of external factors that may increase learning anxiety about learning during COVID-19. Also, there is no significant difference ($P = .139$) between the learners of the different levels of study in terms of external factors that increase learning anxiety during COVID-19.

### Table 11. ANOVA between male and female learners in terms of the external factors of anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>19.727</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.768</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 12. ANOVA between the respondents' levels of study in terms of the external factors of anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2.713</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>1.636</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>17.055</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.768</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies Used by EFL Learners to Overcome/Decrease the Negative Learning Anxiety Caused by Covid-19

As there are anxiety, internal factors and external factors that increase anxiety, there is a response by the learners. The reaction is using a strategy to decrease the negative effects of such anxiety. When testing the strategies used by the EFL learners and analyzing the results, it was found that there is an agreement that the learners use strategies like “enthusing themselves to learn”, “ignoring social media news about COVID-19”, "trying to be hopeful and cheerful during COVID-19", etc. to decrease the negative effects of internal and external factors that increase their anxiety and fear about learning during COVID-19. As shown in Table (13), there is a significant difference between the male and female learners in using the strategies to decrease the effects of COVID-19 anxiety on their EFL learning (P = .004). Using Kruskal Wallis H test to calculate the mean ranks, it was found, as shown in Table (14), that the female learners use more strategies than male learners to decrease the negative effects of learning anxiety caused by Covid-19. Only one strategy is used more by male learners than female learners that is "trying to be hopeful and cheerful during COVID-19 to continue learning".

Table 13. ANOVA between male and female learners in using strategies to decrease negative anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.800</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.800</td>
<td>9.034</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>15.542</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17.342</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14. The mean ranks of male and female learners in using strategies to decrease negative anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table (15), there is no significant difference between the learners of the different levels of study in using strategies to decrease the negative effects of anxiety on their learning (P = .175).

Table 15. ANOVA between the learners of the study levels in using strategies to decrease negative anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.800</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.800</td>
<td>9.034</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>15.542</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17.342</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

This study found that the EFL learners have learning anxiety caused by COVID-19 pandemic. This seems to be normal among the learners. They are anxious about their study. It is normal that they have "fear of academic year loss"(Hasan & Bao, 2020, p. 1). This seems to be normal among the learners. This goes in line with many studies (Sundarasen et al., 2020) that found 92% of 983 respondents had normal anxiety and like (Aqeel, Shuja, Abbas, Rehna, & Ziapour, 2020) that found 77.3% of the respondents had normal, mild and moderate anxiety and 22.7% had severe level of anxiety.

Although it was found that there is no significant difference between male and female learners in terms of anxiety caused by COVID-19, there seems to be tendency to present higher levels of anxiety by female learners than male learners. Silva, Brito and Pereira (2020) found that "female participants (M= 2.59,SD= .81) presented higher levels of anxiety regarding COVID-19 than men (M=2.21,SD=.77)." (p. 4)

It was found that external factors play a role in increasing the negative effects of anxiety caused by COVID-19. These results are aligned with the results of (Martínez-Lorca, Martínez-Lorca, Criado-Álvarez, & Armesilla, 2020) and other studies. That is why WHO suggested "minimize watching, reading or listening to news that cause you feel anxious or distressed" (World Health Organization, 2020, p. 1). Not only external factors have negative effects on learning anxiety but also internal factors have negative effects in increasing learning anxiety. This was proved by Sood. S. (2020). This was stated as "The swift rise of fear and anxiety among people due to uncertainty of the disease are coupled with essential yet socially disruptive measures like lockdowns and quarantines. ...These can lead to ... anxiety. Predisposing factors include ... misinformation on social media". (Sood, S. 2020, p. 23).

The EFL learners use some strategies to decrease the negative effects of learning anxiety caused by COVID-19. As it was found that the female learners are in general more anxious about their learning than male learners, it was found that they use more strategies to diminish or reduce the negative effects of anxiety caused by COVID-19.

Conclusion

It is noticed and proved that anxiety has negative effects on second or foreign language learners. It can hinder the learners from learning a language. As it is known and proved, COVID-19 caused learning anxiety for learners in all the countries that have experienced the pandemic. Saudi Arabic is one of these countries and the Saudi learners are anxious. So, the researchers tried to examine the dimensions of this problem that may affect EFL learning.

After analyzing the data collected from the sample taken from the University of Bisha, this study gives evidence that the EFL learners have been suffering from anxiety during COVID-19. It was concluded that Saudi EFL learners showed normal anxiety towards their learning during COVID-19. In general, female learners had anxiety more than male learners. Moreover, the study revealed some internal factors and external factors that increase the negative effects of anxiety on EFL learning during COVID-19. Moreover, the EFL learners try to use some strategies to decrease the negative effects of anxiety on EFL learning during COVID-19. The study concludes that female learners are more affected by internal factors than male learners. So,
female learners use more strategies to decrease the effects of anxiety on learning during COVID-19.

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---

**Appendix: Students’ Questionnaire**

Name: ................................................................................................................................. (optional)

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

College: ............................................. Department: ............................

Level: .....................................................................................................................

Table 16. *The questionnaire distributed to the study sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I anxiously think about English learning during COVID-19.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I feel uncomfortable with English learning during COVID-19.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I worry that COVID-19 may prevent me from learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I have a worry of my learning activities during COVID-19.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I believe that COVID-19 anxiety decreases my ability to learn English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Thinking about COVID-19 decreases my ability to learn English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 During classes, I find myself thinking about COVID-19 more than learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 The more I think about COVID-19, the more confused I get in learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Thinking about COVID-19 makes me careless about learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I feel nervous when I think that COVID-19 will hinder me from fulfilling my objectives of learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I worry about my English learning when the teachers/classmates speak about COVID-19.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I feel that hearing or reading about the spread of COVID-19 decreases my attention to learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>When I see more COVID-19 preventive and preventive measures done by people, I get more worried about my learning of English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>More social distancing during COVID-19 increases my anxiety about learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Social media news about COVID-19 increases my fear about my learning of English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I think government will apply the procedures that will help me overcome the negative effects of COVID-19 on learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I enthuse myself to learn English actively during COVID-19.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I try to ignore social media news about COVID-19 to care about my English learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I follow the strict preventive measures which make me feel safe of COVID-19 to keep learning English actively.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I try to be hopeful and cheerful during COVID-19 to continue my English learning actively.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ESP Students’ Satisfaction with Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Ukraine

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Abstract
This study aims to determine the level of ESP students’ satisfaction with online ESP learning courses at three faculties of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The current study examines students’ answers to identify their satisfaction in ESP online courses. The study's research questions were divided into four categories: the effectiveness of online ESP learning, the availability of learning material used by ESP instructors, the evaluation of ESP teachers' results, the effectiveness of online testing, and students' difficulties with ESP distance learning. A descriptive statistical method was used to validate the study. The statistics package JASP was used for data analysis. The authors chose observation, literature analysis, a questionnaire provision, and descriptive data analysis as the research tools. The study results show that students are primarily pleased with ESP courses taught online, students fulfil the expected progress in ESP learning performance. It is revealed that the main problems that influence and impact online ESP learning during COVID-19 are related to technical, academic, and communication challenges. Student satisfaction surveys may lead to changes in ESP online learning activities that may, in turn, boost students’ outcomes. The results provide valuable insight into students' satisfaction with online learning and pose practical questions for its implementation. As a result, this study is just a preliminary attempt at offering considerate analysis to Ukraine's policymakers.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, challenges and advantages of ESP online learning, online learning, students’ satisfaction, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

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Introduction

To prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, most higher education institutions worldwide abruptly stopped in-class study at the end of March 2020 (UNESCO, 2020b). As a result of these closures, universities have been forced to use online training tools irrespective of students’ and teachers’ competencies in using technological resources (World Bank, 2020). Although online education is not a new pedagogical methodology and has been used in different fields for many years, there is still a lack of competence in integrating online learning platforms in higher education institutions (UNESCO, 2016). The worldwide academic calendar was plunged into a state of disarray by the coronavirus pandemic. Many teachers and students have gone home and self-quarantined at the same time (UNESCO, 2020a). As a solution to this problem, several academic leaders are now supporting online education (UNESCO, 2020). It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that online education is not a satisfactory substitute for face-to-face delivery. In Ukraine students of the higher education institutions were asked to stay home and continue their studies online. All lectures and seminars were transferred entirely to online learning at Taras Shevchenko National University.

With the ongoing technology development in distance learning and with the introduction of digital teaching technologies, it is crucial to analyse the level of students’ satisfaction in online learning. These issues are of great concern to teachers and administrators of the vast majority of universities worldwide, as students are recognized as the most critical stakeholders in higher education. All efforts are made to meet their educational needs and to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence of this is the statistical research conducted in the UK and the USA. They, in particular, show that the percentage of students' dissatisfaction with the educational process is growing rapidly. It is indicated in a survey by the British Office for National Statistics. In a January survey by the UK's National Statistics Office (ONS), 37% of students said they were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with higher education. It is 8% more than in November last year. The biggest problems, according to British students, are the teaching methods, teaching materials, and the quality of knowledge. In the UK, it can be explained by the transition of most subjects to the online environment through the third lockdown, which was introduced in early January (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

In Ukraine, as in most countries across the world, studies on students’ perception of online learning are also being conducted. The State Quality Service of Education of Ukraine conducted an online survey among teachers and students to analyze their satisfaction with online education and assess the quality of online learning in the 2020/2021 academic year. The survey found various critical challenges in online learning that are considered to influence the quality and efficient study. Such challenges include lack of transparency in the students’ assessment, lack of or poor internet connection, insufficient control over students' acquisition of knowledge, a lot of individual learning, and lack of professional competence for teaching online (The State Quality Service of Education of Ukraine, 2020).

The network of Higher Education Reform Experts reports on the Ukrainian situation with online learning at higher education institutions. According to the findings, Ukrainian universities help their students meet their educational targets in these unprecedented times. The flexibility with which online learning is adopted across Ukraine, however, differs significantly. The higher education institutions experienced with Erasmus+ projects have successfully used the projects’
findings on the creative teaching, learning approaches and instruments of online learning. However, most Ukrainian universities are facing similar problems: 1) there is a shortage of institutional policies and tools to coordinate online learning, 2) the introduction of high-quality multimedia facilities and content is still recent and there is a need to manage the multitude of such services, and 3) teaching personnel have limited knowledge and competence and/or a lack of digital skills (HERE, 2020). The task now is to incorporate new online tools into ordinary teaching activities and to determine the subject areas in which they are already best used and where further progress is needed. As can be seen from the statistics obtained in different countries, further challenges are linked to the teachers’ adaptability to tailor lectures for online learning, to track synchronous or asynchronous interaction between students, and to build authentic online appraisal resources that complement the shift from face-to-face courses to online platforms (Watts, 2016).

To boost student performance, more efforts are required by all online educators to combine pedagogy with technology. Among the various types of student engagement, learner-to-instructor engagement techniques seemed to be the most valued. Icebreaker/introduction discussions and working collaboratively in groups by using online communication tools were rated the most effective engagement strategies in the learner-to-learner category. Sending regular announcements or reminders and providing an assessment scale for all assignments were rated most valuable in the learner-to-instructor category. Also, online dialogue as an efficient networking activity was found to be very motivational for students in the new online learning environment. Thus student engagement increases student satisfaction, enhances student motivation to learn, and improves student performance in the online learning environment. As a result, teachers need a deeper understanding of how students perceive and react to elements of online learning (because student expectations and attitudes are vital to motivation and learning) along with how these methods can be more successfully implemented to improve learning (Koohang & Durante, 2003). Students’ roles and responsibilities in collaborative groups are clearly established and emphasized, and teachers' roles are changed from information providers to facilitators of knowledge in online learning. It is better to involve and inspire students by setting challenges to the students and implement it. Such students’ involvement increases students’ satisfaction (Amena, 2020). This study calls for further studies on integrating professional development seminars and educational workshops for ESP online learning and teaching in order to encourage innovative ESP teaching methods for online learning and alternative evaluation plans for teachers and students. The research aims to determine the level of satisfaction of the students of three faculties at KNU Ukraine with ESP online learning channels and learning environments during lockdown. Student satisfaction surveys may lead to changes in ESP online learning activities that may, in turn, boost students’ outcomes. The results provide valuable insight into students' satisfaction with online learning and pose practical questions for its implementation. The study's research questions fell into four categories: the efficiency of online ESP learning experience, the availability of learning material used by ESP instructors, the assessment of ESP teachers' performance, the effectiveness of online testing, and students' difficulties with ESP distance learning.

**Literature Review**

The analysis of the literature shows that most studies are conducted to classify students' perceptions and attitudes toward online learning, and studies relating to students' perceptions of
online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic are rare and far between. There are different terms presented for online education in the literature. Some of them are virtual education, Internet-based education, web-based education, and education via computer-mediated communication. The authors choose the definition of online education that is based on Keegan's (1988) definition of distance education. Keegan (1996) analyzed reports of distance education and incorporated the following form of education into five characteristics: separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process; the impact of an academic institution in the preparation and planning of learning materials as well as the availability of student support services; the use of electronic media (print, audio, video, or computer) to link teacher and learner and deliver course material; the availability of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate this form of communication (Keegan, 1996).

Sinclaire highlighted that online learning is a massive difference in how students learn and, in addition, how students are taught. Therefore, the point is that there is a growing need to consider what leads to student satisfaction with online learning (Sinclaire, 2011).

In creating a successful online program, Sener and Humbert (2003) claimed that satisfaction is a vital component. Satisfaction can be characterized as "a definition that reflects results and reciprocity between students and an instructor" (Thurmond, Wambach, Connors & Frey, 2002, p.171). Learner satisfaction of a course is one of the significant pillars for evaluating the success and efficacy of the course delivery. In evaluating student satisfaction with online courses Richardson and Swan (2003) concentrated on the relationship of teacher social presence in online learning that influenced students’ satisfaction. They discovered a strong connection between the perceptions of students’ social involvement and their perceptions of online learning. Bollinger (2004) found three constructs to be important: interactivity, teacher variables and technology problems. Yet, developing an online environment that promotes student satisfaction requires methods that go beyond facilitating interaction with components of the course. Interaction with each other, between a student and a teacher and between students in the course, often includes creating culture, among other elements. Sher (2009) discovered that interactions between student and teacher and between students are essential factors in student satisfaction. Multiple studies have shown that a student's active participation in the learning process improves learning, a process known as active learning (Sarason & Banbury, 2004). Good learning results were obtained by interactive teaching or “learning by doing” (Picciano, 2002).

When it comes to learner motivation, satisfaction, and engagement, the online learning environment differs dramatically from the conventional classroom environment (Bignoux & Sund, 2018). Because many new technologies and web-based activities are interactive, online learning can build environments where students engage with the material and learn by doing, improving their understanding as they build new skills (Johnston, Killion & Omomen, 2005).

Some pedagogical methods can be more easily converted into online learning and distance learning environments than others. Teaching activities that rely heavily on instructor lectures or the teacher assigning self-study materials are more readily transferable to online learning environments than more advanced pedagogical approaches. Those approaches are usually discovered where students complete the tasks that are more learner-centered or project-based (Anderson & Dron, 2010). The surveys include a range of explanations why, with online
studies, students can learn successfully. Students have more influence over their research, according to the findings, and have more choices available for reflection at their hands.

In the field of language education, teachers have taken an interest in modeling student-oriented courses using the latest web tools for courses that have been mainly instructor-oriented. Based on the main functions and features of the language learning, online tools are grouped into twelve categories (Son, 2011). For this study the authors chose the tools that are frequently used during ESP classes at the university, such as content management, communication, live and virtual worlds, social networking and bookmarking, resource sharing, Web exercise creation, and Web search engines. ESP courses have similar challenges. The authors decided to research what affects students’ satisfaction in learning ESP online and what learning tools lead to student performance improvement in the lockdown.

**Methods**

The study's data are based on students' experiences completing an online ESP course during lockdown. This research aims to determine the level of satisfaction of the students of three faculties at KNU Ukraine with ESP online learning channels and learning environments during lockdown. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package JASP. Appropriate statistical procedures for description (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used. Students answered the questions in a Google questionnaire. Based on a literature review, a questionnaire was developed to collect the necessary data. The questionnaire covered four areas and consisted of a list of questions in each section. As research tools the authors also chose observation, literature analysis, a questionnaire provision, and descriptive data analysis.

**Research questions**

The current study examines students’ answers to identify students’ satisfaction in ESP online courses. The Google questionnaire was divided into four dimensions: the efficiency of online ESP learning experience, availability of learning material used by ESP teachers, assessment of ESP teachers’ performance, efficiency of online testing, and students’ challenges with ESP distance learning. Questionnaires were sent out and consisted of 23 survey questions sorted into four dimensions: How would you evaluate your ESP online course experience? How would you assess the efficiency of ESP learning materials used in ESP classes? How would you assess your ESP teacher’s performance in a virtual class? How would you consider ESP online testing?

**Participants**

The site for this study was the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Biology, and the Faculty of Geography where an ESP course is taught for students of the first and second years of study at KNU, Ukraine.

This study used a selective student satisfaction evaluation model. The study population was ESP students of three faculties of KNU of the first and second years of study who take ESP courses and participate in online learning. The sampled group is made up of 167 students who were targeted for the survey. The participants' ages range from 17-19. The survey was conducted in English, and no translation was necessary to be added.
Research Procedures

Respondents who participated in the ESP online learning programs of three different faculties were invited to complete the questionnaire. Responses to each question in the survey were imported into a JASP statistical package from Google forms, and respondents’ complete data for each question was put in the JASP interface. Anonymous completed questionnaires, and the received results were analyzed. A descriptive–correlation survey approach was used in this study.

Data Collection

The ESP students’ answers were collected and saved in the Google documents. Data were collected over two months from October to December 2020. The survey took the participants about eight minutes to complete. The 167 forms and the accompanying comments samples formed the data set for subsequent analysis.

Findings

The questionnaire was divided into four sections where the first section highlighted the ESP students’ satisfaction with their ESP learning experience online. In the second section of the questionnaire, the students’ satisfaction with the ESP learning materials offered and used by their ESP teacher was assessed. In the third section the level of students’ satisfaction with their teacher’s competence and performance online was evaluated. The fourth section of the survey represented the student’s satisfaction with the transparency of online assessment.

How would you assess your ESP online course experience?

Regarding answering the questions in the first section: How would you assess your ESP online course experience? Students reported that they were satisfied with the selected method, facilitating their learning outcomes of the course’s objectives. Quantitative data were obtained by asking students to indicate if they are satisfied or dissatisfied with a series of statements about their experiences and preferences regarding the use of the online learning tools on a five point Likert scale (1=Fair and 5=Excellent). The results from the survey suggest that the students view online learning experience as satisfying. Table one provides a summary of the results obtained. As indicated in Table one, the respondents rated two items as being of "high importance" and sixth items as being of "average importance." The two highest-rated items were “Willingness to continue studying ESP online” and “Ability to meet the deadlines.” Analysis shows that the students are mostly satisfied with the offered ESP online learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it was determined that course delivery methods and tools (4,396), were effective during a rapid shift to online teaching during COVID-19. As a first-time experience, the results showed a highly satisfactory achievement of learning outcomes. Participants were satisfied with course engagement activities levels (4,317), ability to meet the deadlines where the mean is (4,617) and the results obtained represent an increased ability to manage time while studying online. Students reported a high level of motivation to learn ESP online (4,377), their willingness to continue study ESP online showed more than good results (4,377), increased opportunity to access and use information showed (4,120) that have a positive attitude to online ESP experience where shift to online ESP learning increased attendance of ESP courses (4,333).
Table 1. *Students’ perceptions of their ESP online course experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course engagement activities</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.317</td>
<td>0.737</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to meet the deadlines</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.617</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s motivation to learn ESP online</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.377</td>
<td>0.691</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to continue studying ESP online</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.743</td>
<td>0.439</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to access and use information</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.120</td>
<td>0.775</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with ESP content online</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.377</td>
<td>0.522</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery methods and tools used</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.396</td>
<td>0.692</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance of ESP course online</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.333</td>
<td>0.626</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*How would you assess ESP learning materials used in ESP classes?*

The answers given in the second section about students’ satisfaction with chosen learning materials used in their online ESP course show that the most effective and convenient media for ESP classes were ZOOM, Google Classroom, and Google Hangouts. The students’ perceptions of the most effective online learning methods and platforms are varied. Quantitative data was obtained by asking students to indicate if they have a positive perception of learning materials -1 or have a negative attitude - 0 to their experiences and preferences regarding the use of online learning tools. Overall, the results from the survey suggest that the students view online learning materials as effective. Concerning the ability to work with the ESP teachers’ guides on their own, students reported that they could do it themselves (0.720). Students understand ESP course requirements better in an ESP online course than in an in-class (0.738). They show high satisfaction with online resources chosen by the ESP teachers (0.707). Overall, the students are delighted with the online classes and the tools used for class deliveries.

Table 2. *Efficiency of ESP learning materials used in ESP classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can work with the ESP teachers guides on my own</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can understand ESP course requirements better in an online course than in an in-class course</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.738</td>
<td>0.441</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with online resources chosen by the ESP</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>0.456</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find video-based ESP classes an effective way of learning</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How would you assess your ESP teacher’s performance in virtual class?

Regarding the questions in section three rating teacher’s competence and performance, students assessed teachers in the online class overall (Good). They were almost satisfied with teachers’ performance in a virtual class. The survey results suggest that the teachers’ performance in a virtual class is favorable for achieving learning outcomes. Table three provides a summary of the results obtained. As indicated in Table three, the respondents rated one item as being of "high importance" and five items as being of "average importance". The highest rated item was “teacher’s presence in the virtual classes”, which represents a vital role of a teacher and facilitator in online learning. The second - highest ranked thing was opportunities to collaborate with other students during online ESP classes, group work and interactivity of classes (4,598) which indicates the necessity of group work during ESP classes. Moreover, it was identified that teacher’s communication was adequately effective and participants are satisfied with the means of communication chosen by their ESP teacher (4,317). Surprisingly the time response from the ESP teachers and feedback from them was not as quick as students expected, and answers to this research question gave less than (4,287) satisfied students. Consequently, it influenced the final result of students’ satisfaction with their teachers’ performance.

Table 3. Assessment of ESP teacher’s performance in a virtual class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of communication chosen by their ESP teacher</th>
<th>Collaboration with other students</th>
<th>Time response from the ESP teacher</th>
<th>Teacher’s presence in the virtual classes</th>
<th>Cooperation with the ESP teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.317</td>
<td>4.598</td>
<td>4.287</td>
<td>4.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>0.820</td>
<td>0.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>4.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How would you assess ESP online testing?

In answering the fourth section on transparency and accuracy of ESP online testing, students reported that they were satisfied with the selected online exam platforms, namely Exam.net and Socrative which were highly rated by respondents. As indicated in Table four, the respondents rated two items as "highly-rated" and four items as being "lower-rated". The results from the survey suggest that online performance testing was assessed transparently and accurately. Despite of the high level of difficulty of the exam tasks (4.741) it did not influence the final result for the course. Monitoring academic performance in online ESP classes in its turn was rated as higher than moderate (4.377), instructions were clear and easy to follow.
Table 4. Assessment of ESP online testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How would you evaluate the level of difficulty of the Midterm exam?</th>
<th>How would you assess the level of difficulty of the tasks during a semester?</th>
<th>Were the exam instructions clear and transparent in the assessment?</th>
<th>Was assessment of your academic progress accurate in online ESP classes?</th>
<th>Was it easy to monitor your academic performance in online ESP classes?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.373</td>
<td>4.741</td>
<td>4.337</td>
<td>4.506</td>
<td>4.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>0.700</td>
<td>0.439</td>
<td>0.638</td>
<td>0.644</td>
<td>0.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>2.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation between selected dependent variables with student’s perception of ESP online learning

The Pearson coefficient of correlation was used to identify the correlation between selected dependent variables with perception regarding ESP online course during the pandemic. The relationship between some selected respondents’ characteristics with perception of students’ satisfaction of ESP online is presented in Table five. There was a significant relation found between the level of course engagement activities and students’ motivation and opportunity to assess and use information with delivery methods and tools used by their ESP teacher.

Table 5. Correlation between selected dependent variables with student’s perception of ESP online learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course engagement activities</th>
<th>Students’ motivation to learn ESP online</th>
<th>Pearson’s r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.745 ***</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to access and use information</td>
<td>Delivery methods and tools used in ESP online</td>
<td>0.599 ***</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate students’ attitudes toward online ESP courses in terms of social presence, social interaction, engagement and satisfaction. Furthermore, the aim of this study was to investigate the perception of ESP online learning versus among students. The survey results show that a level of course engagement activities leads to students’ motivation, and having an opportunity to assess and use information with delivery methods and tools used by their ESP teacher increases the student’s satisfaction with ESP online learning. Interactive instruction or “learning by doing” resulted in positive learning outcomes (Picciano, 2002; Watkins, 2005). Richardson and Swan (2003) concentrated on the relationship of teacher social presence in online learning and students’ satisfaction. They discovered a strong connection between the perceptions of students’ social involvement and their perceptions of online learning.
Our study showed that the four highest rated advantages of online learning were “teachers presence in the virtual classes”, “flexibility in time and place”, “quick sharing of learning materials for students and collaboration with other students”.

Moreover, online learning encourages students to work at their own speed to complete their tasks. As a result, in order to experience class participation, instructors must have a solid understanding of both theory and practice of online learning.

Conclusion
The unprecedented situation with COVID-19 had a significant impact on university education in Ukraine. It is crucial to tailor and adjust teaching methods and tools and create a favorable environment for teaching and online learning in universities. The quarantine gave a push to rapid and effective transformations in the higher education system of Ukraine. Online learning plays a vital role in higher education, it is important for universities to focus on students’ perception and their expectations towards the role of online learning within their higher education experiences.

This study concludes that the students are satisfied with the ESP teachers who created a comfortable ESP online environment in times of COVID-19, where they agreed on specific teaching rules to use, assessment choices, training workshops, and online technical support. Students are also satisfied with the facilities provided by the ESP teachers.

Regarding their most effective online learning platforms, it is concluded that ZOOM is the most effective tool for lecture delivery after Google Classroom.

Overall, all the students are delighted with online teaching during COVID-19. The study revealed that the students are content with the assessment types. The assessment plans used by teachers are perceived as favourable for gaining course knowledge and skills. An efficiently tailored ESP online course uses various teaching tools and services to increase students’ performance. ESP online in the university offers more accessibility and freedom.

The effectiveness and success of ESP online courses at the university rely mainly on the nature of the course content, the outline of the course content, the contact between the student, and the teacher, and the availability of learning materials. The study found that teachers’ presence and support play an essential role in acquiring knowledge online. In both individual and group work, teachers initiate interaction. ESP teachers respond to the learners' questions, design projects, and evaluate their learning because student expectations and attitudes are vital to motivation and learning. It is important to remember that technology may not be capable of replacing a teacher. Our study showed that teachers’ communication was effective enough and participants are satisfied with the means of communication chosen by their ESP teachers. If that is the case, research needs to be done on a wide scale to promote the refinement of ESP teaching and learning processes.

The study presented here focused on students’ satisfaction with ESP online learning among students with mostly limited prior online learning experience. The findings provide important insight into students’ satisfaction with online learning and raise practical
considerations for its implementation. This study is thus just an initial attempt at providing insightful analysis to the policymakers of Ukraine.

Additional studies are recommended to extend research on both professors’ and students’ satisfaction with their overall perception, such as willingness to use online learning, their need for educational technology, as well as technical assistance and training support. A gap actually remains that needs to be filled. Future studies should perhaps be specifically concerned with carrying out an in-depth analysis of the activities to be implemented, such as online training practices, ESP online teaching, development process, and a more detailed course design guidance. In order to promote new ESP teaching strategies for online learning and alternative evaluation plans for teachers and students, this study calls for more research about incorporating career development seminars and educational workshops for ESP online learning and teaching.

Collecting data on the benefits and challenges of online teaching and learning during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic would also be appropriate for teachers and administrators who are to design strategies for future crises.

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### Appendices

**Appendix A  
Students’ questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension 1. Online ESP learning experience</th>
<th>Dimension 2. ESP learning materials used</th>
<th>Dimension 3. ESP teacher’s performance</th>
<th>Dimension 4. ESP online testing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How would you evaluate your ESP online course experience?</td>
<td>1. What platforms were used for your online ESP course?</td>
<td>1. How would you assess teachers’ performance in the virtual classes?</td>
<td>1. What online platforms did the ESP teacher use for testing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What tools did you find most useful?</td>
<td>2. Were you able to work with the ESP teachers guides on your own?</td>
<td>2. Do you think that your and ESP teachers’ cooperation was effective?</td>
<td>2. How would you assess the level of difficulty of the Midterm exam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Would you like to go on studying ESP this way?</td>
<td>3. Did you find video-based ESP classes effective?</td>
<td>3. Did you have any opportunities to collaborate with other students during online ESP classes?</td>
<td>3. How would you assess the level of difficulty of the tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Did you have enough opportunities to reflect on what you have learned in online ESP classes?</td>
<td>4. Do you think that the online resources chosen by the ESP teachers were useful to study the ESP course?</td>
<td>4. Was response time from ESP teachers quick in online classes?</td>
<td>4. Were the exam instructions clear and transparent in the assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Has your online experience increased your opportunity to access and use information?</td>
<td>5. Did you ESP course online increase your understanding of requirements in an online course?</td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Was assessment of your academic progress accurate in online ESP classes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Are you motivated in ESP classes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Was it easy to monitor your academic performance in online ESP classes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you meet deadlines?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Did online learning increase the attendance of ESP classes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COVID-19 Pandemic and Apocalyptic Literature: An Analysis of Margret Atwood’s Oryx and Crake at the time of Coronavirus

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Abstract
Literature has been an imitator of life for generations on this earth, this literature has voiced the voiceless. Recent contemporary and postmodern literary theories have catered to burgeoning notions of logic that go beyond human survival on the planet. Science fiction is a genre of fiction that encompasses imaginative concepts like futuristic scientific-technological settings, faster than light, past and future spatial time travel, the existence of parallel universes and extraterrestrial life etc. An outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by a novel acute respiratory syndrome of coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) occurred in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The outbreak was declared as a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization on 30 January 2020. During this crisis, literature also plays an important role and apocalyptic literature has shown the disastrous consequences if humans didn’t stop their behaviour and attitude towards the world. This research project aims to take literature out of the realm of imagination and present the harsh realities of culture. This study revealed how literature represents the truth of the world that science is learning every day, and how certain inventions can have harmful effects if they are not halted in time. This research analysed the novel Oryx and Crake in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and pointed a convincing glimpse of the future. Snowman (protagonist), known as Jimmy before humanity was overrun by science, is trying to live in a world where he might be the last human Snowman tells the tale of how Crake's scientific ambitions contributed to the abolition of human civilization. The researcher emphasizes how the reel depicts reality and how people are to blame for the degradation of their world.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, cyberpunk, biopunk, biotechnology, science fiction, apocalyptic

Introduction

COVID-19 has destroyed and had paused the whole world. This pandemic is one of the deadliest in history, placing the advancement of research and technology in jeopardy. Despite the development of antimicrobial antibiotics, infectious diseases and germs continue to instil fear in the human community. An epidemic has been experimented with in literature since the early days. These health problems, such as cholera, typhus, measles, plague, tuberculosis, among others, have had their effects on personal as well as socio-economic relations. Today, as the globe joins together to battle COVID 19, people can’t ignore learning about the history of epidemics, as well as those portrayed in literature. Ancient writings, such as Giovanni Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* (1353), Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1392), set in motion the literary trope of epidemics, portraying the Black Death that devastated Europe at that time. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) can be read as allegories of epidemics as they feature hideous creatures, wreaking havoc everywhere they travel.

*Oryx and Crake* is a book by Margaret Atwood, a Canadian author published in 2003. The novel is speculative fiction, adventure romance and science fiction. The novel centres on Snowman, a solitary hero, who finds himself in a grim condition with only animals named Crakers to hold him company. The narrator hears about his history as a child named Jimmy and about the genetic experiments and biomedical research under Jimmy's peer Glenn Crake. McClelland and Stewart presented the novel for the very first time. It was shortlisted for both the 2003 Man Booker Fiction Prize and the 2004 Orange Fiction Prize.

Atwood’s futuristic vision in her plays is just a hint at what the world could look like if current scientific, technological, and industrial advances continue. She demonstrates a world in which human exploitation is at its height. Along with human and technical devices, Crake's character represents the humanist concept that runs through an impermeable wall, created by them. Within Atwood’s fiction, the notion of extinction establishes that creation and death are ultimately connected. The simultaneous adaptation and extinction cycles form life on Earth. The scientists in *Oryx and Crake* are attempting to become part of this natural phenomenon in a bid to control nature. By expressing their self-rationalized dominance by material culture and technology, humans are elevating themselves to the pinnacle of the food chain which, in effect, excuses senseless use. Intervention in natural evolution that accompanies human consumption can be seen in the human activity of selecting and breeding organisms for the desired characteristics and enacting genetic changes over multiple generations. Atwood explores whether genetically engineered plants and mutant animals are not as time-intensive as they used to be.

Review of Literature

In English-language literature, *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary Shelley was one of the first dystopian novels to speak of a possible world destroyed by a plague where a few people tend to be immune and escape contact with others to save them.

American poet and novelist Edgar Allan Poe published *The Masque of the Red Death: A Fantasy* (1842), the tale follows Prince Prosper's attempt to escape a deadly plague, known as the Red Death, by hiding in his castle. He, along with many other rich nobles, holds a masked ball in seven rooms of the castle, each coloured in a different hue. Amid their merriment, a shadowy...
figure dressed as a Red Death victim enters and walks through each room. Prospero dies after encountering this stranger, whose attire proves to contain nothing concrete inside it; the other guests also die. The Red Death is a fictional illness. Edgar Allan Poe explains it as inducing stinging sensation and extreme tiredness, and then swelling which resulting in death within half an hour.

Defoe’s A Journal of the Plague Year (1722) The bubonic plague in 17th century London is identified in literary and historical terms. Defoe is working tirelessly in the story to create the effect of verisimilitude, to remember actual neighbourhoods, roads, and even houses where accidents have happened. It also contains a table of injury facts and discusses the credibility of the writer's various stories and anecdotes.

Akhter in a paper “Gender Inequality and Literature: A Contemporary Issue” talks about the role literature plays in society as, “Literature asserted itself to be an intellectual imitator to life for generations in this earth that has voiced the voiceless. The recent modern and postmodern literary ideas have changed the whole scenario of the literature” (p. 593).

Camus’ novel The Plague (1947) the novel tells the tale of an epidemic that is sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran from the perspective of a narrator who himself is the victim of the plague.

Menadue & Cheer (2017) points the relationship between science and culture and how the science fictions represent the culture, “Science fiction questions the role, relevance, costs, and benefits of current and future technologies, and presents ideas that can influence public opinion” (p.1)

The novel Oryx and Crake centres on a post-apocalyptic narrator called "Snowman," living next to a group of wild human-like beings he names Crakers. Flashbacks show Snowman was once a child called Jimmy who grew up in a world controlled by multinationals and wealthy residences for their workers’ families. Close starvation, Snowman wants to return to the remains of a settlement named Rejooven Esense in pursuit of food, even after deadly genetically modified mutant animals overtake it. He provides an argument for the Crakers, who see him as a trainer, and continues his adventure forging.

Stoker’s novel Dracula (1997), has developed several vampire fantasy traditions by introducing the character of Count Dracula. Dracula's plan to travel from Transylvania to England to find fresh blood and spread the zombie curse, as well as the fight between Dracula and a small group of people headed by Professor Abraham Van Helsing, are told in this book.

Butler’s, Survivor (1978) novel is a contact between the Missionaries, a party of human colonists fleeing a plague on Earth, and the Kohn, articulate inhabitants of the world where the Missionaries have landed, is chronicled in Survivor. The narrative centres on Alanna, the Missionaries' leader's adoptive daughter, as she tries to protect the Missionaries from being destroyed or assimilated by a powerful local society.
Menadue and Cheer (2017) wrote about the importance of science fiction as, “Science fiction questions the role, relevance, costs, and benefits of current and future technologies, and presents ideas that can influence public opinion” (p. 2). Paura and Colacel (2019) talked about science fiction as:

Two trends have long been prevalent in science fiction: the first that of totalitarian dystopia, started with classic literature. Off and on-screen, dystopian stories reveal a Panopticon society, where the pervasiveness of technology removes any hope of individual life. The second trend is that of climate fiction: narratives that imagine a world dramatically changed by the climate breakdown show that our society can always be brought back to a pre-modern state by resource scarcity and overpopulation. (p. 7)

Objectives
The main objectives of this research work are:

• To explore the relationship between science and literature.
• To analyze the concept of mind control, telepathy and telekinesis.
• To build a foundation of realism
• To analyze the vision for the future.
• To relate reel with real.

Research Methodology
The methods selected for the current study are Comparative and Analytical Approach. The paper incorporates different apocalyptic theories to understand the psychology of different characters. All these methods are appropriate for the present study.

Discussion and Analysis
The settings of science fiction are all largely formed within the alternate subsistence of utopian and apocalyptic future societies, the environments of science fiction are often contradictory to those of concurrent fact are often contrary to those of concurrent reality, as they are mostly developed within the alternative subsistence of utopian and dystopian future worlds. Science fiction that highly uses magical and other supernatural prospects as its principal ingredient of plot, theme or setting is categorized under ‘Fantasy,’ an independent subgenre of science fiction. The diversified subgenres that come under the broad field of science fiction are Bio-punk, Cyberpunk, Time travel, Military Science Fiction, Superhuman depictions, Apocalyptic and Post-apocalyptic, Space opera, Paranormal Science Fiction, Social science fiction, etc. Science fiction first appeared in the 1980s as a kind of near-future fiction portraying a bleak patriarchal civilization in the throes of socio-cultural revolution as a result of invasive technology's transformations. Bio-punk is concerned with the future and the anticipated implications of the biotechnology boom and recombinant DNA breakthroughs. Built upon how technology has already altered our lives.

Oryx and Crake's pre-apocalyptic universe was teeming with science and technology firms specializing in transgenic studies. Constantly testing the limits of imagination, these corporations finally pushed humanity off the brink. The expression is Genetic experimentation in which genetic material from one animal is artificially inserted into the DNA of another is known as transgenic science. Jimmy's father was interested in transgenic science. For example, he was the brains behind the pigeon, a hybrid pig creature intended to produce human kidneys and skin cells. Other hybrid creatures included in the book include rakunks, wolvogs, bobkittens, and
luminescent rabbits genetically engineered with jellyfish DNA. However, from Snowman's post-apocalyptic viewpoint, it is apparent that the desire for technological progress directly contributed to the abolition of humanity by granting control and wealth to unscrupulous scholars.

*Oryx and Crake* are engaged in a symbolic struggle between science and the arts, with Crake representing the science side and Snowman representing the art side. In the pre-apocalyptic setting of the novel, science strongly overshadowed the arts. Snowman makes many references to Crake's position as God in the book. Despite his adamant atheism, Crake created the Paradice facility and inhabited it with a new breed of humans, casting himself as a symbolic God. While Crake's reaction to the word ‘Paradice’ was probably sarcastic, Snowman realizes that Crake had a God complex. He not only created a new breed of humans, but he also went out of his way to wipe out the entire human species. Snowman, in the present, transforms Crake's irony on himself by making him a god worshipped by the Children of Crake. Snowman refers to himself as the ‘God of Bullshit’, and he creates bizarre origin stories that the Crakers enthusiastically believe.

The Book ends as “Oryx and Crake” is an exciting love tale at once, and a convincing glimpse of the future. Snowman, born as Jimmy before an epidemic ravaged humanity, is fighting to live in a society where he might be the last human being, and grieving the death of his best friend, Crake, and the lovely and mysterious Oryx whom they both loved. Snowman embarks on a quest in pursuit of answers with the aid of the green-eyed Children of Crake—through the rugged forest that was so recently a great community before large companies put mankind for an unregulated genetic manipulation adventure.

Margaret Atwood is leading us into a distant future all too ordinary and beyond our imagination. “Strange to think of the endless labour, the digging, the hammering, the carving, the lifting, the drilling, day by day, year by year, century by century; and now the endless crumbling that must be going on everywhere. Sandcastles in the wind” (Chapter 3). Snowman is contemplating the remains of his collapsed civilization and how even the most stable objects turn out to be frail. After the everyday afternoon rain, Snowman makes his way to a broken bridge where he can wash in the rainfall and fill his empty bottles of beer with drinking water.

Crake produces the eco-friendly Crakers in *Oryx and Crake*, intending to replace humans with them. This is not only a Frankenstein-sequel means of manipulating nature but also an intense type of biocentrism: it produces creatures that are readily adjusted to their climate. These new creatures are not only respectful of all life forms but also not inclined to any religion. The negative elements of Crake's ecotopia are only the other hand of dogmatic, ecocentric radicalism and so it is unsurprising that his egalitarian dream had disastrous consequences.

*Oryx and Crake* track the human path from manipulating nature (by producing new organisms and leading the current ones to face extinction) to winding up as another survivor of the evolutionary history narrative. Just like the creatures, they replace; the better-adapted crackers supplant them too. It will act as a harbinger for all mankind because far from being deemed excluded or exalted from natural powers (which offer a false sense of supremacy to humans), our technological advancement can transform into our greatest fear because lead the whole race to perish.
He knew he was faltering, trying to keep his footing. Everything in his life was temporary, ungrounded. Language itself had lost its solidity; it had become thin, contingent, slippery, a viscous film on which he was sliding around like an eyeball on a plate. (Atwood, Chapter 10).

This quotation appears at the end of Chapter 10, soon after Jimmy learns of his mother's execution. Jimmy fell into a deep depression as a result of this horrific reporting. He continued to withdraw from his already small social life, drinking late at night to drown his sorrows. Jimmy's sense of intent had faded, and he was losing his grip on reality.

“Immortality,” said Crake, “is a concept. If you take ‘mortality’ as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then ‘immortality’ is the absence of such fear. Babies are immortal. Edit out the fear and you’ll be …..” (Atwood, Chapter 12).

This is a conversation between Crake and Jimmy which takes place in chapter 12, where Crake first revealed to Jimmy the research he had carried out on the human genome. Crake expressed his expectation that his new species of humans would be immune to death because they had no sense of mortality. This will give them the illusion of longevity without ever allowing them to live indefinitely.

Akhter in a paper “Problems and Challenges Faced by EFL Students of Saudi Arabia during COVID-19 Pandemic”, has shown the face of coronavirus as, “The COVID-19 pandemic had a major effect on human survival around the globe. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic could trigger the global economy to compress to one quarter by 2020” (p. 2).

The natural sense states that humans are beings special because they exhibit qualities such as voice and sensitivity that all other animals’ experience. Another such separator is the capacity to interact but it has often been questioned. Human beings are engaged in language distinguished by tone, movement and facial expression and are determined by it. But many creatures also have their system to communicate including infrared vision, smell and body language, chemical signals, or hearing that reaches beyond human sight through registers of their organisms.

On the other, Sharon and Oryx have a slice of the novel's feminine department. They underscore the dubious use of science and technology. Both the characters are symbols that enjoin technology on nature. In an Asian village of parched fields, trees and wild animals that make up the world, Oryx lives from one extreme to the other – the affluent inner paradise of the Rejooven Esense Compound that symbolizes technological/scientific elitism in the business culture. Sharon is taking the opposite direction by serving as a microbiologist with the Organic Compound, only to enter the same research she helped build in the revolutionary environmentalist demonstrations against the corporate perversions.

Scientists continued creating both strange species and utilitarian ones. Genetic engineering enabled humans to overcome the barriers that normally limit the arbitrary cross-breeding of different species of organisms. It has almost made them feel godlike. Whereas some inventions like the dancing rat were friendly and playful, others were dangerous, like the snake (a rat hybrid and the rattlesnake). These hybrids once freed from human control, tended to
overwhelm the animal kingdom. Of all varieties, the most popular were the Crakers that represented an anti-humanist philosophy. Survival was their primary characteristic and not religion.

According to Glover, humans playing god prefer to objectivize reality regardless of their desire to hybridise. The humans and the humanoid Crakers, as Chung-Hao Ku argued, depict the fine line between humanity and monstrosity. In the artificial selection of Oryx and Crake, Atwood explores the natural social order and human exceptionalism and investigates the relationship between humans and animals, their roles, and non-human sentience. Atwood discusses the ethical treatment of animals and informs her readers about what they are eating and how it is produced. Although not consumed, the pigoons (transgenic pigs bred to grow human replacement organs) are nevertheless killed for harvesting the organs from them.

Nutrition has been an overwhelmingly commoditised societal force, given its roots in nature. There are other forms of meals a single group eats. The established ties between food and human consumption have been broken here. This is further exemplified with the agricultural commodity dubbed Chickie Nobs, an all-breast-meat chicken production line that reduces the animal to only the muscle tissue to combat the protein scarcity created by current factory farming related to climate change and overpopulation. Initially averse to consuming them, Jimmy eventually gives in by remarking how the food is not as bad as it appears especially if one can “forget everything the provenance”. This is an illustration of what Atwood considers mindless consumption which is first characterised by abhorrence on the part of the consumer and finally participating due to exhaustion in the face of natural dissolution.

As Atwood shows in her novel, pandemics can bring forth deeply rooted fears and modify human behaviour greatly. The novelist used the apocalyptic genre to criticize contemporary social structure. Even though it was published some twenty years ago, the novel presents the same concerns we face today. The post-apocalyptic setting reflects the current time of the novel, and every chapter of the book shifts back and forth between Snowman's present encounters and his recollections of his pre-apocalypse childhood when he was named Jimmy. As the novel progresses, these disparate yet intertwined plot strands weave together. This brings to mind the current uncontrolled COVID 19 and the fear and hysteria that it engenders. The novel also symbolises the infection since it feeds only on human blood. Literature goes beyond statistics on global mortality and spread to show how the epidemic has affected the lives of those who have been infected, as well as their relatives, families, and neighbours. As many cultural critics have noted in recent weeks, fictional works concerned with plagues, epidemics, and other manifestations of biological crisis have seen a dramatic increase in popularity.

Several of the literature on plague and contagious diseases portrays those in charge as the sole instigator of the masses' wrath, which can be contrasted to the actual mismanagement of regimes in several nations. The lack of access to personal narratives is a profound cultural and ethical feature of all global epidemics. The community takes the role of the citizen as the protagonist, and the public's welfare takes priority over the individual’s. In this way, recounting past sufferings as told in numerous literary and historical texts can result in dense recollection with subjective specificity. Pandemic apocalyptic practices, such as COVID-19, are profoundly embedded in theological and cultural myths that point to the end of the world. In conclusion, we
should hope to become more expressive in our creative creations under COVID 19 regarding our human survival, loneliness, insecurity, confusion, and, most importantly, the importance of mutual introspection of inequality linked to pandemic deaths.

**Conclusion**

*Oryx and Crake* can be used as a monstrous personification of the epidemics. *Oryx and Crake* open up in a tree with a guy called Snowman. There has been some sort of tragic incident, but the reader does not yet know what the event was or what triggered the event. It seems that Snowman may be the only survivor of the case, apart from several childlike people he relates to it as the “Children of Crake,” who wander about nude and have a special genetic makeup. Comparing the now-extinct animals with their bio-engineered equivalents, Atwood points out that unless a single species becomes beneficial or valuable to human society, it may undergo practical exploitation as opposed to extinction only. These genetically modified organisms are merely slaves to the coming generations as they are voiceless and mere property. We are valued as much as they can support their owners and no matter how much they add to the broader community. We might also be exterminated and put back according to human whimsicalities. Beneath the façade that is creation and growth, a substantial amount of naturally born species that are of little benefit to humans go extinct. *Oryx and Crake* debate whether extinction is a more troubling problem because it affects the human race, as opposed to the non-human population, and whether the principle of fairness still extends to the latter (which has been called the 'other' for too long). Humans have always attempted to segregate themselves from non-humans. Via practices such as factory farming and the manufacture of processed foods, humans have effectively made animals the "other" who are only supposed to support humans and maintain their health. This also rendered us unaccountable to anyone who is not human. Humans in *Oryx and Crake* retain isolation from natural processes that enable them to prevent any ramification.

What should be remembered is that choices made from this vantage point, such as collecting organs from pigeons and subsequent sacrifice, decide the ethicality of acts from the human viewpoint. However, what should be borne in mind is that judgments made by this point of view, as exemplified by collecting pigeon organs and their consequent destruction, decide the ethicality of acts from the limited human viewpoint. The majority of the story includes Snowman recalling the circumstances that led to the post-apocalyptic setting under which he now finds himself. Each occurrence takes the reader closer to a complete comprehension of the catastrophic event that wiped out the majority of the global population, as well as Snowman's role in it. The humanities, especially literature, offer insightful insights into how people in the past dealt with the tragedy of pandemics, as well as how to make sense of a world that is now, in many ways, beyond our reach.

**About the Author**

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The Development of Intercultural Competence of Secondary School Pupils and University Students

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Abstract

Some issues regarding how secondary school pupils’ and university students’ (majoring in English, Chinese) intercultural competence, which are to be developed under conditions of the coronavirus pandemic COVID-19, are presented in the article. The authors review the literature on the education standards alongside some native and foreign scholars’ definitions of the pedagogical phenomenon “competence.” The purpose of the study is to analyze the model of competence under focus. We introduce some learning objectives aimed at developing secondary school pupils’ and university students’ intercultural competence. The problem’s relevance is preconditioned by the expanded intercultural and interethnic ties within Ukraine and other countries, which are to be observed when dealing with representatives of different countries and considered when elaborating the competence-based framework for secondary school pupils and university students. The leading suggestions (findings) related to the study have been given: systematic formation of the intercultural competence of secondary school pupils and university students, improvement of the existing curricula, and syllabi’s adaptation of the educational profession-oriented training programs intended future translators and teachers of foreign languages.

Keywords: intercultural competence, education normative education, training models, methodological mode, Covid-19, secondary pupils, university students.

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Introduction

We substantiate the need to modernize the formation of the lingua cultural competence for secondary school pupils and university students’. In these terms of their readiness for situational intercultural communication (in a foreign language) in any situation and on any topic, we will offer some methods to be followed. In this view, the authors analyze methodological literature to distinguish some aspects that have not been considered before in detail. We used adequate methods during the educational process. Some assignments related to practical methodological work, which effectively contribute to the formation and development of the lingua cultural competence of educational process participants, were described.

Linguistic and cultural competence acquires particular importance exactly in high school when high school pupils need to communicate with foreigners, which generates their motivation to use both linguistic and culture-centered potential in the context of cross-communication. Many scientists such as teachers, methodologists, psychologists, and even psychotherapists have studied the problem of forming the lingua cultural competence of high school pupils.

The analysis of the scientists’ work allows us to conclude that "lingua cultural competence" is a new concept. It takes its origin from the term "socio-cultural competence" as the readiness and ability of high school pupils to perform situational intercultural (English-speaking) communication. In our opinion, there exists an infinite potential of tools to improve the educational process in our problems. We would like to emphasize that in our study, the term “lingua cultural competence,” “linguistic and cultural competence,” “intercultural competence,” and “cross-cultural competence” are considered to be synonymous.

It is essential to approach the development of high school pupils’ lingua cultural competence through the methodology of teaching English and Chinese as the keynote elements. We are to consider several aspects, which, in our opinion, are dictated by the modern dynamic development of innovative integrated training, which seems to be significant and determines the effectiveness of training learners. Other factors to be taken into account are peculiarities of learners’ information perception (represented system) and their age (age-related leading needs).

On the one hand, after graduating from secondary general education schools, graduates enter universities to acquire their future professions. After graduating from a higher education institution, certified specialists perform their professional duties at the state level and in the international format. In other words, the knowledge of a foreign language alongside the cultural heritage of the country in which a specialist works is a necessary component of his (her) job professional diagram.

On the other hand, in the era of globalization and interdependence of countries in economics, international trade, and politics with the aspiration to save and demonstrate their individuality, the national language is the primary vector of the realization of these processes. Therefore, the topic’s relevance regarding teaching theory and translation methods, interlanguage, and intercultural communication are still under scholars’ focus to ensure successful negotiations. It is known that the English language is an international language of communication that connects representatives of different cultures in various areas of cooperation. However, with the global implementation of
International projects initiated by the Government of China ("One Belt - One Road," "New Silk Road") are globally implemented. Therefore, the status of the Chinese language is very high. The number of those who want to study the Chinese language and culture and to work in Chinese companies is increasing. In this regard, the main questions cover the content of methodological support for the process aimed at developing lingua cultural competence of future sinologists (philologists, translators, Sinologists). Also need to take into account the lack of a sufficient number of methodological materials for effective teaching/learning of a foreign language at universities. The second problem is the COVID-2019 pandemic, which forces foreign language teachers and pupils/students to work remotely; it generates particular difficulties.

**Literature Review**

This paper aims at analyzing the normative and theoretical-methodological literature and presenting a model of teaching a foreign language (English and Chinese) that takes into account the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment and the basic requirements of the NUS concept (*The New Ukrainian School*). It can resolve the contradictions between the rapid technical and technological development of the world and a gradual decline of an individual’s lingua cultural competence.

The standardized *literature review* on the indicated problem showed that under the term “*competence*,” we could understand the scope of knowledge, skills, and experience gained in the training process. In the spectrum of this study, “*competence*” correlates with the content of the above meaning “profession-oriented pedagogical training” alongside the sense represented in the Law of Ukraine “On higher education” dated 05.09.2017 No. 2145-VIII. It presupposes acquiring qualifications in the relevant areas of training or specialty. The activity of future translators of English/Chinese is carried out in higher educational institutions, thus, according to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2017). We would like to emphasize that in our study, these concepts are considered to be synonymous: “translator of the Chinese language,” “translation specialist,” “translator-sinologist,” and “translator-orientalist.”

We also intend to consider some features of teaching English/Chinese at high school and the peculiarities of training future translators. Next, to analyze and study the existing (in Ukrainian and foreign education space) functions and approaches the distance teaching/learning process facilitating the development of secondary school pupils’ and university students’ intercultural competence within a pandemic situation.

For the realization of these aims, we have processed and analyzed the education-related documents as follows:
• the Law of Ukraine “on Education” (The Law on Education, 2017);
• the Law of Ukraine “on Higher Education” (The Law on Higher Education 2019);
• Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment
• The NUS (New Ukrainian School) concept (Konseptsii Nush, n.d.);
• The Decree of the President of Ukraine “On the National Doctrine of the Development of Education”;
• “Foreign language teaching programs for general education institutions and specialized schools with in-depth study of foreign languages: grades five-nine (English, German, French, Spanish)”
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(Foreign language curricula for secondary schools and specialized schools with in-depth study of foreign languages Grades five-nine: English, German, French, Spanish, 2017);

• The manual “Recommends on Organizing Distance Learning”;

• Educational and profession-oriented programs for the training of the future philologists-translators.

The above scientific and pedagogical literature allowed us to obtain a more in-depth and better understanding of linguistic and cultural competence, which is to be mastered by high school pupils and future translators. We considered a necessary complex of external and internal circumstances aimed to raise the effectiveness of educating activities under pedagogical conditions.

The multidimensional focus of the teaching and upbringing of secondary school pupils and university students covers a particular spectrum of competences. It contributes to the clarification, updating, and adaptation of the professional training contents targeted to the contents of the curricula and syllabi of each discipline (at the designated educational level) and pupils’ learning outcomes. However, the approach to defining the concept of “competence” appears to be ambiguous for foreign and domestic scholars. Let us consider the essence of the concept “competence” represented in primary sources.

In 2001, the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI) proposed the initial definition of “competence” as “the ability to carry out activities expertly, to perform tasks or work according to certain criteria” (Spector, 2001), according to the acquired knowledge, skills, and educational achievements, to be more precise.

The experts from the European Union interpret the phenomenon “competence” as actually achieved learning outcomes. It is validated through the ability of the learner autonomously to apply knowledge and skills in practice, in society, and at work. (Deseco, 2002).

The authors of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Education policy and education “equal to equal,” interpret competence as “an integrated characteristic of person’s quality, a resultative unit formed through experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavioral responses” (Ovcharyk, 2004, p.95).

The representatives of the Federal Statistics Department of Switzerland and the National Centre for Educational Statistics of the United States and Canada (Salganik, Rychen, Moser, Konstant) contributed to defining the concept “competence” by launching the program “Definition and selection of competencies: theoretical and conceptual foundations” in 1997. Experts from various fields made a significant attempt to systematize and generalize the experience of many countries in the framework of the designated program. They gave the most compact definition of “competency,” being more than just knowledge and skills, as the ability to
successfully meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context [the same source].

We should remark that despite, at first glance, a clear understanding of the concepts under study, some scientists Bolotov, Lednev, Nikandrov, Ryzhakov, Raven, and others, year of publication) equate the concepts “competence” and “competency” in these semantic markers: “knowledge,” “abilities,” “skills,” “awareness,” etc. (Bolotov & Lednev, 2003) On the other hand, the synonymy or likeness of “competence” and “competency” is caused by the etymology of these words (English competence/competency, Latin competentia) and their incorrect translation into Ukrainian/Russian.


Rychen and Tiana interpret the notion “competence” as a combination of interrelated cognitive and practical skills, knowledge (including tacit knowledge), motivation, values and ethics, attitudes, emotions, and other social and behavioral components that together can be mobilized for effective action in a particular context (Rychen & Tiana, 2004).

Pometun (2005) associates competence with a broad concept that encompasses cognitive, operational-technological, motivational, ethical, social, and behavioral components; contains learning outcomes (knowledge and skills), a system of value orientations (Ovcharyk, 2003, p.61).

In Khutorskoy’s opinion, competence implies “the acquisition of a certain amount of knowledge and experience by a person that enables him/her to conclude something, convincingly express their his/her thoughts, to act adequately in different situations” (Khutorskyi, 2003, p.61).

Zimnyaya interprets competence as an actual manifestation of competency, as intellectually and personally-driven experience of a person’s socio-professional activity, as knowledge based on which a person can use competences (Zymnia, 2003).

Bogush believes that the concept of “competence” is a complex feature of an individual that combines the results of the previous mental development (Bogush, 2008, p.56).

Popova defines the concept “competence” as a “qualitative-measuring characteristic of an individual, integrated result of the successful transformation of normatively defined knowledge
being acquired, skills and abilities into a professional activity. That is, the formation of a person’s ability to act in practice successfully, using the acquired educational and life experience in a profession-related or other activities. The result of gaining competence – assimilation of educational, subject-oriented and professional (conceptual and professional) competences” (Popova, 2016).

According to theoretical sources, competence covers various levels of these spheres: cognitive, social, family-life, professional and personal and correlates with such concepts as “personality,” “characteristic,” “quality,” “ability,” “capability,” “awareness,” “knowledge,” “skill” and “competency.” In the light of the preceding, competence is understood as the person’s evaluative and productive integrated characteristic, which is manifested at the end of the training, special training through the acquired knowledge, skills, and experience alongside the ability to use them in practice.

Methods
The appropriate research methods have been considered: the theoretical analysis of the above-mentioned normative documents; psychological, pedagogical, and methodological literature generalize modern innovative integrated methodological approaches to the development of the lingua cultural (English and Chinese) competence of high school pupils and Bachelor-students. The modeling of the process enabled the formation of the competence under study. We determined these leading essential components contributing to the development of the competence under focus: modern pedagogical, psychological, and methodological innovative integrated principles of education organization; partnership pedagogy; child (student) – centrum; positive, age-related and cognitive psychology; competence- and activity-based approaches; integrated “subject-language” learning principle (Figure one) and the principle of continuous learning, in particular in the context of the coronavirus pandemic COVID-19 [14].

Figure one. The model of the lingua cultural (intercultural) competence development.

Findings
“The new Ukrainian school is a key reform of the Ministry of Education and Science. Its main aim is to create a school that will be pleasant to study at and equip pupils not only with knowledge but also with the ability to apply it in everyday life. The teaching is a person who provides a reform. Without teachers or reform, any changes will be impossible. That’s why the
main principle of the NUS (*The New Ukrainian School*) is a motivated teacher.” (Kontseptsiia Nush, n.d.). “The primary function of a teacher is to support a pupil in his/her activities: to promote his/her successful progress in the flow of educational data, to facilitate the solution of emerging problems, to help to assimilate a large amount of a variety of integrated information, to realize his/her abilities, his/her personal qualities, to provide support for the pupil’s need for self-development with the self-improvement process.

Due to this in the world, the educational community began to use a new term, which emphasizes the importance of teachers’ function – **facilitator** - (that’s one who promotes, facilitates, helps to learn)» (Kontseptsiia NUS (*The New Ukrainian School*), n.d.). This function is also continued to be performed by lecturers, where the future specialists are trained in various fields, including future philologists. The quarantine has complicated the process of language training of a person in comprehensive school and higher education. Considering the above, we propose a universal model of the formation of lingua cultural competence of complete school pupils and university students in Ukraine.

The methodology that we have elaborated consists of these ways: the organization of the theoretical, practical, and integrated activities intended for the participants of the educational process in terms of education competence, which is the main requirement of the NUS (*The New Ukrainian School*) Concept and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Kontseptsiia NUS, n.d.)

Our methodological approach is based primarily on such postulates as: philosophy of the child (students)-centrism, pedagogy of partnership, positive, age-related and cognitive psychology, sub-competence-based approach, innovative-integrated principles of the educational process, and the principle of learning continuity. The choice of the above postulates is due to the requirements of the modern NUS (*The New Ukrainian School*) Concept and the All European Framework of Reference for Language Education (Kontseptsiia NUS, n.d.)

By the phenomenon of “child (student)-centrism,” we mean the provision of the upbringing process and education of each child (each student) based on the development of his (her) natural abilities,” according to Zakharenko (1997). The pupil/student is the center of the educational process. The main thing in the educational process is focusing on the pupil’s / student’s needs, child (students)-centrism” (Kvas, 2011). A person (personality)-oriented model of education that is based on the ideas of the child (students)-centrism, is aimed at approaching maximally to pupils’/students’ personality, abilities, and life experience, providing moral and psychological comfort within the process of teaching and bringing them up.

**“Pedagogy of partnership, or cooperation,** based on the principles of humanism; dialogical subject-subject interaction between all participants in the educational process (pupil - school - society - family; student - university - society - family); a creative approach to the development of each personality; mutual understanding; support; conscious person’s responsibility for his/her results; distributed leadership” (Bekh, 2000, p. 33).
To ensure the moral and psychological comfort of senior pupils and first and second-year bachelor course students under conditions of the coronavirus pandemic, we follow positive, age-related (developmental), and cognitive psychology.

**Positive psychology** — is a branch of psychology focused on the positive aspects of the human psyche. In contrast to the orientation of classical science to psychological problems and pathology, the main research topics in this field are as follows: happiness, optimism, flow, trust, forgiving, and solidarity. This research area attempts to make the experience of human life more satisfying and to uncover natural abilities (Positive psychology, despite complicated situations.

**Age-related a person’s (Developmental) psychology** is a branch of psychological science. We study the features of a person’s mental and personal development at different life stages (Developmental psychology). Therefore, a platform for teaching a foreign language to pupils and students transformed in the context of quarantine.

**Cognitive psychology** (lat. Cognitio "knowledge") is a field of psychology that investigates cognitive processes, such as problem-solving, memory, and language processes (Cognitive Psychology). Pupils and students experienced the positive and negative aspects of learning foreign languages and cultures of the countries, and the wording is being studied in the online-mode.

Considering the importance of formally dynamic individual and age characteristics of the pupils’ (students’) personality, we believe the distance conditions for learning. It was experimentally proved that the following four types of pupils (students) were distinguished: visuals, audile (auditory learner), kinesthetic, and digital. While developing a methodology for individual and group types of online work, we considered the empirical results of our study, age features of senior pupils and first-year/second-year students of bachelor courses (as the leading need for communication with peers) (Bulakh, 2016). According to our methodology, students will work in micro-groups of three or four people representing different types according to the corresponding representative system and specific functional role content component. We do not name the subjects of learning by their kind of the leading channel of information perception, but by number: the first subject of learning is visual, the second subject of education is digital, and the third is audial, etc. (Krotik, 2020).

During the educational process, several necessary competences that correspond to the modern concept of language education are developed: speech, socio-cultural linguistic, language (linguistic), and educational-strategic (Nikolaieva, 2013). The idea of “socio-cultural competence” is being worked out in scientific publications of these scientists: Borisko (1997,) Galskova (2004,) Zimnya (2005,) Kozhedub (2016,) Kuzmenko (2007,) Nikolaieva (2013,) Pisanko (2008,) Rudakova (2017,) Safonova (1996,) Tarnopolsky (2004,) Ter-Minasova (2000,) They consider this competence as one of the leading indicators of the readiness of a participant in the educational process to implement intercultural communication.

**Results and Discussion**

“Sociocultural competence” is defined as the ability of an individual to obtain various cultural, linguistic, cultural, socio-cultural, and intercultural integrated knowledge. A person needs it to achieve goals in foreign language communication. Summarizing the above, we chose modern
and trendy topics for the English and Chinese classes. “The training program of foreign languages” corresponds to the specific tasks and requirements of the NUS (The New Ukrainian School) Concept aimed at developing pupils’ (intercultural) lingua cultural competence alongside educational and profession-related programs for the students majoring in 035 “Philology.” We also used some elements of integrated training, according to the requirements of the NUS concept, “On the National Doctrine of the Development of Education,” and the Standards of Higher Education in Ukraine.

According to “Foreign language teaching programs for general education institutions and specialized schools with in-depth study of foreign languages: grades five-nine (English, German, French, Spanish)” (The program is registered by order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine dated 07.06.2017 № 804). The following topics of situational communication have been identified and expanded. They cover national and cultural specifics of speech activity, form senior pupils’ ability to use elements of the socio-cultural context that is necessary for intercultural communication with native speakers, to be more precise:

- **I, my family, my friends** (family ties, daily routine, appearance, character traits, family responsibilities, family traditions, autobiography).
- **Clothes, food, drinks** (shopping, visiting stores, food traditions, the leading assortment of goods, price, money, clothes sizes, names of dishes, cooking, table setting, kitchen appliances, utensils).
- **Recreation and leisure** (hobbies, free time, vacations, sports, Olympic Games, cinema and theater, sportspersons, sports competitions, clubs, sections).
- **Nature. Weather. Travel** (general information about Great Britain, Ukraine, transport, luggage items, travel documents, sights of capitals).
- **Native city. Village. Holidays and traditions. School life** (subjects, working day, English and Ukrainian lessons, activities in the classroom, favorite subject, extra-curricular activities, types of schools, teaching staff, grading system, rules of behavior).
- **Health care** (doctor's visit; symptoms of diseases, medical institutions, medical workers, medicines).
- **Lifestyle** (healthy lifestyle, entertainment, Pen Pals, active recreation).
- **School library** (selection of books to read, favorite writer, readers, literary hero, literary genres, work with the electronic library).
- **Mass media** (press, columns, television and radio, programs, presenters, favorite radio/television show).
- **Music** (musical styles, genres, composers, musicians, performers, instruments, concert attendance).
- **Great Britain and Ukraine** (geographical location, geographical concepts, types of landscapes, climate, population).
- **Youth culture** (appearance, hobbies, youth organizations, clubs, camps, currents of youth culture).
- **Science and technological progress** (famous scientists, inventors, and inventions).
- **Work and profession** (professions, career choice, characteristics of occupations, factors influencing career choice) (Foreign language curricula for secondary schools and specialized
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schools with in-depth study of foreign languages Grades five-nine: English, German, French, Spanish).

“The level of knowledge of a foreign language at the end of the ninth grade should correspond to the level of A2 + following “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” (Pan-European Recommendations for Language Education: Study, Teaching, Assessment). The topics mentioned were widened for first- and second-year students majoring/minoring in Chinese translation. We substituted the English culture-related issues with the Chinese ones: China and Ukraine, Science and technological progress: Chinese dimension, Travelling in China, etc.

The rapid development of the latest information technologies and their implementation around the world significantly affect the development of the personality of the modern pupil. Therefore, the current educational institutions aim provide the academic results that would contribute to the development of competence components of the individual in various fields of activity and correspond to the modern requirements of our society.

The standard of higher education in the specialty 035 "Philology" (Program is registered by the order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine dated 20.06.2019 № 869) reveals special (profession-related, subject-centered) competences, namely: the ability to use the knowledge about the language as a unique sign system, its nature, functions, levels in profession-related activities; the ability to freely, successfully and effectively use the studied language (s), in oral and written forms, in different genre/style varieties and registers of communication (official, non-official, neutral), for solving communicative tasks in various spheres of life; the ability to conduct situational communication, which covers the national-cultural specifics of speech activity; to form university students’ ability to use elements of the socio-cultural context; the ability to freely operate with unique terminology, to solve professional problems; the ability to realize the linguistic, literary and special philological (it is depend on the chosen specialization) analysis of texts belonging to different styles and genres, etc.

The system for ensuring the quality of educational activities and the quality of higher education by an institution of higher education (system of internal quality assurance), upon the proposal of the institution of higher education, is assessed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education or independent institutions accredited by it for evaluating and ensuring the quality of higher education for its compliance with the requirements for the system of ensuring the quality of higher education are approved by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and international standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education.

During the topic analysis of situational communication, which covers the national and cultural specifics of learners’ speech activity, we concluded that the rational use of the principles of integrated learning in our methodology effectively contributes to the formation and development of the (intercultural) lingua cultural competence of secondary school pupils and university students. That is an essential component in achieving the set task, namely, in modernizing the formation of their lingua cultural competence under conditions of the
coronavirus pandemic in terms of their readiness for situational intercultural (English and Chinese) communication situation and on any topic.

The term “integration” began to be actively used only in the 19th century when relations were formed between previously isolated branches of knowledge. By the integration, we understand the uniting of parts, elements, and components that once existed separately into a single whole by complicating and strengthening the connections between them (Proshkin, 2010).

The term “integration” is quite multifaceted and includes changes, which can occur at different levels. However, the formation of unity between separate elements by identifying their standard features is familiar to any integration process is scholars. These degrees of integration: distinguish subject-center (between objects of research or complex problems), problem-related (between research methods), horizontal (in natural sciences), and vertical (between groups of sciences) integration (Ivanchyuk, 2016). We consider innovation-integrated and subject-language integrated training in the quarantine context in our methodology.

The specificity of the integrated learning methodology is that it creates favorable conditions for the manifestation and development of the teacher’s creativity; provides absolute freedom to choose a topic, content, tools to be used during the educational process. We propose the methodology that involves integrated learning by using innovative technologies in the specified online context – first of all, and this is the technical side of the developed method, namely, the use of modern teaching tools such as:

- Methodological recommendations for teachers: how to use the technique (non-printed and electronic forms);
- A workbook for each student (non-printed and electronic form);
- Presentations of the lessons on each topic in PowerPoint (in electronic format).

During the introduction of integrated online learning, it becomes possible not only to provide but also develop and improve knowledge, skills, and abilities in a foreign language and show pupils (students) the environment in all its diversity involving the knowledge from different academic disciplines, for example Literature, Art, Basics of life safety, Lingua cultural studies, General Linguistics, which contributed to the emotional development of the individual, the formation of her (his) creative thinking and critical competences provided by the NUS Concept, “The training program of foreign languages” and higher education standards.

The use of an innovatively integrated method allows us to make the educational process one-to-one interesting for the participants of the teaching/learning process without reducing the program requirements; to optimize it by restructuring the content of training and practical alternatives to traditional forms of exercise, namely: Microsoft Teams (Microsoft 365), ZOOM Cloud Meetings, WeChat, DingTalk, Google Meet and the formation of the intercultural/lingua cultural competence of learners under the conditions of COVID-19.

Firstly, it is necessary to understand what lies in the content of the concept "distance learning." We will try to explain it.

Distance learning is a form of education using computer and telecommunication technologies that provide interactive interaction between teachers and pupils/students at different training and self-guided work with information network materials.
Distance learning and technology can be viewed as a natural process of development. It is accompanied by a change in traditional forms and training methods due to the intensification of computerized procedures.

A striking example is replacing a blackboard with chalk with interactive panels for training and presentations and various computer-assisted systems; a transition from an electronic library, from a class with headphones to modern language laboratories with the high-speed Internet.

Professor Haifa Al-Nofaie, in the article, surveys of pupils and students on computer ownership, provides background information on the level of students’ readiness to learn on the Internet and also surveys technical problems in distance learning. Due to this survey, we can assess the situation and find solutions for solving problems that negatively affect sound and practical knowledge. (Al-Nofaie, 2020)

The technology of subject-language integrated learning has been introduced in many European countries. The term “subject-language integrated learning” was created by Marsh in 1994. The author first described this methodological approach, in which the study of a foreign language is integrated. “The methods of subject-language integrated learning refers to situations where subjects or parts of them are studied in a foreign language with a dual purpose. It is namely - the study of content while learning a foreign language” (Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe). In our opinion, it is regardless of the learning conditions (online, offline or mixed).

The technology of the subject-language integrated learning meets the requirements of didactic presupposes enabling the development of the pupils’/students’ linguistic and communicative competences in English and Chinese. In our case, the intercultural/lingua cultural (English and Chinese) competences learning in the educational context where their general education-related knowledge, skills, and abilities are formed and developed. While developing the methods and planning the training sessions, we took (as a basis) the four main components of the “4C” subject-language integrated learning, namely: “content” (content) - stimulating the process of assimilation of knowledge and development of skills; “Communication” (interaction/communication) - enabling the process of using the acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities to gain knowledge on the issue; “Cognition” (cognitive orientation) - the development of the mental activity, reasoning of learners for a better understanding of the language and the subject; “Culture” (knowledge of cultural studies) - understanding the peculiarities of the culture of your country and other individual cultures, it contributes to the versatile socio-cultural development of the individual and effectively socializes it in a modern multicultural society (Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe).

The methodology developed by us assumes the presence of such a tool as: “Workbook” (Figure two), which consists of several parts:

• “Introduction” to the topic of the lesson,
• “Main part,”
Each participant of the educational process receives detailed instructions for working with the “Workbook.”
Introduction to the topic of online classes begins with the guidelines, pupils/students undergo precise control of the teacher - facilitator, who does not announce any topic, goals, or objectives of the lesson. The teacher promotes learners’ independent work, activates their critical thinking, which allows identifying and detailing the planned educational process at the initial stage of the class.

During a specific lesson, all learners do the required exercises and tasks in the second part of our “Workbook,” named the “Main Part,” in pairs or micro-groups of 3-5 participants. The lessons are made taking into account all components of our Model, enabling the formation of linguistic and cultural (English and Chinese) competence of the secondary school pupils/university students.

The third, final part of the developed training copy includes exercises for independent work in the “online” mode, which have a complicated level. The students will receive the highest or incentive scores by completing this part.
The peculiarity of the developed instruction for each of the participants is based on the empirical results of our previous research and both in individual and other types of work.

Visuals, kinesthetic, and digitals respond to inner and outer feelings, so while perceiving new material, high school students and first-year undergraduate students demonstrating these sensory channels need to be offered the exercises that affect the full range of bodily perceptions. For example, it is essential to see and feel the information provided on the symbolic and physical levels when working with the tasks of the first part. That is why we recommend the functions as follows:
- to read the text for the whole group;
- to arrange pictures for the reader in groups;
- to number the pictures in chronological order according to the content of the received information, etc. (Krotik, 2020).

While working on the second part, “Main part,” we offer to imagine yourself as the main character in role-playing games/dialogues.

Working on the “Mental Map” and the digitals in the third practical part of our Workbook, all the above sensory channels actively cooperate, even online. During this
cooperation, the students get the knowledge that meets both linguistic and cultural competence, and their age-leading needs, according to Vygotsky (2003). The researcher determined that the leading activity of adolescents is interpersonal communication with peers, so the form of learning that motivates action should involve interacting and communication in pairs, or micro-groups, or small and large groups /classes; different quests, competitions, lessons-conferences, lessons-colloquia with elements of reflection are desirable too (Krotik, 2020).

Let us consider structurally, as an example, one of the topics of our proposed Model aimed at developing of linguistic and cultural (English) competence of our respondents on the current case “COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine”. That is expanded the issue within situational communication of the several problems, thus integrating several subjects: "Health Protection" and "Occupational Health."

I. “Introduction” to the lesson’s topic (Figure three).

The introduction to lesson topic’s is under the precise control of the teacher-facilitator (according to our methodological recommendations). He/she does not announce any issues, goals, or objectives of the lesson; thus, the task of the first part of the workbook is not only to introduce new linguistic (English) knowledge on the topic. It is also aimed at actualizing the pupils’/students’ independent work that activates their intuition, critical thinking, which allows us to determine and independently detail the planned educational process at this stage, basing on their life experience (key competence).

All students with the foremost leading sensory channel of information perception should be active in performing the exercises of the first part because, in the discussion, each of the participants expresses his/her thoughts on defining the topic, goals, and objectives of the lesson. After all, the vision can be similar or different; thus, the ideas are supplemented in such a way (Krotik, 2020).

II. “Main part” (Figure four).

During the work on the exercises of the second (central) part of our workbook, pupils (students) develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities in these speech activities:

• speaking (monologues or dialogues, if they dispute);
• listening (they listen to the partner);
• writing (they write words/phrases/word combinations/short expressions, sentences);
• reading (they read what is written in the workbooks).
Figure four. “Workbook.” “Main part.”
Listening technology is implemented either with audio media (CD recording; flash drive; links via audio files of Google disk, etc.). If there are no technical teaching aids (TTA), the teacher reads the proposed text.

We involve the pupils/students in students’ systematic and consistent work with authentic learning material, according to the “European Recommendations on Language Education,” to ensure the mastery of normative communication. The number of lexical units increases, including those which contain a socio-cultural component, contribute to the effective formation of the competence under study. The exercises of the second part of our “Workbook” are aimed at systematization and generalization of lexical units, acquired during their previous work with the “Workbook.”

At the stage of acquaintance and work “with new linguistic units (at the preparatory stage aimed at the formation of linguistic skills (Sydorenko, 2017), a verbal system of a foreign language in the form of the concept of this system alongside the rules of its use are formed; perception and comprehension of new lexical units are realized through their semanticization. Possible ways of semanticization are: performed through making up a story, a conversation, individual situations, independent acquaintance with a word (reading or listening to the text)” (Shatylov, 1977). The second section of the “Main part” of our “Workbook” includes exercises intended to develop reproductive skills of using lexical units.

Reproductive speech speaking skills are the basis for all types of language activities, so you should develop linguistic and cultural skills during listening, speaking, reading, and writing. All the recommendations and requirements are taken into account while formulating tasks by our Model. It is aimed at the formation of linguistic and cultural (English and Chinese) competence.

III. Reflection: “Mental map” (Figure five).
Reflection can be done both orally and in writing. An analysis of the pedagogical and methodological literature has shown that many scholars note that written examination is more
important and useful for personality development. There are several well-known and most commonly used forms of written test, for example: essays, portfolios, logbooks, cinquains, diaries, and so on. We offer “Mental Map” as a type of written reflection (Naidova). The most critical condition in working with the “Mental Map” is its constant use during each lesson. Only then will this map help the learners to study more quickly and the teachers-to teach better. The “Mental map” is a so-called algorithm of reasoning and proof-giving. The focus is not on memorizing or reproducing information but on the content, reflection, sense, awareness of dependencies, and connections. Students can complete such a map throughout each lesson, or they can complete it at home by adding any additional material. It can be such as drawings, diagrams, etc.

However, we support the concept that the informatization of Ukrainian education is one of the most essential modernization processes of the modern education system. In particular, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is thanks to modern technologies, namely information. The educational paradigm is improved, new perspectives for increasing efficiency of the educational process are revealed. Currently, a significant role is given to self-education and distance education programs.

The studies of most Ukrainian and foreign scholars in the field of teaching English deal with the issues related to the problems of forming secondary school pupils’ and university students’ intercultural competence using English a foreign language, not Chinese. The language educators emphasize the necessity of combining language learning with the familiarization of learners with the culture of native speakers (which is reflected in educational nationally-marked texts). Unfortunately, there is nearly no corresponding research in teaching Chinese to secondary school pupils and university students; the issue regarding the selection of educational material and methods for implementing the educational process in the linguistic and cultural studies aspects is not exact either. In the view of the above, we could state that there is a need to perceive the Chinese language not as a purely lexical-grammatical-ideographic aggregate but as a holistic, integrated system. It has accumulated and evolved for millennia being, based on the philosophical and pedagogical heritage of China, its histories, everyday rituals, folklore, spiritual and moral treasure, ethnography, traditions of many generations. These elements can intertwine with the Ukrainian cultural heritage and contribute to the improvement of foreign language classes.

We support Oleksandra Popova’s idea (Popova, 2020) that an essential place in the designated approach to the formation of secondary school pupils’ linguistic and cultural competence in the process of studying the Chinese language belongs to the selection of the national and precedential material, which the scholar specifies as follows: “fables; artistic and ethnographic texts; ethnically-marked words, phraseologisms; historical and ethnographic works; reference texts about rituals, customs, everyday cultural life of representatives of native and foreign countries; texts are containing information about their beliefs, religious preferences; ethical and aesthetic literature of a national character, etc.); the above educational samples are to be creatively analyzed, synthesized, transformed into a curriculum” (Popova, 2020, p. 31).

Thus, we can assume that the linguoculturological approach to the formation of secondary school pupils’ and university students’ linguistic-and-cultural competence in studying
the Chinese language can be associated with the concentration of pupils’ attention on the study and descriptive analysis of China’s and Ukraine’s cultures. Philosophical phenomena used in foreign (Chinese) and state/national (Ukrainian) languages are actualized in the Chinese/Ukrainian language communicative-cognitive discourse.

Conclusion
According to the presented model, we define the English/Chinese linguistic and cultural competence of secondary (high school) pupils and university bachelor-course students is the ability and willingness of the individual to intercultural communication. We associate it with the term “intercultural competence.” The online methodology takes into account the leading essential components of the NUS, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; modern pedagogical, psychological, and methodological innovation-integrated principles of organization of the educational process based on postulates of partnership pedagogy, child (student) -centrism, positive, age-related (developmental) and cognitive psychology; sub-competence-based and activity-center competence approaches, the subject-language integrated principle of learning and the direction of continuity of education. The presented model of the online methodology attempts to resolve the contradiction between the rapid technical and technological development of an individual in ontogenesis. The gradual decline of his/her intercultural (English and Chinese) competence, as well as the restrictive conditions of the coronavirus pandemic, are to be considered. Modern and trendy topics are offered to the participants of the educational process to get acquainted with while learning English and Chinese. For the first time, the "Workbook" has been developed for training teachers/facilitators with corresponding instructions for use and guidelines. The effectiveness of the proposed methodology was experimentally proved, and we are going to consider ways of its improvement in our further studies.

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Zoom Sessions in Distant Learning: Algerian EFL Students’ Perceptions and Attitudes

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Abstract
During the COVID-19 pandemic, when classroom instructions are interrupted, teachers and students approach digitalization and become familiar with web conferencing. The present research aims to examine Algerian EFL students’ motivation about the use of Zoom, as an asynchronous learning approach, to help ‘bridge the gaps’, and cope with the changes they encounter while exploring online learning. As such, the main questions that set the study are: How academically appropriate is the Zoom’s integration for enhancing EFL students’ motivation? How can the perceived obstacles be challenged for the proper integration of Zoom? To answer these problematic questions, the researcher conducted a case study with twenty EFL students at Oran university of Algeria. Informal, structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires were employed. This study concluded that participant students have overall positive perspectives about using Zoom sessions with some limitations. Training students to use ICTs and developing positive perceptions about using online educational platforms and applications were the main recommendations for using zoom classes.

Keywords: attitudes, distant learning, motivation, Algerian EFL students’ perceptions, Zoom sessions.

Introduction

Early in 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools and universities worldwide were commanded to close, and teaching online becomes inevitable for many teachers and instructors. It seems that this alteration was relatively trouble-free for those states that had invested in the field and moved toward digitalization in a strategic way pre-crisis (such as France, Germany, Estonia, Denmark, Finland). Countries, like Algeria, that had not adopted strategic plans are not supposed to provide support, as they had witnessed a lack of investment in higher education that wreaked significant difficulties.

Students’ positive perceptions and attitudes play a crucial role in the alteration to online learning. This later is gaining acknowledgment of academic community which spotlights the significance of providing training for teachers and students. Lack of training may bring about some obstacles and barriers for students to successfully exploit ICTs in their learning. Due to some psychological factors, such as computer anxiety, or the lack of ICT competencies, students might be reluctant to use technology and become ‘technophobic’ (Azarfam, 2012). Hence, integrating technology in these conditions would not fulfil the primary objectives of developing students’ linguistic skills, and negatively affect their classroom motivation and learning outcomes (Gabriel & Thonda, 2020).

Motivation in learning and academic results could be significantly improved by students’ positive perceptions about using ICT. Thus, providing classrooms with the latest technologies is no longer what is required to promote technology-mediated teaching. Students should be encouraged to think positively about the benefits and merits of e-learning and how the use of Zoom sessions could enhance their learning process.

To this aim, the present research work attempts to give a spindle eye on the distant learning situation in the Algerian university and considering the EFL context as a case study. It also seeks to focus on the status of ICT and its importance for the teaching and learning process. In other words, the present paper endeavors to highlight students’ motivation towards e-learning, with a particular emphasis on ‘Zoom’ as an asynchronous learning strategy to help bridge the gaps and cope with the changes they come across while exploiting Zoom sessions. This study sets around the subsequent research questions:

-How academically appropriate is the Zoom’s integration for enhancing EFL students’ motivation?
-How can the perceived obstacles be challenged for the proper integration of Zoom? Another significant motive for the necessity of integrating Zoom sessions is the importance of students’ positive attitudes and perceptions about the use of technology in their distant learning experience and communication (Leung, 2015).

The paper under scrutiny investigates the use of Zoom sessions in the English language department in Oran University of Algeria. Also, it tends to accentuate EFL students’ attitudes and perceptions about learning in a synchronous virtual classroom. Besides, it tries to examine students’ motivation to learning within Zoom classes.
Literature Review

Zoom Classes: Step towards Blended Learning

With the rapid growth of technology, the notion of e-learning is widely spread. Universities and academic institutions worldwide judge this teaching strategy extremely propitious, as it allows students to learn distantly and hence, substitute for the decreasing number of traditional classroom instruction (Dumont & Ragg, 2018). Consequently, a large variety of internet-assisted or based-courses has been emerging. The conception of ‘blended learning’ appears with the idea of a Learning Management System (LMS), e.g. Canvas, Edmodo, and Google classroom, to significantly improve the quality of the teaching-learning process (Dash, 2019).

Along with Dumont and Raggio (2018), teaching online can be possible with three modes: asynchronous, hybrid, and synchronous. In distance learning approach, students are not obliged to be present in the classroom with their teachers and classmates. Still, they have to learn remotely and can be engaged in any activity posted beforehand in the cloud-based LMS. Students in the asynchronous online classroom can study whenever they see time convenient. However, the teachers-students interaction in this model is interrupted by the settings (Blaine, 2019). With hybrid online teaching, teachers and students concurrently have access to internet-based classrooms using a particular online platform. Some learning activities, such as group or individual assignments, are done asynchronously, and results are posted onto LMS later on. The third mode is synchronous online teaching, also called synchronous virtual classrooms. It relies essentially on ‘real-time communication’ where learning tasks are done distantly through a particular internet-based platform (Martin; Parker & Deale, 2012).

A study on the synchronous virtual classroom has suggested that this instruction approach can provide students with a comparable learning experience and upshot equivalent to the traditional environments. Ngo (2019) observed that learning through a platform in an asynchronous online setting showed a constant development of students reading, writing, listing, and speaking skills of the English language, parallel to the traditional classroom environment (Martin et al., 2012). It is worth of mentioning that developing students’ “sense of belonging to a learning community” could endorse their motivation and cooperation (Falloon, 2011). This showed that traditional classrooms could be replaced by synchronous virtual classes (Barbosa & Barbosa, 2019).

Many studies about synchronous virtual classrooms examine the learning outcomes of students in total “distance learning” where lectures are basically structured for educational purposes. The nearest practice could be taken from mixed-mode teaching labeled ‘synchronous hybrid virtual classroom’ involving two groups of students (one onsite and the other online contributing in the same course (Raes et al, 2020). Though, one should not disregard that sometimes unpredicted factors may cause uncommon breakdowns to traditional classroom environments. A study by Zevenbergen, Sigler, Duerre, and Howse (2000) stated that violent inundations in the United States pushed schools and colleges in the impacted zones to stop their classes for a long time. Power failure can also lead classes, which depend much on electronic devices, to suspend their activities. Other circumstances, like civil unrest, bring about class annulment or suspension; that impacts the lesson plans and the whole curricula of the impacted academic year (Barbosa & Barbosa, 2019).
**Zoom Sessions and Students’ Academic Outcomes:**

Different studies recommended a relationship between positive outcomes and motivation and Zoom sessions in synchronous virtual classrooms. Watkins & Carnell; Lodge; & Whalley, 1996) declared that Zoom class promotes the primary skills required in language learning, such as high order thinking, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills when interacting, cooperating, and sharing information. Beside, selecting and designing activities in Zoom classes should boost students’ motivation, and engagement (McCloskey & Lee, 2010). McLoughlin and Lee (2010) considered that exploiting Zoom sessions can support the learning process of syntactic and semantic cognition for students. Through writing and rewriting sentences when interacting with their classmates in instant messaging, students are encouraged to construct correct sentences.

With the Zoom sessions in synchronous virtual classrooms, students can ask questions to support their understanding and accomplish assignments before posting them online. Also, necessary feedback from their classmates and teacher greatly assist students in reducing the degree of anxiety perceived when collaborating with classmates (Suresh & Vishnu & Gayathri, 2018). This was made out by students learning in the Virtual University of Pakistan and thrived positive perspectives and learning outcomes in Zoom classes. Along with Pérez (2013), when students are free to decide between synchronous and asynchronous settings, they reveal preference to the synchronous settings regarding interactions and development of the content resources. That is for the reason that more communication-oriented towards language teaching is provided in zoom classes to captivate students’ motivation and involvement mainly with the use of texts, videos, and voice chats to afford immediate feedback that assists students to acquire the necessary skills of language (Keegan et al., 2005).

Lots of researchers prop up the significance of Zoom sessions and students’ learning achievements. Marjanovic (1999) underlined the effect of integrating Zoom in developing collaborative Learning environment. Furthermore, Blau & Barak (2012) affirmed that the feedback provided in this setting could help students to find out both their potencies and feeblenesses about the process of language learning to support engagement and learning outcomes. These results are comparable to those in an asynchronous classroom environment, which revealed that teachers make more effort in a synchronous classroom environment than in an asynchronous classroom environment regarding assignments and activities (Miles; Mesinga & Zuchowski, 2018).

Dansieh (2011) described that through writing texts, chats and posts, students could develop their language skills and amplify their motivation and engagement. Therefore, they become autonomous and successful learners. Moreover, Behjat (2011) conducted a study on how students reveal positive attitudes when utilizing a technological device through writing, like devoting more time and flexibility in structuring their ideas. Lin and Overbaugh (2007) also underlined the significance of sharing ideas, and providing feedback via Zoom sessions. Russell (2010) affirmed that Zoom could develop students’ language skills in an inventive and effective way. Besides, chat texts can boost interaction and communication among students and improve their speaking and writing skills (Liang, 2006).
Zoom Sessions and Students’ Perceptions

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic era, many universities around the globe strive today to train teachers and students to implement technologies, platforms, and applications to be utilized in the teaching-learning process; since people are accustomed to using these technologies to improve communication in a digital world (Kee, 2020). Then again, instructors implement these devices into the process of language teaching to make the material effortlessly intelligible for both personal or group levels of communication (Blau & Barak, 2012).

Several studies have inspected the significance and impacts of technology on language learning and fundamental skills. Zhao (2009) carried out a study that underscored the synchronous learning devices, such as text, chat, and video conferencing, to open topic discussions concerning culture in the English language. The results explained that these strategies assisted students’ learning of the English language, and developed lexical schemata when discussing, interacting, and collaborating in synchronous settings.

Sauro and Smith (2010) examined the input of language in learning through synchronous strategies. They observed development in students’ English language comprehension and lexical schemata. A study emphasized the use of chat rooms, and their impact on students’ learning outcomes. It found that after the experimental period of online Learning, participant students demonstrated improved writing and speaking skills (Ochonogor, Alakpodia, and Achugbue 2012). Another study also examined the effect of using text chats. Students recognized the benefits of Zoom in developing interaction, and improving their writing and speaking skills (Suresh & Vishnu & Gayathri, 2018).

Many studies concluded that Zoom classes have many merits and positive effects on students’ academic results and fundamental language skills. Zhao (2009) pointed out significance of Zoom classes to foster students’ communicative competence and boost their collaboration, and interaction. The use of Zoom classes helps students to explore new ways to structure, design, and manage their studies, and hence, develops their autonomy (Thumnong, 2020).

It is essential to state that through face-to-face interaction and conversation via texts, students can comprehend the lectures posted on the platform. Moreover, Falloon, (2011) accentuated the lack of research about typing errors when communicating in chats. However, a study by Hamouda (2013) underlined the significance of word processors in second or foreign language learning; when exploring different facets of the language such as syntax, semantics, and phonology. Therefore, students use this aptitude when practicing the four skills of language in a real-life situation. He stated that word processors, in instant messaging are essential in developing students’ language skills.

A distressing situation might be the origin of students’ negative attitudes about Zoom sessions, where ambiguity and misunderstandings could weaken textual interaction in instant messaging. However, Croxton (2014) considered that some limitations of distant Learning are related to the length of time that some students may need to learn in virtual settings and the difficulty of interacting and collaborating with classmates.
One cannot deny that Zoom sessions in virtual classroom settings are endorsed in ‘the higher institutions community’ as an effective strategy to instruct autonomous Learning and support both students and teachers to remain connected (Ghounane, 2020). According to Halverson; Spring; Huyett; Henrie & Graham (2017), Zoom classes in distant learning settings are more developed than other platforms as they endorse face-to-face interaction.

Kasula (2016) stated that using other platforms could benefit the teachers more than the students. He claimed that it enables teachers “to display class objectives, activities, and assignments in an orderly, focused, a productive and transparent manner for students, teachers, and administrators” (p. 11).

Several studies brought to light the effectiveness of Zoom sessions in the EFL environment. A survey conducted by McCloskey et al. (2013) claimed that Zoom sessions could help in the EFL context when designing activities that fit with students’ needs in distant Learning. Other studies underlined the strategy’s significance as a central part of the synchronous virtual classroom to foster students’ thinking skills, and problem-solving aptitudes. Accordingly, Chen and Lee (2011) considered that:

During the zoom session, students may ask questions to help them structure their sentences or do their assignments before posting them; they may be exposed to listening input to increase their schemata that develops their error correction system which is directly linked to conscious learning of a language. At the same time, students receive essential feedback on their work from their teacher and classmates, which can decrease the anxiety levels felt when sharing with others. (as cited in Ayoub, 2019, pp. 131-132)

Liang (2006) concluded that Zoom could improve the students’ writing skills throughout text chats in instant messaging. Liang also suggested that learning via Zoom session can boost the students’ motivation in online Learning and affects their communicative competence and interaction. It is crucial to underline the literary gap in this study. Despite the profusion of researches on the integration of Zoom worldwide, further investigations in the Algerian context are significantly required.

**Research Design and Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative approach that involves a case study. Informal structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires are conducted. A cyclical process of data compilation, interpretation, and analysis is highlighted in this action research. Meyer (2000) claimed that action research attempts to provide practical solutions to problems. It also strengthened experts and decision-makers, to be actively involved in the study (Bagriacik, 2019).

**Instrumentation**

Informal, structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires were designed to scrutinize EFL students’ perceptions and attitudes about using zoom sessions in English language learning. In this study, open-ended questionnaires were convenient to collect data and allow the respondents to stay anonymous. Six questions with definite instructions, which could be answered in roughly less than ten minutes, were processed. It aimed to reduce the time participants would need to complete them and thus, reduce the return rate. The use of questionnaires allows informants’ answers to be free from any biases of the researcher. They are also deemed effective and provide structured responses. In this study, the questionnaire brings to
light students’ activities in Zoom class and their perceptions, and attitudes. It tackles also the main challenges to integrating Zoom, and provides recommendations.

In the present study, the interview schedule processes the EFL students’ perceptions and outlooks about learning via zoom sessions. The researcher solicited consent from the interviewees to take notes about their complete statements during the interview. Therefore, right away after the interviewing process, data were transcribed word for word and then analyzed. The interview questions highlight the significant merits of zoom class, tackle some limitations, and provide recommendations for effective integration of Zoom in the EFL context.

An undergraduate class of twenty EFL students enrolled in the English language department, at Oran university of Algeria, were selected to participate in the study. EFL students participating in the study were in their third year license studies and having oral expression lectures once a week via zoom sessions for the first time. Since November 2020, teachers need to instruct remotely and post their lessons on academic platforms such as Moodle, Team, and significantly zoom. Participant students consent to partake in this study and reveal their perceptions, and attitudes towards learning through Zoom sessions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Students’ Questionnaire

During the COVID19 pandemic, Algerian universities and higher education institutions raise the challenge to use technology and investigate an e-learning environment to benefit from the merits of technology and save the academic year. Though some of them reveal preference to the traditional classroom environment, teachers are, in some way, pushed to cope with the new situation to post lectures and even assess students via a system that provides opportunities to upload lessons. They can also accomplish their assignments, and keep in touch with their teachers virtually. Even if this innovative strategy seems to enhance their self-autonomy, training students and developing their ICT proficiencies to learn distantly may not be an easy task, mainly for students who are not adept with technology. Accordingly, through the questionnaire, the researcher underlines students’ perceptions and aptitudes to be thought of via Zoom classes. Table one gives an idea about the students’ experience of learning in Zoom classes and the activities required in this setting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Download the lectures posted on the platform</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and interaction</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table one shows that 65% of the students downloaded lectures posted on the platform. Students’ answers also showed that using the Zoom sessions favored their communication (53%),
collaboration and interaction (47%), and assignments (44%). It is pretty evident that students welcome the use of Zoom and enjoy the transition to online settings.

In the second question, the researcher asked students about the merits of learning via Zoom sessions. Table two presents an in-depth look at the standpoints of students regarding the advantages of the zoom class.

Table2. Students’ views about the merits of Zoom class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merits</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase motivation</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Interactivities</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a diversity of learning materials</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate proper Assessment</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table two reveals that students appreciate in the Zoom class that it increases their motivation (57%) provides a diversity of learning materials (55%). 48% of students stated that it increased interactivities. They added that in Zoom class, they interact mainly during classroom assessment. 47% of students’ answers encompass integrating proper assessment. It seems that students are motivated about the use of zoom sessions.

Students were questioned about their perspectives about the use of Zoom. The following table gives an idea:

Table3. Students’ positive perspectives about the use of the Zoom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Perspectives</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table three shows that students have, on the whole, positive perspectives about Learning via Zoom classes. More than half of students believe that flexibility in this online Learning can support the process of Learning (53%) and offer accessibility to different learning materials (49%). 51% of students stated that Learning in the Zoom class boosted their autonomy, as it favored student-centered Learning; only 20% of participants pointed out the aspect of comfort. Some psychological factors, such as stress, anxiety, or being ashamed, may make students feel uncomfortable using technology.

The researcher designed the fourth question to scrutinize the students’ perceptions about what they most dislike when learning in Zoom class. The following table provides an idea:

Table4. Students’ negative perspectives about the use of the Zoom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Perspectives</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings from table four demonstrate that most students consider learning in zoom class as intensive (59%). Students perceive the overuse of technology in the Zoom class as demanding and burden them in such a disturbing environment. 55% of students claim that the zoom class lacks interactivity. They add that they interact less with their teacher and classmates. They also highlight the problem of plagiarism (41%). Because this system is new and relatively challenging, students can copy and paste things from the net with ease. Informants also point out the lack of discipline (25%). They claim that some students use to misbehave during lectures.

In the fifth question, students were questioned about the perceived barriers and obstacles encountered in the zoom class. Table five provides an idea about the main limitations.

**Table 5. Limitations of Zoom class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation and negative attitudes</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer anxiety</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of ICT skills</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to change and no perception of benefits</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time in zoom session</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical breakdown</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings from table five demonstrate that resistance to change and no perception of benefits (71%), lack of motivation and negative attitudes (70%), lack of training (69%), lack of ICT skills (65%), and computer anxiety (59%) were the main limitations to integrating Zoom in their Learning. There is a tight relationship between factors that may prevent a successful integration of ICTs, particularly the Zoom classes. When students are not motivated and trained to use a given technology, they would deliberately lack proficiency and develop a kind of anxiety for technology and digital devices. Besides, more than half of the students’ answers show that technical breakdowns can seriously hamper the teaching-learning process through zoom sessions. Lack of time in Zoom sessions is also regarded as a limitation of learning with Zoom.

The last question invites the informant students to suggest some recommendations for the effective use of Zoom.

**Table 6. Recommendations for the effective use of Zoom classes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing cognitive load</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training students to use digital learning</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table six shows that informants believe that experiencing the potential benefits of integrating ICT (62%), training students to use digital learning materials (61%), and facilitating access to educational platforms (58%), are highly recommended to implementing Zoom in EFL context. Students also believe that updating knowledge (55%), reducing the cognitive load (54%), and providing more interactive activities (53%) in providing an effective technical support mechanism (52%) as extremely important for the effective use of technology in their learning experience.

**Students’ Interview**

The researcher conducted an online interview with eight EFL students at Oran University. The questions intended to give an overview of the students’ perceptions and attitudes about learning in zoom classes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Question One: How do you get in touch with your teachers and learn during the Covid-19 pandemic?**

The eight students answered that from the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021, they are supposed to learn distantly, exploit educational platforms, and download lectures. They argued that thanks to these alternatives, they could have classes and use technology in the process of Learning. They maintained that they also contacted their teachers through emails to post lectures online.

**Question Two: Do you think that e-learning and emerging virtual classrooms would replace the traditional classroom environment after the COVID 19?**

Five informant students stated that online Learning could not substitute a traditional classroom environment, where they can distantly interact with their teachers and classmates, becomes an integral part of their daily lives during the pandemic.

They added that they were not trained to be thought with technology. They maintained that they are familiar with using the net to research, send mail, download stuff, but they had never experienced learning in a virtual classroom before. Interviewed students claimed that even if they are supposed to have access to academic platforms or applications, they are still novice users and need time to master some ICTs competencies. On the other hand, five out of eight students mentioned that, in Zoom class, they lack the sense of human interaction and focus merely on typing instant messaging to communicate with each other. One student reported: “we get used to chatting with each other, but sometimes due to some errors of typing, there is
misapprehension”. Other students stated that they are inclined to use technology and explore the wave of e-learning. One student said: “I love using technology in learning. I can ask a question from my room when I do an assignment.”

Question Three: How do you consider the use of Zoom in the EFL classroom? All the interviewed students highlighted that Zoom class boosts their motivation. They maintained that it encouraged them to interact and communicate via chats and instant messaging. One student stated: “even if we are not confident, we can easily communicate through chat”. In the interview, students maintained that in the Zoom classes, lectures are uploaded, and they can easily access the platform to download them and do their assignments. Besides, four students asserted that they are extremely engaged when teachers use videos. One student stated: “I can easily and comfortably listen to the lecture and learn”. Also, learning in zoom classes promotes student-centered learning as it fosters them to be autonomous learners. One student said: “I believe e-learning is making students more active and self-learner”. Five students claimed that it offered them the opportunity to be independent and self-directed learners. One student claimed: “It is easy for us to go back and forth through the whole video for a summary or even revising it”.

Question Four: Do you prefer learning with or without zoom? The majority of informants concurred that technology had paved the way for online education. Four out of eight students pointed out that they prefer using Zoom, primarily in the course of oral expression. They claimed that they appreciate the use of authentic learning materials such as videos and songs. One informant said: “learning with zoom in oral expression would be effective for teachers, mostly in the assessment when students are supposed to register videos and post them on the platform”. Five students validated that although it is helpful for students and teachers during the pandemic, synchronous virtual classes via zoom technology can never substitute the traditional classroom environment. They maintained that they could use the platform as an extra tool for Learning. One student said: “zoom strategy can help teachers to provide feedback and assess in the assignments”. Another replayed: “zoom sessions can enhance traditional classroom environment, but it cannot replace it”. Two students stated that because some teachers and learners are reluctant to use technology. They claimed that they need to perceive the benefits of using ICTs and adopt positive perceptions.

Question Five: what do you dislike most in Zoom? Three students agreed that Zoom classes lacked communication between students and their teachers. One student said: “in this virtual class, teachers are busy checking technical stuff such as internet connection and clearness of sound and more than communicating with students”. Another added: “the teacher does not have time to communicate with us”. Seven out of eight students insisted that they lack the training to use the platform is a significant problem. They also affirmed that they lacked competencies in ICT skills as a consequence of not being trained. Five other students also mentioned that some students refuse change brought by technology and feel anxious to use the computer. All students pointed out that technical break-down are what they dislike most in the virtual class.
Question Six: what do you suggest to use zoom in the learning process?

Five informant students claimed that teachers should provide more interactive activities. Other students maintained that they need to be trained to access easily to the platform. Informants also reported that assuring an effective technical support mechanism is highly recommended.

**Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings**

The COVID 19 pandemic has impelled all the educational regulations, particularly for those who do not approve the implementation of technology in the classroom. Some teachers, mostly old ones, become *technophobic* and are reluctant to use technology in instruction. Those teachers have to deal with the innovations that the field of teaching and learning entails.

Through the analysis of both questionnaire and interviews, informant students consider the use of Zoom sessions in an oral expression class as beneficial and entertaining. They stated that they were motivated and engaged when using some English videos and songs. This result goes hand in hand with researchers like Liang (2006), who suggested that Zoom sessions could boost the students’ motivation and enhance language skills.

Analysis also showed that participant students believe that the Zoom class increased their collaboration, raised their interactivities, and fostered their learning autonomy. These conclusions support McCloskey et al. (2012), which maintained that Zoom sessions could be beneficial in the EFL environment when designing activities that match with the students’ needs in distance learning.

The findings disclosed that students were motivated to learn via Zoom class. Though they are not trained, students reveal a willingness to participate in the lesson and accomplish some tasks via the platform. This result confirms the findings of a study by Barbosa and Barbosa (2019), which reveal that Zoom sessions could develop students’ communication, and language skills. This result may answer the first research question, how academically appropriate is the Zoom’s integration of for enhancing EFL students’ motivation?

Results showed that most informant students appreciate using Zoom class, though they still consider themselves trainee users as they are not used to employ ICTs in learning. This result might be the answer of the second research question, how can the perceived obstacles be challenged for the proper integration of Zoom?

Analysis divulged that students’ negative attitudes, lack of training, lack of ICT skills, and computer anxiety were the significant obstacles that may prevent an effective integration of the Zoom sessions. These findings confirm the idea of Doyle (2005), who believed that such a problematic condition might be the origin of students’ negative perception about the use of ICTs. Findings also reported that technical breakdown is considered a real obstacle. These conclusions get in harmony with Kasula (2016), who maintained that lack of technical support or weak internet connection might hamper Zoom class. Participant students believed that providing training to use ICTs and assuring an effective technical support mechanism were the primary enablers to integrating Zoom classes in the EFL context.
Conclusion

This study aimed to scrutinize EFL students’ perceptions and attitudes about the use of Zoom classes during the Covid-19 pandemic situation. The researcher considered the English Language department of Oran University as a case study. It also endeavored to shed light on the students’ motivation and standpoints about having an oral expression class via Zoom sessions throughout the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. This paper attempts to provide a sweeping view of the situation of e-learning in the EFL context. The present study was limited to a small sample of EFL students in the English language department. Still, it could be taken it as a roadmap to conduct more studies, chiefly on the use of new instructive applications like Zoom and Google Classroom in Algerian schools and institutions. ICTs become a fundamental element in the process of teaching and learning. Teachers and students need to deal with the advancement of technology in language teaching. It is now a responsibility for teachers to ensure that, taking into consideration that positive attitudes and motivation significantly affect the quality of the whole process of language teaching and learning.

The Covid-19 pandemic situation propelled institutions, universities, and teachers worldwide to approach digitalization and invest in students’ attitudes and aptitudes. Attention was drawn towards the merits of technology that foster both synchronous and asynchronous teaching-learning processes. The learning and teaching ambiance becomes more enjoyable where both teachers and learners are joined to share knowledge distantly.

Most of the results showed that students are motivated to learn via Zoom classes and reveal positive attitudes and perspectives about Zoom’s use of in the teaching and learning process. The analysis also showed that Zoom sessions cannot and should not replace the traditional classroom environment. Indeed, Zoom classes intend to enhance the Learning process, engage students to learn, and reinforce the teacher-learner relationship.

The use of educational platforms and new applications like Zoom is not sufficient. The process of teaching and learning would not be effective without the critical role of teachers and students’ positive attitudes. The objective of this attempt is to develop students’ centered Learning and endorse inventiveness in teaching. Effective integration of e-learning requires thoughtful initiatives of experts and decision-makers to train teachers and students to successfully use technologies and bring innovation in teaching and learning.

Recommendations

This study presents some recommendations that can help in integrating Zoom in the Algerian EFL context:

- Stakeholders and decision-makers should re-think the curriculum and re-consider technology in the teaching /learning processes.
- Teachers and students should receive training to use ICT in e-learning environments to develop their e-competencies.
- E-competencies can be developed by exploring students’ potentials of using e-skills and knowledge.
- Students should develop competencies beyond school, and foster their autonomous and creative Learning.
- Teachers need to adopt positive perceptions about the use of different educational platforms and applications.
- Teachers and students should consider the positive outcomes of ICTs

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Zoom Sessions in Distant Learning: Algerian EFL Students’ Perceptions

Benmansour


Online Learning amid COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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Abstract
The outbreak of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has led countries to implement measures to prevent its spread. One of these measures included shutting down schools and universities. Consequently, the teaching, learning and assessment processes were entirely shifted from face-to-face to online. The current study aimed to investigate online vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) amid COVID-19 pandemic used by Saudi EFL students. It attempted to find out the online strategies Saudi EFL astudents use to get the meaning of new vocabulary, the strategies they use to study new vocabulary and the strategies they follow to revise the learned vocabulary and keep them as part of their repertoire. The sample of the study was 119 male and female English and non-English majors. The study modified Kulikova's (2015) questionnaire. This study was conducted at the University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia, during a fully online learning period in September and October 2020 at the time of COVID-19 outbreak. The data were collected via a self-administered questionnaire form. It was distributed via teachers of the English Department. The study found out that English majors used vocabulary learning strategies more than non-English majors. It also showed that students do not ask their teachers about the meaning of new vocabulary (77%), they also do not ask their classmates (92%), nor they ask their friends (85%), which could be attributed to online study and due to social distance during coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, online learning strategies, Saudi EFL students, vocabulary learning strategies

1. Introduction

In order to stop the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), it was rational to close the institutes of education globally (Mahyoob, 2020; Syahrin & Salih 2020). As a result, schools and universities in Saudi Arabia transferred entirely online. Studying via different learning management systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, Zoom, Cisco, YouTube, Instagram, etc., force learners to learn new vocabulary that enhances vocabulary acquisition and allow students to practice them (Dincer, 2020). Mobile phones, online games, and blended learning were found as a good opportunity for students to acquire new vocabulary (Mahdi, 2018; Al Masri, 2020 & Bin-Hady, 2021).

It is a complex process to learn vocabulary through formal instruction as it is influenced by several factors such as the teacher’s attitude towards the notion of acquiring vocabulary and the students' readiness to learn vocabulary. Vocabulary learning is also influenced by the interaction of other factors such as the linguistic features of vocabulary; mother tongue and second/foreign language interference; the nature of vocabulary development; the ability of memory to encode, store, and then recall acquired or learned vocabulary; development of the second language (L2) mental lexicon and its organization; vocabulary input; individual differences; the teacher and teaching strategies; presentation of new words; and integration of lexical items in the mental lexicon (Takac, 2008). Vocabulary acquisition is also affected by learning strategies followed by learners. Yunhao (2011) put it: "The use of vocabulary learning strategies is one crucial factor that affects the success of foreign vocabulary acquisition" (p. 1).

English Vocabulary is important for English learners to listen, speak, read and write. Without vocabulary, English students cannot comprehend listening and reading skills and cannot produce any writing and speaking activity. It is found that English as a foreign language (EFL) learners who study English at schools cannot adequately express themselves neither in speaking nor in writing (Al-Nasser, 2015). Therefore, the current study is going to investigate the VLSs used by EFL students while studying English online. It attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most and least VLSs used by EFL students during COVID-19 outbreak?
2. Is there a significant difference concerning the use of strategies between English and non-English majors?
3. Is there a significant difference with regard to the use of strategies between higher and lower GPA students?

2. Review of Literature

Recent studies, during the breakout of COVID-19, on Saudi students' VLSs have been conducted. Alghamdi and Elyas (2020) proved the positive effect of electronic flashcards on promoting learners' vocabulary. Alhadiah (2020) demonstrated a positive attitude towards the use of Quizlet program for learning vocabulary. Alamer (2020) examined the influence of Blackboard (Bb) on vocabulary acquisition. The study showed that Bb had a little effect on the performance of King Khalid University (KKU) students in vocabulary learning. Alharthi, Bown and Pullen (2020) reviewed the literature concerning the use of social media platforms for learning vocabulary. They found that out of 50 studies, only fifteen were relevant to using social media platforms for vocabulary learning. It has been acknowledged that social media platforms...
are effective in the development of vocabulary. Concerning VLSs used by undergraduate students, Alahmad (2020) found that Saudi female undergraduate English major students used seventeen strategies, out of which nine cognitive and five metacognitive with high frequency in the vocabulary learning process. Her study also revealed that they used twenty-eight and ten strategies with medium and low frequencies, respectively. A similar study by Al-Khresheh and Al-Ruwaili (2020) proved that the most and the least preferable strategies used by the Saudi undergraduate learners were memory and cognitive strategies, respectively.

a. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Many researchers and theorists provide definitions of learning strategies. Oxford (1990) call them "actions" that learners use to facilitate the learning process (as cited in Macaro, 2001, p.17) . Cohen (2014) defined language learning strategies as "thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance" (p. 7). Learning strategies, as defined by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), refer to "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). Prior to these definitions, Rubin (1975) had offered a comprehensive definition of learning strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p. 43). Therefore, language learning strategies can be described as a set of methods, techniques, actions, steps, thoughts, or behaviors that learners use to facilitate the learning process.

VLSs can be regarded as an integral part of language learning. They refer to all “actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary” Cameron (as cited in Yunhao, 2011, p. 7). According to Oxford (2017) "L2 vocabulary learning strategies are teachable, dynamic thoughts and behaviors that learners consciously select and employ in specific contexts to improve their self-regulated, autonomous L2 vocabulary development for effective task performance and long-term proficiency" (p. 244). Learning a word doesn't mean knowing its meaning only. According to Hurd and Lewis (2008), it is a cumulative process that depends on identifying the word's form, meaning, and its usage in different circumstances.

Hatch and Brown (2000) explained five steps to learning new words: encountering the word, identifying the word form, identifying its meaning, associating the word form to its meaning, and using it. From the point of view of VLS use, Schmitt (2000) classified VLSs into two main categories: strategies for the discovery of new word meaning and others for consolidating a new word meaning after it has been discovered. The former category subsumes two subcategories, determination strategies, and social strategies. The latter category includes social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified language learning strategies used by foreign language students into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. Concerning strategies used for learning vocabulary.

On the basis of Ming Wei's (2007) classification of strategies, Yunhao (2011) listed seven VLSs: dictionary use, guessing, perceptions, encoding, activation, management, and sources. VLSs are important for vocabulary learning and acquisition Takac (2008).
On the basis of VLSs proposed by Schmitt (2000), Khair (2017) investigated VLSs used by Sudanese English major students at the University of Al-Fashir. The study revealed that using VLSs had a positive effect on the development of vocabulary. It also showed that metacognitive strategies were most frequently used (75%) by the participants and then cognitive strategies. However, social strategies were the least used by them. Patahuddin, Syawal, and Taher (2017) verified strategies employed by learners of junior high school in Parepare, Indonesia, for enhancing their English vocabulary. The results of the study showed that learners used different methods such as dictionaries, reading English books and advertisements, playing games, the internet, listening to songs, and watching movies to acquire vocabulary. Alqarni (2018) conducted a study on the impact of training students to raise their awareness of VLSs. The participants were 29 Saudi male English majors in the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University. The results of the study showed the impact of this training in the increased use of VLSs by the participants and their use in reading and grammar courses as well. To explore the development of vocabulary by using WhatsApp, Bensalem (2018) conducted a study at Northern Borders University in Saudi Arabia. Forty students participated in the study. They were divided into two groups, experimental and control. The experimental group was asked to use the new vocabulary in sentences and submit their assignments via WhatsApp, and the control group was asked to submit hard copies of their assignments. The results of the study showed that the experimental group, which also proved a positive attitude for learning vocabulary via WhatsApp, outperformed the control group in the vocabulary test. Yaacob et al. (2019) explored the use of VLSs by students at Saudi School Malaysia. The findings of the study revealed that the participants used five stages of strategies (encountering the new word, getting the word form, getting the word meaning, consolidating word form and meaning in memory, and finally using the word) at a medium level and almost at a close range.

Other studies on the use of VLSs by students of other academic majors were conducted. Seddigh and Shokrpour’s study (2012) investigated the use of VLSs by medical students and found out that guessing and dictionary strategies were the most frequently used strategies while social and study preference were the least used by the subjects of the study. This is not in line with Hashemi and Hadavi’s (2015) study, which investigated the use of VLSs by students of Medical Sciences at Rafsanjan University. The results of the study showed that 57.6% of the participants used dictionaries. Guessing and social strategies were the most used strategies. However, autonomy and note-taking strategies had the least obtained scores. The results also showed significant differences pertaining to students’ majors. Social strategies were more frequently used by paramedical and nursing students, while study preference and selective attention strategies were used by medical and dentistry students. Female students preferred social strategies, but males used autonomy and note-taking strategies more. Boonnoon, (2019) explored the use of VLSs by students of four different academic majors (Business, Engineering, Agriculture and Health Science) at a comprehensive university in the northeast of Thailand and examined if there was a significant difference in strategy use pertaining to their academic major. The results of her study revealed a significant difference in the use of five categories - study preferences, selective attention, autonomy, social, and memory. However, the results did not show any significant difference for the other three categories (guessing, dictionary and note-taking) among the participants. The results also proved that health science students used VLSs more frequently than others.

b. Significance of Vocabulary for Language Proficiency
Being acquainted with vocabulary is vitally important for acquiring second and foreign languages and mastering receptive and productive language skills (Viera, 2017). Vocabulary knowledge is vitally important for language comprehension and production (Seddigh & Shokrpour, 2012; Patahuddin, Syawal & Taher, 2017). VLSs play an essential role in developing the four language skills (Patahuddin, Syawal & Taher, 2017; Boonkongsaen, 2012). Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners cannot communicate. According to Oxford (2017) "grammatical competence is needed, along with competence in using vocabulary, for optimal communication" (p. 243). Yaacob et al. (2019) said, "In all linguistic skills, vocabulary takes its role in developing a student's language proficiency" (p. 3). Boonnoon (2019) stated, "To master the language, learners need to pay utmost attention to all details pertaining to the language knowledge including grammatical structure, vocabulary, and register" (p. 902). Learning vocabulary is considered as the most urgently required thing that people need to learn another language (Laufer & Sim 1985, as cited in Hashemi & Hadavi, 2015). Khan, Radzuan, Shahbaz, Ibrahim and Mustafa (2018) conducted a study on the role of vocabulary knowledge in the development of speaking skills which revealed that vocabulary knowledge and speaking proficiency are strongly correlated. Learners who know VLSs find it easy to learn new vocabulary because VLSs facilitate the learning process of new vocabulary (Boonkongsaen, 2012). Adam (2016) undertook a study on the role of VLSs in the development of learners' performance which proved the necessity of having a good stock of vocabulary for language skills mastery. In addition, vocabulary teaching and learning strategies promote both learners' writing and communication abilities.

Thus, one of the main factors as to why language learners might not be able to communicate is their insufficient vocabulary knowledge that can be regarded as the crucial need to improve their language proficiency. The wider the vocabulary, the more proficient learners are.

c. Factors Affecting Vocabulary Acquisition

Boonkongsaen (2012) discussed twelve factors that affect learners' VLS use: belief, attitude, motivation, and language learning experience; the field of study, course type, class level, gender, and language learning environment; language achievement, language proficiency, and vocabulary knowledge. She categorized them into three main categories: learners' individual differences that include the first four factors, situational and social factors that cover the next five, and learners' learning outcome, which encompasses the last factors. You (2011) conducted a study on factors that contribute to vocabulary acquisition while reading. Her study revealed that factors such as explanation, repetition, and translation into L1 are significantly more effective for vocabulary acquisition. Other factors such as marginal glosses and dictionary use help learners acquire meanings of new words. In addition, factors like additional oral and visual inputs affect the retention of new words positively. She found out that learners vary in their vocabulary acquisition due to individual differences such as motivation and language proficiency.

Yaacob et al. (2018) proved that motivation is one of the most significant factors that affect vocabulary learning among Saudi students at Saudi School in Malaysia. It also showed that learners' attitudes and beliefs and learning environment also affect vocabulary learning. A leaning environment motivates students to have a positive attitude towards learning English. Lin-Fang (2013) studied the factors that affect students' use of VLSs at Fooyin University in Taiwan.
Motivation was proved to have the greatest effect on VLS. Proficient learners with high motivation participated more than students with low motivation in self-initiated learning activities. Learners whom their family members tutored showed more proficiency than others. The study showed that the effort spent on learning didn't affect VLS. According to Knez (2018) learners' perceptions influenced VLS. In other words, learners who think that English is easy to use more incidental VLS. However, gender and level of education do not affect vocabulary choice.

Our study is different from the studies mentioned in the literature with regard to its focus on VLSs by Saudi undergraduate learners amid the outbreak of COVID-19, which none of these recent studies have touched upon.

3. Methodology

This section is dedicated to present the methodology that is followed to conduct the current study.

a. Participants

The sample of the study consists of 119 students from the University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. The participants are English majors (79) and non-English majors(40) who study English online during COVID-19 outbreak. Forty-six participants are male and 73 are female. The students' GPA was one of the variables of the study. The background information of participants is presented in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>1 or 2 (Year 1)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4 (Year 2)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 or 6 (Year 3)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 or 8 (Year 4)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>English Majors</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-English majors</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Higher (3.5-5)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower (&lt; 3.5)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Instruments and Data collection

The researchers distributed a questionnaire on vocabulary learning strategies to the students of English. The questionnaire was of two sections. The first section was a background information. It elicits students, gender, GPA and levels. The second section used Kulikova's (2015) modified questionnaire. It was divided into three categories: the strategies that students use to get the meaning of new vocabulary, the strategies that learners use to study new vocabulary and the strategies that learners follow to revise vocabulary to keep them in their repertoire. Before distributing the questionnaire, it was sent in an online form to 9 university teachers to referee them. Then they were asked to write their suggestions for modification if suggested. The questionnaire was finally updated according to the comments given by referees.
To avoid the questions' misunderstanding, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic and distributed to students in English and Arabic.

The questionnaire was designed in Google Format and the link was sent to the chairperson of the English Department. He sent the link to the English teachers' group in Telegram in September 2020, requesting them to distribute it to their students. The students were informed that the questionnaire is for research purpose and it will be confidential. They were also informed that they would not get or lose any mark because of responding to the questionnaire. The participants were not asked to write their names in the questionnaire to avoid the bias responses.

c. **Data Analysis**

SPSS package 24 was used to analyze the frequencies and percentages of vocabulary learning strategies followed by English and non-English majors. It was also used to analyze the Chi-Square to find out the significant differences between the study variables.

4. **Results and Discussion**

To answer the research questions of the current study, the students' responses were analyzed, presented and discussed in this section.

4.1 **Vocabulary strategies used to get the meaning of new vocabulary**

The only significant difference between English-majors and non-English majors was that English majors were more likely to rely on a bilingual dictionary (Chi-square = 8.10, p<.005) as shown in Table 2.

| Table 2, Chi-square test: the difference between English and non-English majors in using a bilingual dictionary |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square                              | 5.212a           | 1               | 0.022           |
| Continuity Correctionb                         | 4.353            | 1               | 0.037           |
| Likelihood Ratio                                | 5.364            | 1               | 0.021           |
| Fisher's Exact Test                             |                  |                 | 0.030           |
| Linear-by-Linear Association                   |                  |                 | 0.018           |
| N of Valid Cases                                | 119              |                 |                 |

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.81.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table
However, Table 3 displays the students' frequencies and percentages when trying to get the meaning of a new word. Looking at the raw numbers, English majors were less likely to ask a classmate (8%) than others (13%) and more likely to use all other strategies than non-English majors. This suggests that English majors have a wider range of strategies for finding the meaning of a new word than do non-English majors. For non-English majors, the most-used strategy was to guess the meaning from context (53%), a strategy that was also common for English majors (65%). However, the most common strategy for English majors was to look up the word in a bilingual dictionary (73%), a strategy used less frequently by non-English majors (45%). Another interesting result is that only 24% of English-majors use monolingual dictionaries (English-English dictionaries). This is in line with Alhaisoni (2020) who found that bilingual dictionary is the most used one and monolingual dictionary is less frequent. However, 73% of the English-majors use bilingual dictionary. This might indicate the students' keenness to know the meaning in their native language.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of vocabulary strategies followed to get the meaning of a new vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary strategies</th>
<th>Non English-major</th>
<th>English-major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look it up in a bilingual dictionary (English-Arabic dictionary).</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look it up in a monolingual dictionary (English-English dictionary).</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I search for it in Google to find its meaning in different dictionaries.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask the teacher to translate it.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask my classmates to translate it.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask my friends via WhatsApp group or other social media devices to translate it</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess its meaning from context.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Vocabulary strategies used to study new vocabulary

As in Table 4, the Chi-square test shows a significant difference between English majors and non-English majors regarding the strategy of writing the newly learned vocabulary.
repeatedly. English majors were more likely to write them repeatedly (Chi Square = 5.21, p<.030).

Table 4. *Chi-square test: the difference between English and non-English majors in writing learned vocabulary repeatedly*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>5.212</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity Correction</td>
<td>4.353</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>5.364</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>5.168</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows that English majors were also more likely to write example sentences for new words. Writing rather than orally repeating seems to be a strategy more often used by English majors though it does not show any significant difference between the English and the non-English majors.

Table 5. *Frequencies and percentages of vocabulary strategies followed to study new vocabulary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary strategies</th>
<th>Non English-major</th>
<th>English-major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;No&quot;</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Yes&quot;</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To study the new vocabulary by

- *reviewing the newly learned terms with my classmates.*
  - 32 students (80%)
  - 8 students (20%)
  - 68 students (86%)
  - 11 students (14%)

- *repeating them aloud.*
  - 22 students (55%)
  - 18 students (45%)
  - 46 students (58%)
  - 33 students (42%)

- *repeating them silently.*
  - 31 students (78%)
  - 9 students (23%)
  - 63 students (80%)
  - 16 students (20%)
Table 6 shows a significant difference between high grade and low-grade students regarding connecting new words to their synonyms and/or antonyms. Students with high GPA are more likely to use this strategy than students with low GPA, Chi-Square = 6.85, p<.02. This item showed that students with high GPA have enough vocabulary in their repertoire, allowing them to connect the learned words to synonyms and antonyms, but students with low GPA do not have enough vocabulary to follow this strategy.

**Table 6, Chi-square test: the difference between high grade and low grade students in connecting the learned vocabulary to their synonyms/antonyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>6.580a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity Correctionb</td>
<td>5.610</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>6.704</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>6.525</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.52.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table
4.3 Vocabulary strategies used to make the learned vocabulary part of students' repertoire

Table 7 shows the strategies used to make the learned vocabulary part of the students' repertoire. The results show that there is no significant difference among the variables (major/non-major, male/female, and high grade/low grade) in this regard.

Looking at the raw numbers, it is clear that the English and non-English majors' strategies are similar. The only strategy that shows higher frequency than others is the use of the learned vocabulary in their speaking and writing. The other strategies are not commonly used by the majority of either the English or the non-English majors. This might lead to the inability of students to use appropriate vocabulary in their performance.

Table 7. Frequencies and percentages of vocabulary strategies followed to make the learned vocabulary part of their repertoire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary strategies</th>
<th>Non English-major</th>
<th>English-major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>To make the new vocabulary part of my repertoire</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I keep lists of learned words and revise them regularly.</em></td>
<td>24 60%</td>
<td>51 65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I use newly learned words as much as possible when I write or speak.</em></td>
<td>16 40%</td>
<td>32 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I write the new words of flash cards and hang on the wall.</em></td>
<td>36 90%</td>
<td>69 87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I keep a vocabulary notebook and review continuously.</em></td>
<td>25 63%</td>
<td>52 66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I make vocabulary cards and study them every now and then.</em></td>
<td>34 85%</td>
<td>57 72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The current study aimed to investigate online vocabulary learning strategies used by Saudi EFL students who study English at the University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia, during COVID-19 outbreak. The current study results showed that English majors used vocabulary learning strategies to get the meaning of the new vocabulary and study the learned vocabulary. Concerning strategies to make the learned vocabulary as part of their repertoire, the study did not find significant differences among the variables (major/non-major, high grade/low grade, and male/female). Students reported that they did not highly use strategies of asking teachers, classmates, and friends. However, they used bilingual dictionaries, Google Translate, or they guessed the meaning. This might be attributed to online learning during the pandemic, which encouraged self-learning. It was found that the students of English and non-English majors were
different with regard to using strategies to get the meaning of new vocabulary and to study them, but not with regard to strategies to keep the learned ones as part of their repertoire.

The researchers recommend a further study to investigate the impact of online learning on self-regulated learning as learning vocabulary online might enhance online self-regulated learning. The researchers also recommend that EFL students be taught vocabulary learning strategies in the university’s first semester. Furthermore, they recommend that students be taught how to use dictionaries and know what dictionaries provide users with.

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Challenges and Benefits of Web 2.0-based Learning among International Students of English during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Cyprus

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Abstract
There has been an increased reliance on Web-based learning, particularly in higher learning institutions, due to the outbreak of Covid-19. However, learners require knowledge and skills on how to use Web 2.0-based learning tools. Thus, there is a need to focus on how Web-based tools can be used to enhance learning outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges and benefits of Web 2.0-based learning among international students of English as a Second Language (ESL) at the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), North Cyprus during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data were collected from a purposive sample of 15 ESL learners at EMU using focus group interviews. The interview data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings showed that challenges faced by international students of English at EMU during the Covid-19 pandemic include inadequate knowledge of technology and technical issues such as poor internet connectivity, inability to upload large files, and loss of password. Additionally, the findings showed that Web 2.0 technologies can help the students to enhance collaborative learning, independent learning, flexible learning, as well as competence in using technology for learning purposes. It was envisaged that this study would be beneficial to the management of higher learning institutions, educationists, and students in general. However, this study is limited to international ESL students at EMU with a few participants. To provide generalizable outcomes, further studies may adopt a quantitative or mixed-method approach.

Keyword: Covid-19, Cyprus, ESL learners, international students, learning culture, Web 2.0

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid.22
Introduction

The emergence of modern communication technology has transformed the way learning activities are conducted (AlJeraisy, Mohammad, Fayyoumi, & Alrashideh, 2015; Martinez-Lopez, Yot-Domínguez, & Trigo, 2020; Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013; Pachler, & Daly, 2009). Today, learning becomes possible through web 2.0 technologies by utilizing various digital devices to blend the learning system (Abdul Rahman, Azmi, & Hassan, 2020; Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2018). These new technologies support learning through Learning Management System (LMS) tools such as student portals, or Content Management Systems (CMS) such as Moodle, MOOCs, Blackboard, and Muse (Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2018; Wang, Chen, & Khan, 2014). However, learners require knowledge and skills on how to use these Web 2.0-based learning support facilities (Hursen, 2020). Students of tertiary institutions struggle to acquire skills and awareness on how to use the new learning system (Rahimi, van den Berg, & Veen, 2015).

Learning, especially in higher educational institutions, can take place virtually, on a distance space, online and offline via communication technologies, and thus learning becomes a flexible commodity (Collis & Moonen, 2002; Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020). The learning environment has witnessed tremendous improvements in the 21st century with a more complex future (Rahimi et al., 2015). This is because educational scientists continuously attempt to develop and manage more learning tools to support the post-industrial forms of knowledge acquisition around the globe (Warschauer, 2007; Aljawarneh, 2020). These learning tools consist of Learning Management Systems (LMS), such as portals, and Content Management Systems (CMS), such as Blackboard and Moodle (Warschauer, 2007; Abdul Rahman et al., 2020). In essence, communication technology has transformed learning positively by enhancing learning outcomes (Abdullahi, Rouyan, Almetairi, Hassan, 2020; Abdul Rahman et al., 2020).

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, the educational system has deteriorated remarkably across the globe (Mishra, Gupta, & Shree, 2020; Hoq, 2020). As such, there has been an increased reliance on Web-based learning, especially in higher learning institutions (Mahyoob, 2020; Martinez, 2020; Hoq, 2020). Thus, there is a need to focus on how Web-based tools can solve this disruption in education and their possible challenges (Hoq, 2020). However, there is inadequate research on challenges faced by students in using Web 2.0 for learning purposes (Rasheed, Kamsin, & Abdullah, 2020). Also, very few studies focused on challenges faced by international students, particularly learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) in using Web 2.0 for learning among purposes (Prasad, Maag, Redestowicz; Hoe, 2018). Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges and benefits of Web 2.0-based learning among ESL international students at the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), North Cyprus during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study aims to address the following research questions.

1. What are the challenges faced by international ESL students in using Web 2.0 tools during the Covid-19 pandemic at the selected institution?
2. How do international ESL students benefit from the use of Web 2.0 tools during the Covid-19 pandemic at the selected institution?
**Literature Review**

**Web 2.0 Learning Tools**

Generally, Web 2.0 technologies refer to websites that emphasize user-generated content, ease of use, participatory culture, and interoperability for end-users (Bugawa, & Mirzal, 2018). Web 2.0 tools include Social Networking Sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, and blogs, and wikis used for discussion and sharing of educational content, as well as synchronized tools that are openly accessible, such as Google Apps and Dropbox (Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2018; Wang, Chen, & Khan, 2014). These accessible resources “have allowed people with common interests to meet, share ideas, and collaborate in innovative ways” (Nedeva & Dineva, 2012, p. 471).

The implementation of Web 2.0 tools in higher learning institutions promote engagement and interaction among students and thus creates “a more learner-centered learning environment” (Wang, 2010, p. 842). According to Nedeva and Dineva (2012), flexible and collaborative communication tools are used to develop a content-specific platform. Besides, Al-Samarraie and Saeed (2018) noted that Web 2.0 tools “are particularly used to support group members in editing online documents, along with exchanging thoughts and insights related to the subject matter” (p. 6). Thus, instructors are encouraged to inspire their students to employ Web 2.0 tools for formal learning activities and support them to possess online learning competencies (Abdullahi, Rouyan, Noor, & Bashir, 2018; Bugawa & Mirzal, 2018; Wang, 2010).

Most of the commonly used LMS have facilities that offer different forms of communication for collaborative knowledge construction (Brown, 2016; Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2018). Students could access online materials and track their progress irrespective of where they reside (Wang et al., 2014). Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and WhatsApp were found to be the most commonly used tools for collaborative learning purposes (Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2018). Other tools such as multimedia and web platforms were found to be effective in improving teaching and learning experience (Kakosimos, 2015). Specifically, studies found that various tools, such as podcast and videocast, are successfully used to improve students’ learning outcomes (Pinto-Llorente, Sánchez-Gómez, García-Peñalvo, & Casillas-Martín, 2017; Sarfo & Yidana, 2016). Various learning tools are combined to support learning activities to face the challenges of today's higher education (Hoic-Bozic, Dlab, & Mornar, 2015).

**Challenges and Benefits of Web 2.0-based Learning**

Several studies have investigated the use of Web-based tools in the learning environment (Hoq, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Palaigeorgiou & Grammatikopouloou, 2016; Rasheed et al., 2020). These studies found that the integration of Web 2.0 tools into education has both challenges and benefits. For example, Palaigeorgiou and Grammatikopouloou (2016) identified the challenges and benefits of Web 2.0 learning in traditional learning settings using interviews with teachers. The study found that Web 2.0 learning activities help students learn how to collaborate, create digital content, reflect on their thoughts, extend the time-space of educational dialogue, and promote trust between students and teachers. However, the findings showed that students face various challenges in using Web 2.0 for learning activities, such as the amount of time and effort required, overestimation of students’ skills, and lack of training opportunities.
Moreover, Rasheed et al. (2020) argued that the integration of technology into education has brought some level of unease to students, instructors, and institutions. For example, students must have “self-regulation skills and technological competence since they are required to manage and carry out their studies independent of their instructor, at their own pace, and also using online technology out of their face-to-face sessions” (p. 2). According to Rasheed et al., challenges faced by students and teachers in using Web 2.0 include inadequate knowledge of technology and self-regulation challenges. Additionally, motivations and background knowledge create great opportunities for students to engage with technologies and develop digital literacy. In this regard, Prasad et al. (2018) measured the extent to which international students develop digital competence. According to the findings, students have significant motivation to engage with unfamiliar technology.

The use of Web 2.0 can be challenging to some international students due to digital culture differences (Ozad & Barkan, 2004; Vesisenaho, Voltonen, Kukkenen, & Anu, 2010). Students require skills to use Web 2.0 technologies for learning (Meyers et al., 2007) and they must devote much time to familiarize themselves with the new technology (Prensky, 2003). This is because Web 2.0-based learning is mainly student-centered (Ozad & Barkan, 2004; Hoic-Bozic et al., 2015). Research shows that the integration of Web 2.0 into the traditional learning approach can help students to develop collaborative learning (Abdul Rahman et al., 2020). As such, digital literacy becomes paramount as the facilities prove effective in developing positive learning outcomes (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Hoic-Bozic et al., 2016).

A few studies focused mainly on Web-based learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, Mishra et al. (2020) examined the use of online teaching-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in India. The study found that the Covid-19 pandemic situation has caused lots of destruction to education and it is challenging to manage online tools for learning, particularly on a long-term basis. Similarly, Hoq (2020) used a survey method to investigate teachers’ preference for various e-learning tools during the Covid-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia. According to the findings, teachers opined that e-learning tools “save time and energy in editing and modernizing of educational materials” (p. 462). However, some teachers do not have the self-confidence to meet the technical demands.

More specifically, Mahyoob (2020) used a survey method to determine the challenges faced by English language learners during the Covid-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia. The findings showed that learners of English face technical, academic, and communication challenges. According to Mahyoob, “most learners are not satisfied with continuing online learning as they could not fulfill the expected progress in language learning performance” (p. 351). Similarly, Mouchantaf (2020) found that teachers “mainly complained about students missing lectures, technical complications, and a lack of institutional help and training” (p. 1264).

Furthermore, the integration of Web 2.0 facilities in traditional learning components have raised concerns, “but there has been no clear understanding of the challenges that exist in the online component of blended learning” (Rasheed, et al., 2020, p. 1). Ignatow and Robinson (2017) argued that relatively low economic status may also lead to low digital competence. It is uncertain whether the families of international students, particularly from developing countries, can be classified as middle class as understood in Western countries because comparisons are
complex (Banerjee & Duflo, 2008). However, there is inadequate research on challenges faced by students in using Web 2.0 for learning purposes (Rasheed et al., 2020). Nevertheless, some studies reported these challenges from teachers’ perspectives alone (Brown, 2016; Hoq, 2020). Also, very few studies focused on challenges faced by international students in using Web 2.0 for learning purposes (Prasad et al., 2018).

Methodology

Design

This study employed a qualitative method in which focus group interviews were used to explore the challenges and benefits of Web 2.0-based learning among international ESL students at EMU, Cyprus. According to Jackson (1998), focus group interviews are flexible and relatively easy to conduct. Through focus group interviews, a wide range of themes can be obtained as comments from one participant may generate responses from others (McLafferty, 2004; Jackson, 1998).

Instrument

This study employed semi-structured interviews with predetermined questions that focus on the challenges and benefits of Web-based learning during the Covid-19 pandemic among international students at EMU, Cyprus. The interview was conducted face-to-face with the participants. Interviews are considered powerful tools for information gathering as participants are allowed to express their views freely on a specific topic (O'Reilly, 2005). The respondents were allowed to freely express their views throughout the interview process. According to Sewell (2008), semi-structured interviews reduce bias when different responses are compared. Also, Creswell (2012) explained that semi-structured interviews generate information that might not be expected by the researchers.

Participants

The data were collected from a purposive sample of 15 international students of English at EMU, Cyprus. EMU has more than 17,500 students from almost 110 countries around the world (EMU, 2021). Generally, 15 participants are sufficient for focus group interviews (Goss & Leinbach, 1996). The data collection was performed by a co-author of this study who is part of the students’ community. The students were selected based on their willingness to participate in the research.

Procedure of Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The analysis was performed using the four stages proposed by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007): Generating natural units of meaning; labeling, categorizing, and ordering the natural units; constructing narratives; and interpretation. Cohen et al. (2007) explained that analysis of qualitative is certainly interpretive, unlike numerical analysis. The coding procedure consists of reading through the interview data, identifying, categorizing, and interpreting themes based on the participants’ responses.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and benefits of Web 2.0-based learning among international ESL students at EMU during the Covid-19 pandemic. The students
were asked to express their feelings regarding the challenges and benefits of Web tools for learning purposes. The participants were 15 international students consisting of 10 males and 5 females from five countries. The first question aims to explore the challenges of using Web 2.0 tools among the students during the Covid-19 pandemic. These challenges are presented in Table 1 based on the students’ responses.

Table 1. Challenges of using Web 2.0 technologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Exemplary quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Based on your experience as international students, what challenges do you face in using Web 2.0 tools for learning English? | Inadequate knowledge of technology      | …because I did not use the student portal in my former school (P4)  
…during my secondary school time, we didn't have a student portal (P1)  
I did not use Moodle during my previous course (P15) |
| Poor internet connectivity                                                |                                        | …running very slow and I am facing frequent disruption (11)  
Internet connection is often down…(P2)  
I need a proper internet connection…(P7)  
…this is my problem with the lack of stable internet connection (P5) |
| Large files upload                                                        |                                        | It is not easy to upload large files…(P13)  
…as some files exceed maximum size (P11) |
| Loss of login password                                                    |                                        | Yes, the challenge I experienced was a password issue… (P 3)  
the password created for you will suddenly refuse to work…(P14) |
| How can these challenges be addressed?                                   | Training and orientation                | The university should organize orientation programs…(P1)  
…and there should be orientations (P11)  
…students need to be oriented (P12)  
Most of us need to be trained (P14) |
|                                                                            | Boosting internet connectivity          | …internet connection must be resilient (P7)  
A better internet connection can ease our tension (P11)  
…so we need better WiFi connectivity (P13) |

Note: P = Participants

As shown in Table 1, the emerging themes suggest that challenges faced by international ESL students during the Covid-19 pandemic at EMU include inadequate knowledge of technology, poor internet connectivity, inability to upload large files, and loss of password. These findings indicate that some students faced challenges due to insufficient knowledge of using Web-based learning tools and technical factors. The use of Web-based learning tools supports learners’ delivery of content. However, to use these technologies, there is a need to develop skills Additionally, the students opined that these challenges can be addressed by
providing training and orientation to international students on how to use Web 2.0 technologies more effectively. They also suggested that internet connectivity should be improved.

Moreover, the poor internet connectivity and accessibility cannot be overlooked as the students’ online activities are interrupted by low-speed internet. Also, technical competence is of paramount importance because utilization and gaining access to online materials depends largely on an individual’s literacy and competence level. Lack of competency with learning tools can be problematic and may obstruct students’ progress and possible learning outcomes. The second question aims to identify the benefits of Web 2.0 technologies among international students. This information is depicted in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2. Benefits of using Web 2.0 technologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Exemplary quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on your experience as international students, what benefits do you</td>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>It’s now easy for me to team up with my colleagues and connect with lecturers (P6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gain by using Web 2.0 tools for learning English?</td>
<td></td>
<td>My interactions with colleagues become easier…(P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>I read and write at my pace (P12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>…now I have enough time to read and write (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible learning</td>
<td>…and makes me feel like a mobile learner (P14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>… here at EMU, it is flexible (P6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>…because it allows me to present my work freely (P9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other benefits do you gain from Web 2.0 tools in general?</td>
<td>Access to a variety of</td>
<td>It is indeed useful, I love it, it’s very informative… (P14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>information</td>
<td>… and a lot of things one can access online (P6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>…so I learn how to use access material and conduct research (P8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>…and therefore I become more familiar with new technology (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competence in using technology</td>
<td>It helps me develop skills for online communication (P13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: P = Participants

As presented in Table 2, the emerging themes suggest that Web 2.0 technologies can help the students enhance collaborative learning, independent reading and writing, and flexible learning. Additionally, the students believe that Web 2.0 technologies provide a wide range of information for learning purposes. They also believe that Web 2.0 tools help them develop competence in using new communication technology. These findings show that although some students face certain challenges, they still enjoy and benefit from using Web-based learning tools.

According to the findings, Web-based learning creates ample time for students to read and write. Some of the students expressed, “now I have enough time to read and write” (P3), “I read and write at my pace” (P12). They believe that the Web-based learning approach enables them to organize their own pace of study. However, this approach requires support from
instructors and the provision of learning materials for the students. This is because content delivery plays a vital role in supporting online learning experiences.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study showed that, in using Web-based learning tools, international ESL students face challenges related to inadequate knowledge of technology and technical problems such as poor internet connectivity and loss of login passwords. Nevertheless, Web 2.0 technologies benefit the students in terms of collaborative learning, independent and flexible learning, competence in using technology, as well as provision of a wide range of information for learning purposes. These findings concur with some studies on the challenges and benefits of Web-based learning tools (e.g. Mahyoob, 2020; Palaigeorgiou & Grammatikopoulou, 2016; Rasheed et al., 2020). Thus, Web-based learning tools have both challenges and benefits for international ESL students.

According to the findings of this study, some students at EMU face challenges because they did not use Web 2.0 technologies, such as student portal and LMS, in their previous institutions. One of the participants says “during my secondary school time, we didn't have a student portal” (P1). This outcome suggests that prior technical knowledge creates great opportunities for students to engage with technologies and develop digital competence and literacy. Ignatow and Robinson (2017) argued that relatively low economic status may also lead to low digital competence. Additionally, “mastery of digital skills is a precondition for the acquisition of informational advantage” (p. 4). It is uncertain whether the families of international students, particularly from developing countries, can be classified as middle class as understood in Western countries because comparisons are complex (Banerjee & Duflo, 2008).

Moreover, the traditional learning process is being mediated and blended by Web 2.0 technologies. As a result, learners were termed “digital native” as their brains move toward accommodating the new communication technologies on which they spend most of their time (Prensky, 2003). Students’ competencies in using the traditional approach could help them to acquire blended learning skills (Meyers et al., 2013; Warschauer, 2007). Through Web-based learning, students not only require skills but also norms and practices on how to manage learning technologies. As such, students need the competence to learn through the online environment and manipulate digital platforms such as LMS and CMS (Meyers et al., 2013).

The Web-based learning approach involves technical activities for solving learning problems that are student-centered (Hoic-Bozic et al., 2016). Students receive learning materials managed by institutions from their respective faculties, and departments (Ozad & Barkan, 2004). Thus, institutions partially support course instructors, while learners interact with the instructors. The integration of technologies aims to build stretchy learning atmospheres and develop collaborative learning (Abdul Rahman et al., 2020). This approach could be a challenge, especially to some international students, due to differences in learning culture and background (Vesisenaho et al., 2010).

Even though some international students have prior technical knowledge of Web 2.0 learning tools, there is a need for technological competencies that might influence their use of the facilities at their host institutions. In this regard, Warschauer (2007) argued that to face the
current global challenges, institutions must equip learners with e-learning technical skills. This is because digital literacy becomes paramount as the e-learning facilities prove effective in developing positive learning outcomes (Hoic-Bozic et al., 2016). Some of the students suggested that the management of EMU should be organizing orientation programs for new international students on the use of web2.0-based learning facilities, such as student portal and Moodle. A student states “the university should organize orientation programs” (P1). Digital learning aims to help students overcome learning problems and develop their skills (Prensky, 2003).

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges and benefits of Web 2.0-based learning among international ESL students at EMU during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study revealed that the students face challenges related to technical problems and lack of prior technological competence. However, Web-based learning helps the students to enhance collaborative learning, independent learning, flexible learning, and competence in using Web-based learning tools. These findings indicate that although international students of EMU face challenges, they benefit from using Web-based learning tools.

There is an inadequacy or lack of research into the challenges and benefits of web 2.0-based learning among international ESL students, especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Therefore, this study advances our understanding of Web-based learning among international ESL students as well as its challenges and benefits during the Covid-19 pandemic. These challenges can be addressed through training and orientation programs on the use of Web 2.0-based learning tools, particularly for new students. This objective can be achieved through the collective efforts of educational institutions and relevant authorities. It was envisaged that this study would be beneficial to the management of higher learning institutions, educationists, and students in general. This qualitative research is limited to international ESL students at EMU with a small sample of participants. Therefore, further research may use a mixed-method approach to provide generalizable outcomes.

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Indonesian Freshmen’s Challenges in Collaborative Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Reflection of a Procedural Writing Class

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Abstract
One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world of education is the implementation of online learning. Almost all teaching/learning activities must be changed and adjusted with the virtual classes. One among other activities commonly done in an English language education program is group work or collaborative work between or among students. Due to the pandemic situation, this particular activity should also be done online. This study aims to describe freshmen’s perspectives on collaborative work done in a Procedural Writing class. The teacher of the writing class randomly paired the students to work collaboratively. There is only one research question in this study: What challenges do Procedural Writing students experience in doing collaborative learning during the pandemic COVID 19? Data were derived from reflections that fourteen (14) Procedural Writing students at an English Language Education Program (ELEP), UKSW, Indonesia, wrote in the sixth week of Semester II/2020-2021 academic year, and from interviews with two participants who said that they were not happy with collaborative learning. Findings showed that in general, the freshmen felt that collaborative work helped them write better, they got more ideas, helped in their grammar, and exchanged knowledge. Only two students felt unhappy due to misunderstanding and ideas which were not delivered successfully. This study will hopefully be useful for writing teachers, practitioners in education, as well as students so that they will have a wider horizon of what writing students feel and experience in collaborative learning during this pandemic era.

Keywords: freshmen, challenges, collaborative learning, Procedural Writing, COVID-19, pandemic

Introduction

Online learning is a massive revolutionary in many companies. Up to 90% of corporations use online learning by the year 2020. In 1995, it was only 4%. The E-learning market is predicted to grow another 8% in 2026 (Anna, 2019). The world has been drastically changing in many aspects for the past year. It was the outbreak of Coronavirus which caused all these changes. The world seemed to start a new era in which the digital and virtual world is now rising and becoming the top priority. The world of education is not an exception. All teaching/learning processes and activities have shifted from offline to online ones.

According to Higley (2018), online learning environments are different from traditional classroom learning opportunities. Online learning fosters additional learning experiences where learners can interact, collaborate, and take ownership of their own learning. Cooperative work has also changed in its form. It cannot be done directly anymore. Students have to meet virtually. Many teachers still assign students to work collaboratively despite the pandemic COVID because cooperative learning including group work can give many benefits to students. Laal and Ghodsi (2012) mentioned that through collaborative learning, students learn to solve a problem, complete a task, or complete a project.

Considering the positive values of collaborative work, like understanding and appreciating others’ opinions as well as negotiation of meaning, the researcher perceived the need to conduct this present study. The rationale underlying this study is that it is necessary to describe and share what freshmen’s perspectives are about collaborative learning during pandemic COVID. This study will hopefully add its value and significance as it will shed a light to research under the area of collaborative learning and enrich more literature in that field.

This study is guided by one research question: What challenges do Procedural Writing students experience in doing collaborative learning during the pandemic COVID 19? This research is therefore aimed to describe what Procedural Writing students experience in doing collaborative learning during the pandemic COVID 19. It is hoped that the results of this study can help English teachers in the future to implement and maximize the use of collaborative learning in the classroom to improve students’ procedural essays. Hopefully, EFL writing teachers will still see the benefits of collaborative learning. Students can hopefully feel the advantages as well.

Literature Review

Online Learning

Over the past year, since the outbreak of Coronavirus, many changes have happened in the field of education. One way to keep the teaching and learning process going on is through online learning. Online or distance learning has been very popular these days. Almost all systems are shifting from direct or face-to-face activities to online ones. All learners should move to an area where all teaching-learning processes are digitally and virtually done. Students of all levels of education have to adapt and adjust themselves to this so-called virtual distant education.

Rudghhoff (2006)-mentioned that online education or learning plays an important role in language learning and teaching (as cited in Cinganotto, 2019). In line with Rudghhoff, Song, Rice, and Oh (2019) also argued that online learning environments can be well understood as a
phenomenon of many facets or simply said, a phenomenon affected by many aspects. Purarjomandlangrudi and Chen (2019) believed that online education is an educational medium that enables both learners and teachers to interact with one another. Nonetheless, these learners and teachers are located in different geographical locations. They can meet virtually at the same time, or at different times.

Student interaction becomes one of the most important factors related to online learning, according to Berg (2019). Teachers should ensure that all students are active and engaged, can create their own knowledge, and can reach a high level of achievement. Interaction in distance learning has been divided into three categories. They are interacting with content; interaction with the instructor; and interaction with peers (Moore, 1989, as cited in Berg, 2019). Bouhnik and Marcus (2006) added the fourth category of interaction. It is interaction with the system (as cited in Berg, 2019).

Just like what a famous saying mentions, every coin has two sides; it means that everything has its strengths and weaknesses. Online education is not an exception. Hameed, Tair, O'Leary and Kaynge (2018) claimed that there are many challenges of conducting online distance learning. A potential lack of the required technology is the first challenge. The examples are Internet access, laptops, or desktop computers. This further deals with the fees of subscribing to these online learning templates. Then, there can also be problems around the need to have technical support, and logistic issues. These technical problems can cause bad internet access. In turn, it will affect the functioning of the virtual team. The choice of an experienced online platform must, therefore, be considered carefully.

Secondly, Hameed, Tair, O'Leary, and Kaynge (2018) explained that there may be ethical issues about the protection of confidentiality in these sessions. This requires knowledge of the relevant professional requirements, like the tutor team, for example. Other than that, the student-teacher relationship has traditionally been trademarked by direct face-to-face or direct contact and being present at the same time and place, that is, in the classrooms surrounded by walls. Consequently, learners and educators may be less satisfied with online learning. For these reasons, the concept of blended learning, which is an integration of online learning with the face-to-face learning experience, has been developed to overcome the limitations of stand-alone online or face-to-face learning and has been found effective and applicable in various settings.

The third challenge is that all kinds of distance online learning programs must understand and support the existence of the training provision as well as arrangements, both in the classroom and in the workplace. This means liaison and cooperation with the training providers and institutions are required. Liauw, Huang, and Cheng (2007) added that the base of learning activity in online learning is learner autonomy and interactive learning actions (as cited in Omar, Hassan & Atan, 2012).

Since the first quarter of 2020, the world “has been forced” to apply the online teaching-learning process due to the pandemic. Whether they were ready or not or whether they liked it or not, they had to shift from the ordinary face-to-face Teaching/Learning Process (TLP) to the virtual, digital one. Four-wall classrooms have been substituted by virtual classrooms without walls. There has been a massive change from a normal offline TLP to the online one. With these
great changes, all parties, the government, teachers, parents, as well as students have to adapt to the new system. All learning activities have been designed in such a way that they can be done virtually. This includes collaborative work which should also be done online. Not much research has been done in this area, which therefore creates a gap between the ideal condition of collaborative learning and the reality experienced by foreign language learners. Discussed below is the implementation of online collaborative learning during the pandemic.

**Collaborative Learning**

Working collaboratively with other people may not be easy. There can be different ideas, different opinions, as well as difficulties in interrelating ideas. Misunderstanding often happens, leading to uneasiness between and among learners. However, there are many positive sides of collaborative learning that can be explored. According to Laal and Ghodsi (2011), one benefit of using collaborative learning in the classroom is that it involves students, and they will absolutely be more actively engaged in classroom activities. Students are also “forced” to communicate and interact with others when playing games.

In spite of the benefits that can be felt from collaborative learning, there are also challenges that arise during the implementation. Firstly, all learners have different styles of learning. There are students who like to work in groups, but there are also learners who dislike it. Not everyone can work with others successfully. Secondly, students who do not like working in groups will participate less because of their lack of confidence or low self-esteem, which possibly leads to inferiority to their peer students. In order to suit the students’ characteristics, while they are still in the transitional phase from junior to senior high school and they still like to play, teachers need to be aware of the different kinds of approaches for activities in the classroom.

Laal and Ghodsi (2011) defined collaborative learning as an educational approach in teaching and learning where the learners work together in a group in order to complete a task, solve a problem, or create a product. Gerlach (1994) pointed out that collaborative learning is based on the participants’ interaction through their conversations when the learning occurs (as cited in Bishnoi, 2017). Problems, questions, or the challenge to create something all drive the group activity, and everyone is supposed to be actively participating. It a situation where two or more people learn together.

Methods like cooperative learning, group learning, peer learning, learning community, and constructive learning are often used interchangeably with collaborative learning (Campbell & Li, 2006). Collaborative learning is a kind of method that has a positive impact on students. It is a powerful tool in learning and has the potential to be used in ways that can make a great impact on classroom language learning. According to Overtoom (2001), collaborative learning has benefits in enhancing the students’ employability skills because it supports active learning and self-discovery.

Another expert, Hedge (2000), further claimed that anytime students of different performance levels work together in one group, they will be responsible for their peers’ learning process instead of merely being accountable for their own interests. In collaborative learning, the ideas and information shared by the students are a valuable learning source for every student in
the class. The interactions among the participants in a group, such as feedback or revisions, are a means of identifying strengths and weaknesses to improve performance and even to develop speaking skills. Many researchers have conducted studies on how collaborative learning provides benefits - especially in teaching speaking. However, not much has been done in the area of online collaborative learning.

Another study by Pattanpichet (2011) found a surprising fact that working in groups can grow familiarity and friendships among students. When collaborative learning is used in large classrooms such as arranging students into group work, it helps to create an atmosphere or habit of sharing knowledge. With the help of collaborative learning, students also learn to work in a team. This can help them develop their social skills which will be useful for their work environment in the future.

Higley (2018) argued that online collaborative learning should be maintained. Collaborative learning rooted in constructivism. It views learning as a process, learners actively engage in new ideas through collaborative grouping situations. Still, according to Higley, constructivism is a good theoretical framework for E-Learning considering that it guarantees that learning happens among all learners. Through collaborative learning, all learners are actively engaged.

In line with Higley, McLeod (2019) also explained the idea of constructivism. It states that learners construct meaning through active engagement with the world. They do this through experiments or real-world problem-solving. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the community plays an essential role in the process of meaning-making (as cited in McLeod, 2019). Still, according to Vygotsky the environment where children grow up will influence their way of thinking and what they think about (as cited in McLeod, 2019). Therefore, all teaching and learning is a matter of sharing and negotiating the “socially-constituted knowledge” (Vygotsky, as cited in McLeod, 2019). It is within the zone of proximal development that children and their peers construct knowledge.

Methods

This study was conducted in Semester II, 2020/2021 academic year, in English Language Education Program (ELEP), in UKSW, a private university in Central Java Indonesia. Data from this study were derived from fourteen (14) students’ reflections submitted online to a learning management system on February 20, 2021. Online interviews through WhatsApp call on March 1, 2021, were also conducted with two students. In the sixth week of the semester, after they experienced collaborative work twice with their peer students, they were asked to write their reflections on what they thought of the collaborative work in that particular class. Two students were then interviewed for the sake of data triangulation.

Participants

The participants in this study were fourteen (14) freshmen who took Procedural Writing class, group C. Their age range was between 19 and 20 years old. There were five male and nine female students. These students were in the second semester of their college years. They entered the study program in 2020. It means that since the beginning of their study up to the time the research was conducted, they had never had offline classes. Altogether there were 42 students of
parallel Procedural Writing classes. The class taught by the researcher was group C. All the students in group C were involved as research participants. The sampling technique is thus considered convenience sampling since the researcher was also the teacher of group C.

**Instruments**

This current study only used two research instruments, the first one is guided reflections submitted on February 20, 2021, and the other is online interview protocol via WhatsApp call on March 1, 2021. There is only one guiding question for the reflection: *How did you feel about the collaborative work with your peer students? Was it easy? Was it difficult?*

The second instrument is the in-depth interview. The interview questions are confirmation for unclear statements, starting with *What do you mean by…please explain.* All participants were allowed to answer either in English or Indonesian, both in the reflections and online interviews. All of them used English for the reflections, and Indonesian for the interviews, considering that this was to avoid misunderstanding. Besides that, they did not have to think of the English grammar and vocabulary.

**Research Procedures**

Procedural Writing class is a compulsory subject to be taken by the second-semester students of an ELEP, in a private university in Central Java. It is the second writing class that they have to take, after the Creative Writing class. It is a writing course in which students are taught to write procedural essays. The objective of the course is to make students able to write pieces of writing showing series of procedures (ELEP, 2021). Altogether, they have to write four procedural essays; the first three of which are written collaboratively. The first writing that the participants had to make was one paragraph only, the second a three-paragraph essay, the third a five-paragraph essay and the fourth was an individual five-paragraph essay. The fourteen participants in this study were second-semester freshmen.

**Results**

Throughout the semester, the participants had to write pieces of writing collaboratively. Data were taken after they wrote their second essays, which means that they had experienced writing essays twice with their peers. All of the participants admitted that they had online discussions via WhatsApp messages. Shown below is Table one consisting of the fourteen Procedural Writing students’ opinions on collaborative learning.

**Table 1. Procedural students’ opinions on collaborative learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Initials</th>
<th>Students’ Opinions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (M)</td>
<td>First, there was no problem. We were having an online discussion. The problem dealt with a cellular network and the ideas that we had, but everything was still going on well till the work was done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (M)</td>
<td>I could have more ideas. However, we had problems finding time to work together. It took more time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (M)</td>
<td>I enjoy it. Though we discuss online, we don’t have any significant problem. Sometimes, there is a problem with the network of our mobiles. Besides that,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sometimes there are ideas that cannot be conveyed because we don't meet face to face. However, in terms of the division of tasks, sharing of opinions, and giving suggestions, we don't have any problem.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D (F)</td>
<td>I am happy to collaborate with my partner. We've been through a lot of repeating sentences, checking them again, and again. Sometimes we have problems with the network. We feel it difficult, but we are happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (M)</td>
<td>I feel happy because I work with a friend I have known before. We can discuss things and share our opinions comfortably. However, we have a little problem in deciding the topic, but we have a good discussion about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (F)</td>
<td>I feel full of the spirit because there is fun and we can share our own opinions and combine them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (F)</td>
<td>It's been a unique experience for me. We discussed things through group chats or virtual meetings. It's hard to communicate that way because sometimes people misunderstand us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H (F)</td>
<td>I find it enjoyable, we can share opinions when writing essays. Working with friends can add relationships and tell each other if there are errors in writing the essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (F)</td>
<td>I feel happy and it helps me to do the assignment. I like it and I'm happy because now I have a close friend. I feel lonely doing an assignment alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J (F)</td>
<td>Happy and grateful because I can make a good relationship with my friend during the collaborative work, I also divided the work with my friend, so we could finish faster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K (F)</td>
<td>Sometimes there is misunderstanding and confusion in choosing the right words for our essay, thank God we got feedback from the lecturer, so we can fix our draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L (M)</td>
<td>I have good discussions with my friend. We always exchange ideas for our tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M (F)</td>
<td>It's very good. I can share my opinions and we can share knowledge and opinions about the materials and assignments given.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (F)</td>
<td>I have good cooperation with my partner. My partner always did his part fast and enthusiastically. I have no complaints about him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the online interviews with Student G and Student K on March 1, 2021, both explained that the misunderstanding happened because they used written texts to communicate. Sometimes their partners did not use any punctuations at all which made them unable to get the points. “We just discussed things via WA messages. I did not know my friend’s intonation in “speaking”. One day, when editing our essay, my partner misunderstood me and edited another part, not the one I asked her to,” Student K stated. Student G added, “Maybe if we meet face-to-face, the situation would be different. There could be chemistry between us.” Further analysis will be presented in the discussion section.
Discussion

As previously mentioned, students were asked to write a reflection in the sixth week of the semester. The answers were summarized in Table one. From Table one, it can be clearly seen that 12 out of 14 students (85.71%) felt happy with the collaborative work in writing. Only Student G and Student K (14.29%) seemed unhappy with the collaborative work. These two students were good students. They always achieved high in their courses. Unfortunately, their partners in writing happened to be their peer students who were less able than they were. Indeed, this could be a problem when the students working collaboratively were not compatible in terms of proficiency. Andriessen et al. (2003), as cited in Noroozi, Weinberger, Biemans, Mulder, and Mohammad Chizari (2012), mentioned that differences in positions or incompatible views while learners are constructing counter-arguments might potentially trigger socio-cognitive conflicts.

Dealing with time or schedule clash, there is only one participant, Student B, who admitted that he had problems finding the right time with his partner. This is in line with what Tamm (2019) and Anna (2020) stated, that one of the disadvantages of online learning is E-Learning requires strong time management skills. Included in time management are the arrangement, organization, making of schedules, and plan. It is about someone’s time with the goal of achieving both effective work and output. This also means allocation distribution which is deliberate and the structuring of time among competing demands. All this is based on priority. People cannot store time and its accessibility cannot be enlarged over twenty-four hours (Adebayo & Omojola, 2015, as cited in Tambaya, 2019).

Four participants, Student E, Student H, Student I, and Student J mentioned that they were happy with the collaborative work since they could make new friends. These students were from the 2020 class year who never met face-to-face before. For them, it was a special blessing to have new friends and they could get close to these new partners. Student I showed her contentment dealing with this matter, “I feel happy and it helps me to do the assignment. I like it and I’m happy because now I have a close friend. I feel lonely to do an assignment alone.”

Getting a chance to share knowledge is another reason for liking collaborative learning. As many as seven students (50%) felt glad because they could share knowledge as well as opinions with their partners. These are Student B, Student C, Student E, Student F, Student H, Student L, and Student M. This was also stated by Hedge (2000). She mentioned that that anytime students of different performance levels work together in one group, they will be responsible for their peers’ learning process instead of merely accountable for their own interests. In collaborative learning, the ideas and information shared by the students are a valuable learning source for every student in the class.

There is another opinion of the participant dealing with English structure. One student mentioned that she was helped in terms of grammar. This was stated by Student D, “I am happy to collaborate with my partner. We’ve been through a lot of repeating sentences, checking them again, and again. Sometimes we have problems with the network. We feel it difficult, but we are happy.” A study conducted by Ghorbani & Nezamoshari’e (2012) on 62 female freshmen majoring in different fields like Law, Accounting, and Economics at Ashkhane Distance Learning University, Ashkhane, Iran, also found that collaborative learning improved both high as well as low achievers. All these respondents were native speakers of Persian.
Problems with the cellular network were experienced by Student A, Student C, and Student D. This is a very common problem experienced by many students who are doing online learning. Caballé, Xhafa, and Barolli (2021) asserted that modern mobile collaborative learning environments have to provide advanced enablement for the distribution of learning activities. The necessary functionalities and learning resources should also be provided to all participants, regardless of where the participants and resources are located, and whether this location is static or dynamic. However, all the participants in this present study stayed in their hometowns all over Indonesia. In some parts, internet network availability was still unstable. Dealing with internet data plans, Efriana (2021) explained that even though the internet is in students’ hands, they still face difficulty accessing the internet network because of the areas where they live. A study conducted by Nashruddin, Alam, and Tanasy (2020), as cited in Efriana (2021), found that some students live in remote rural areas which are not covered by the internet. In addition, their cellular network is sometimes unstable. This is caused by the geographical location which is far from the signal coverage. This becomes a problem that happens to many students who take online learning. This results in less effective implementation of online learning.

Besides data from the reflections, four students were also interviewed. From Participants E, J, H, and I’s answers about friendship, it could be seen that collaborative work can become a kind of “platform” for these freshmen to make friends. This is in line with a study done by Pattanpichet (2011). He found a surprising fact that working in groups can grow familiarity and friendships among students. When collaborative learning is used in large classrooms such as arranging students into group work, it helps to create a “knowledge-sharing atmosphere”. With the help of collaborative learning, students also learn to work in a team, and this can help in developing their social skills for the work environment in the future.

Conclusion
As previously mentioned, there is only one research question addressed in this study, that is, What challenges do Procedural Writing students experience in doing collaborative learning during the pandemic COVID 19? From the discussion above, there are several conclusions that can be drawn. First, in both online and offline situations, collaborative learning is necessary to build students’ soft skills. They can learn to share ideas, opinions, knowledge, as well as information. Besides that, they could learn to express their opinions, argue, accept, and negotiate others’ opinions with good mannerism. Secondly, collaborative learning is good to build good relationships between and among students. EFL teachers should think of various ways of assigning students to do collaborative activities including group and pair work.

There are however some limitations of this current study. This study was limited in the number of participants. Future researchers can have more participants involving more students and employing more research instruments for data triangulation. Future studies can also be conducted on different levels of writing classes with different levels of students like semaphores or third-year students. This study hopefully can add useful insights both for teachers and students of writing in general, particularly of Procedural Writing class.

The pedagogical implications of this study are stated as follows. It is time that EFL teachers, not only at the tertiary level but also at the secondary level, think of online collaborative activities which are suitable for their students. All activities should ideally be
adjusted with the students’ condition and proficiency level. The idea is to make students learn from one another during this pandemic without any pressure. The group should work together for the betterment of all group members. It is just like what Phil Jackson mentions, “The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team” (Alexander, 2017, p. 1).

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Formation of the Culture of Working with Information in the Conditions of Distance Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract
The main purpose of the study predetermines the main issue of the article: to show the importance of formation of a culture of working with information among students during distance learning, which means the ability to evaluate, perceive information, prevent manipulation, distinguish truth from falsehood. The main task is to assess the existing and desired level of this competence, to develop an organizational model of its formation which consists of the following components: goals and objectives, pedagogical conditions and evaluation criteria. The model was implemented simultaneously at the Drahomanov National Pedagogical University and National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute” by teachers of humanities in experimental and control groups (16 people) in three stages: ascertaining, formative and final. A questionnaire and a self-assessment map of the formation of the culture of working with information were developed for the ascertaining stage; purposeful work with students was conducted (special tasks, discussion conversations, discussions) at the formative stage the results before and after the experiment were compared at the final stage in particular. Positive dynamics in the experimental group was noted, the average rate of formation increased. The proposed evaluation criteria - motivational, cognitive and activity ones have demonstrated practical value. It is advisable to recommend their use at other faculties. It is concluded that the organizational model is effective. The prospect of the study is the scientific substantiation of the implementation of the model among a wider range of students and the development of a distance specialized course.

Keywords: culture of working with information, distance learning, educational process, media culture, pedagogical conditions, students.

Introduction

Proper understanding of the information necessary to form knowledge is extremely important. Moreover, it is also a key point in the preparation of homework and performing independent creative and research work in conditions of distance learning. Considering scientific sources, everything is clear: here the facts are reliable, confirmed and substantiated. If you need to use media materials, there might be problems, because there are too many fakes, misinformation, propaganda and manipulative texts. Such information is inaccurate. It requires additional verification, assessment of contexts, scientific basis or explanation. As Plakhta (2017) says, “unfortunately, we all consume fakes to some extent. However, to encounter manipulation does not mean to believe in it. It’s important to be able to recognize media manipulation that can be encountered anywhere” (p. 1).

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged university education around the world. It transformed pedagogical activity and intensified innovative processes in the organization of education, forced to look for alternative models of cooperation between teachers and students, made distance learning to be the main educational mode. There was a replacement of interactive, personality-oriented traditional classroom learning, in which the teacher had more opportunities to explain the incomprehensible things and get a face-to-face reaction from students, to online education with maximum use of the Internet (involving various web servers, platforms, resources and social networks). Everything seems to be fine: modernizing education is just in time, because the mobile and global world requires a change in management and learning, improving learning opportunities even when, under certain conditions, the student can not be actually present in the classroom. Technology makes it possible to do it. Therefore, we appreciate it. However, having our own teaching experience at the university, we note that distance learning requires a teacher and student to be more focused when working with information. When discussing how to teach English, there are also important points: understanding the terms, the authenticity of the material, where it is placed and if it is translated correctly; if the information is authentic, how to interpret vocabulary and jargonisms properly, and, of course, checking the facts to avoid manipulation by substituting concepts.

The culture of working with information as competence in media society is extremely important. Information flows are growing rapidly every day. There are many unreliable, unverified, obviously fake, as well as purposefully manipulative texts among the array of information. Being incompetent, it is easy to get confused and not to distinguish if it is the truth or lie. There are a lot of destructive sources of information on the Internet. The problem is complicated by the fact that in conditions of distance learning teachers often give students the task to process media material independently and to create their own text because they realize that it is interesting, and they can be encouraged to study the subject in such way. It is extremely important to motivate future professionals to treat information responsibly, check it in several sources, determine manipulative and propaganda narratives. According to the Eismunt (2016), “The use of fact-checking, i.e. verification of allegations for completeness, accuracy and manipulation, does not only protects society from lies but also helps to develop critical thinking among people” (p.1).
Literature Review

The issue of media culture, the culture of working with information has recently become very relevant. The area of research interests includes media campaigns, wars, manipulations, the basics of media culture, the role and importance of the pedagogical process in the formation of the culture of information production and consumption. Issues of media culture and media literacy were investigated by many foreign researchers, such as Buckingham (2003); Jolls & Wilson (2014); Schultz-Jones (2016); Adams (2018); Mason, Krutka & Stoddard (2018); Bulger & Davison (2018); Torneros, Teyie, Tejedor & Pulido (2018); Cubbage (2018); Simmons (2019); McDougall (2019); Šuminas & Jastramskis (2020); Higdon (2020).

Some domestic researchers emphasize on the use of information in media campaigns as a means of war, as a technique of manipulative influence to do harm to the enemy. For example, Pocheptsov (2013) describes content wars that cover everything: both virtual and cognitive environments and they also program the media environment of a person. The model of the world forms the media flows that people use directly and indirectly. Another researcher Petryk (2009) analyzes special media campaigns and he believes it has the following features: directing or targeting a clearly defined audience; sensational, tendentious and emotional ways of discussing them.

There are similar views among scholars on the foundations of media culture in terms of socio-cultural and philosophical aspects. Blyzniuk and Kolyada (2000) note that the basis of media culture can be knowledge about the media environment, the laws of its functioning, the ability to navigate in media flows.

We agree with the idea of the importance of the pedagogical process in the formation of the culture of media production and consumption. Scientists Blystiv and Galaz (2015) note that “education is of great importance in the formation of media culture, which should form a new specialist of the media community, who has such skills as information differentiation; development of information evaluation criteria; creation of information and its use” (p.17). Another researcher Levshin (2002) believes that

achieving the goal of media culture formation is conducted in the process of solving the following tasks: the study of various sources of information; mastering the methods of analytical and synthetical processing of educational information, techniques and means of independent search of information in accordance with the tasks that arise during learning; study and application of the possibilities of the newest information technologies, etc. (p.73).

Markiv and Zarivna (2019) also speak on the formation of a culture of working with information in the educational environment through the introduction of media literacy: “Media educators are trying to find ways to teach students not to depend on the information, to consume and assimilate only relevant and necessary information” (p. 170).
Methods

The following tasks were chosen for the study:

1. To analyze the need to develop skills of a culture of working with information, proper information consumption, especially in the distance learning mode.
2. To assess the feasibility of using an organizational model for developing this competence, which includes the following components: purpose and goals; pedagogical conditions; criteria of formation.
3. To conduct a pedagogical experiment on the formation of the culture of working with information and evaluate its results.

To fulfil the tasks a set of methods was used, namely: theoretical method comprising analysis of professional literature, classification and systematization of theoretical and experimental data, theoretical modelling of the process of formation of a culture of working with information in terms of distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic; empirical methods of collecting information (questionnaires, testing, interviews, pedagogical observation, discussion of completed tasks), which contributed to the study of the state and implementation of the research problem, pedagogical experiment (ascertaining, formative, final stages) in order to test the effectiveness of the hypothesis and the effectiveness of experimental work; methods of mathematical statistics used to process the data of the pedagogical experiment, to check the probability of the obtained research results.

Participants

Drahomanov National Pedagogical University and National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute” were selected as an experimentation facility of the study. Experimental and control groups (16 students: 8 technical students, 8 humanities students) were formed. Humanities teachers simultaneously worked remotely with these groups while teaching journalism and philology.

Tools

The training was conducted remotely on the platforms: Zoom, Google meet, Moodle; digital documents circulation was used as well. A map of self-assessment of the formation of the culture of working with information (15 positions), questionnaires for checkpoints before and after the experiment, testing to identify the level of awareness of students on the need to form a culture of working with information.

Special tools: special tools were used - systematic, communicative, reflective methods, methods of survey, observation, self-assessment, content analysis, rank correlation of Spearman, Student, clarification, interpretation, dialogue, role-playing games, discussions, conversations, interviews and other techniques.

Data Collection Procedure

The study was conducted during 2020, which was a crucial point for the education system because e-learning became the only way of learning, and covered three stages of scientific and pedagogical research.
The first stage is the determination of the starting points of the research: goals and objectives, object, subject, hypothesis, research methodology; review of the literature and study of the state of development of the problem on the formation of a culture of working with information; definition, substantiation and development of methods of ascertaining and formative experiments.

The second stage is aimed at the preparation and conduct of ascertaining and formative experiments in order to study the state of formation of the culture of working with information among students.

The third stage is the analysis, generalization and systematization of the obtained empirical data and drawing conclusions.

Let's explain the key definitions for understanding the aspect of our study. Thus, generally speaking, media culture characterizes a degree of perfection of society or a certain part of it in all possible types of working with information: its receipt, accumulation, any kind of processing, creation of new qualitative information, its transfer and practical use (Shelestova, 2016). The basis of media campaigns is the purposeful use of information messages, manipulation buttons, distribution of topics, fakes, the substitution of concepts, misinformation, etc. They have become a means of media war and manipulative technologies. A conscious desire to verify information provides the formation of critical thinking skills, the ability to distinguish truth from lie and withstand media hype, and also to be very responsible in the choice and analysis of media resources. All these features are included in the concept of “media culture” which means conscious, humane and honest use of the system of stable value orientations, beliefs and qualitative characteristics of professional standards within working with information. In fact, this concept determines the content of awareness. When preparing the article for writing, we monitored what media skills modern youth do not have, namely: “skills on finding and preparing information”, “resistance to manipulation”, “verification of sources”, “language training”, “knowledge of modern terminology, “working with social networks”, “mastering the latest formats of information”, “communication skills with people from vulnerable groups”, “good knowledge of foreign languages” (Dachkovska, 2016, p. 4).

Thus, the issue of forming a culture of working with information is a pedagogical problem. Therefore, it is advisable to use the following organizational model in the educational process for the cycle of humanitarian, theoretical information disciplines developed by Markiv (2018):

Objective and goals: to determine the content and list of competencies, skills and abilities that justify the system of a culture of working with information (mentioned above).

Pedagogical Conditions
1) Comprehensive motivation of educational activities of future professionals to the formation of cultural competence within working with information, for example, a search of primary sources, check of actual material, etc.; monitoring of sources of propaganda to prevent false information or its interpretation, especially on the Internet; ability to apply public exposure of the propaganda narrative; use of fact-checking, etc. It is important to emphasize that such
competence will help students not to fall into the trap of propaganda, not to be exposed to the harmful effects of information, not to pay attention to manipulation or misunderstanding.

2) Structuring the content of preparing students for understanding the content and mechanisms of media competence. As part of the experiment, the following courses were introduced into the course of the humanities university “Mass Media in the World Media Space”:
   a) Mass media and the general public (argument: how mass media affect groups of people);
   b) means of influencing public opinion (argument: methods of manipulation are revealed);
   c) techniques and means of media war (argument: the technology of intervention of the subject of counterstrategy into consciousness is revealed).

At the technical university, teachers offered students to study authentic mass media materials and translated versions at English classes, as well as posts on social networks. They tried to define the competency level of students in understanding, interpreting, analyzing information on authenticity, ideological bias, falsehood, the substitution of concepts, etc. through a survey.

3) The use of active available methods in the mode of distance learning which provide the formation and development of skills within working with information. It is advisable to use problematic, comparative, retrospective analysis, conversation, i.e. it is necessary not only to explain but also to analyze the content of manipulative content considering components with students immediately (fakes, alternative facts, etc.), as well as to learn to check information from various sources.

**Formedness Criteria**

1) Value and motivation criterion is manifested in a positive attitude, the interest of future specialists in the formation of personal culture within working with information. If the communication environment is properly organized, this criterion will be clearly visible.

2) Cognitive criterion denotes the volume, completeness, depth, systematization of professional knowledge on this issue. It can be seen in the written answers of students.

3) Activity criterion is an ability to apply the acquired knowledge in practice.

The experiment was planned to be conducted in three stages: *ascertaining stage* (measuring the existing level of formation of the culture of working with information); *formative stage* (formation of the culture of working with information); *final stage* (measuring the levels of formation of the culture of working with information after the experiment). Conducting experiment in conditions of distance learning, we paid less attention to the first stage, since we understand that such competence is almost non-existent in our society, because media literacy, which is able to form it, is just being introduced. We focused mainly on the formative stage, i.e. the teacher's explanation, skills' training and students' independent work. The experiment was conducted simultaneously at National Pedagogical Dragomanov University and National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute” by the teachers of the humanities. Two groups were organized: one experimental and one control group of the 1st year master students on the basis of both universities. Then we combined them and listed the figures in the tables.

It should be noted that the use of learning material on a thematic basis has more informative value. Being well informed does not mean being competent. We selected training material purposefully, and also encouraged the processing the authentic English texts. Actually, there were articles by foreign authors of foreign media, which students evaluated
by comparison. They used texts focused on the formation of competence, as well as authentic texts.

Using the technique of questionnaires, we selected questions that would reveal the need to form a culture of working with information. We also conducted two check values. The first diagnostic check value was performed by us at the beginning of the formative stage of the experiment, the second one was done after its completion. Here are some questions we offered students to answer: Do you have enough knowledge, skills and abilities to understand what is written? What do you know about propaganda and manipulation? Do you need a further explanation of what you read? Do you often observe a contradiction between the author's opinion and his own worldview (background knowledge)? Do you feel emotional tension after reading? etc. As a result of the survey, we obtained the following dynamics of awareness of future philologists with the culture of working with information of the experimental and control groups which is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Dynamics of levels of awareness with the culture of working with information of the experimental and control groups (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of awareness</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-st check value</td>
<td>2-nd check value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 High</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>44,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Moderate</td>
<td>45,8</td>
<td>49,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Low</td>
<td>31,7</td>
<td>6,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the table, students' awareness of the importance and content of the culture of working with information increased from the first and second check values in EG by 31.8% of high level (from 12.5% to 44.3%), by 3.8% of average level (from 45.8% to 49.6%) and decreased by 25.6% of low level (from 31.7% to 6.1%). The analysis revealed an insufficient level of culture of working with the information confirmed by the results.

Table 2. Comparison of student test results before and after the experiment (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>EG</th>
<th>CG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-experimental check value</td>
<td>Post-experimental check value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>61,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>73,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>67,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>69,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>81,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Humanities student</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Technical student</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Technical student</td>
<td>70,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Technical student</td>
<td>66,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since the survey was conducted anonymously, we encrypted the names of the students and recorded them as a humanities student (eight students) and a technical student (eight students) in both groups. The values to be checked are important for us.

The increment of the average coefficient of the educational level of future specialists, calculated on the basis of pre- and post-experimental check values, is given in table 3.

Table 3. The summary results of testing students before and after the experiment on the formation of the culture of working with information (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre-experimental check value</th>
<th>Post-experimental check value</th>
<th>Incremental value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>55,77</td>
<td>61,92</td>
<td>6,15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EG</td>
<td>69,61</td>
<td>88,93</td>
<td>19,32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To confirm the difference between average values of the test results of the experimental group before the experiment and after the experiment, to find out whether these averages are statistically significantly different from each other, in our study:

$$
\bar{x}_1 = 69,61; \quad \bar{x}_2 = 88,93.
$$

To calculate these values we apply the Student t-test(t) by the formula:

$$
t = \frac{|\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2|}{\sqrt{m_1^2 + m_2^2}},
$$

where $m_1$ and $m_2$ – integrated deviations of partial values from two samples which are compared with the average values $\bar{x}_1$ and $\bar{x}_2$.

$$
m_1^2 = \frac{S_1}{n_1}; \quad m_2^2 = \frac{S_2}{n_2},
$$

where $S_1$ and $S_2$ – sample variances (EG before the experiment and EG after the experiment), where the variance is calculated by the formula:

$$
S = \frac{1}{n} \sum \left( \bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2 \right)^2.
$$

Thus,

$$
t = \frac{|69,61 - 88,93|}{\sqrt{85,15 + 24,56}} = \frac{19,32}{7,31} \approx 2,64
$$

For the degree of freedom $n_1 + n_2 - 2$ we calculate $(15+5) - 2 = 28$ and significance levels $0,05$ (significance point $t$ - the Student t-test – 2,05). According to our calculations, we
received $t_{\text{empirical}} 2.64$, i.e. $t_{\text{empirical}}(2.64) > t_{\text{significant}} (2.05)$, indicating the statistical significance of the compared average results of the experimental group before and after the experiment. Therefore, the obtained values of the Student t-test shows that there have been positive changes in the experimental group after the application of the method of forming a culture of working with information. This fact is indicative of the effectiveness of this technique, and, therefore we can say that the experiment is successful.

The researchers also conducted a self-assessment of students of the desired level of formedness and formedness of a culture of working with information by the method of Spearman's rank correlation.

Table 4. Calculation $d^2$ for Spearman's rank correlation $r_s$ when comparing the average group values of self-assessment of hard and soft skills of future specialists of the experimental group (EG) of the ascertaining experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard and soft skills</th>
<th>Assessment of the desired level of culture formedness of working with information according to students</th>
<th>Self-assessment of culture formedness of working with information</th>
<th>$d$ ($r_1$, $r_2$)</th>
<th>$d^2$ (summa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Average group values in % $r_1$ (rank)</td>
<td>Average group values in % $r_2$ (rank)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>83.2 $3$</td>
<td>60.3 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>70.3 $8$</td>
<td>50.1 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>65.0 $10$</td>
<td>49.2 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>56.2 $13$</td>
<td>33.1 6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>60.3 $18$</td>
<td>20.2 11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>80.3 $4$</td>
<td>18.2 14</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>50.6 $14$</td>
<td>15.3 15</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>70.8 $16.5$</td>
<td>25.3 9</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>85.3 $2$</td>
<td>50.2 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>74.3 $6$</td>
<td>20.1 12</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>75.6 $5$</td>
<td>22.2 10</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>60.8 $12$</td>
<td>31.2 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>70.8 $6.5$</td>
<td>34.6 5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>69.5 $9$</td>
<td>27.8 8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89.1 $1$</td>
<td>18.9 13</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of skills $n = 15$ 454.8

Table 5. Calculation $d^2$ for Spearman's rank correlation $r_s$ when comparing the average group values of self-assessment of hard and soft skills of future specialists of the control group (CG) of the ascertaining experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard and soft skills</th>
<th>Assessment of the desired level of culture formedness of working with information according to students</th>
<th>Self-assessment of culture formedness of working with information</th>
<th>$d$ ($r_1$, $r_2$)</th>
<th>$d^2$ (summa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Students of the experimental and control groups assessed the desired level of formedness and culture formedness of working with information on the proposed fifteen hard and soft skills:

Table 6. *Self-assessment card of the culture formedness of working with information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Hard and soft skills</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Understanding the content of information and its value effect on people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Comprehension of the importance of information for the formation of the mature highly developed successful personality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mastering skills and abilities to plan and meet the requirements for searching, processing, creating and disseminating information independently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conducting self-monitoring and analysis of the impact of information on mental health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ability to use fact-checking voluntarily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Formedness of a stable negative attitude to propaganda materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Formedness of motivation to check the material in different sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Using a “gourmet” method of selecting information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ability to use resources created by professional journalists and in social networks proportionally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The ability to verify information independently before its dissemination in social media pages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mastering the technique of self-regulation in stressful situations due to the inconsistency of information with the individual system of beliefs, values, judgments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ability to distrust everything that is written</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Efforts to evaluate information as rationally as possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Adjustment of the individual condition after reading “heavy” information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Rest from production and consumption of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average group values in %</th>
<th>( r_1 ) (rank)</th>
<th>Average group values in %</th>
<th>( r_2 ) (rank)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of skills \( n = 15 \)

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is calculated by the formula:
\[ r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \times \sum d^2}{n(n^2 - 1)} \]

where \( \sum d^2 \) - the sum of squared values of rank differences, and \( n \) - number of paired observations. Due to the obtained results of self-assessment we calculate the empirical value \( r_s \) of experimental group:

\[ r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \times 454.8}{3360} = 1 - 0.812 = 0.188 \]

We also calculate similar values of the control group:

\[ r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \times 424}{3360} = 1 - 0.7571 = 0.242 \]

We compare the results of calculations of the empirical rank correlation coefficient \( r_s \) of both groups – (0,188 EG), (0,242 CG) and significant (0,482). At the level of statistical significance, 0,05 values of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient are lower than \( r_s \) significant. It means that the level of students’ formedness of hard and soft skills of the culture of working with information by the results of self-assessment is low (insufficient) and goes to 0 in both groups. It also means that the motivation and value component is poorly formed.

**Discussion**

The research was aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the proposed model of forming a culture of working with information, as well as collecting and processing data that demonstrate the need for such competence among students, the dynamics of development during the experiment and verification of organizational model effectiveness.

At the ascertaining stage the concept “culture of working with information” was defined by future experts, and measurements of levels of this competence formation were conducted (the level is proved to be low).

As a result of the performance of the formative stage of the experiment (special materials were purposefully selected, trainings on checks of information were used, explanatory work was conducted by teachers, debates and discussions of materials containing hidden manipulative content, post-truth instead of a fact, alternative facts, the substitution of concepts, etc.) competencies of formation of a culture of working with information in the experimental group (25%) increased compared with the control group (9.9%).

At the final stage comparison of the results before and after the experiment was conducted. Insufficient level of the motivational component was revealed (according to motivational criterion); cognitive criterion (the ability to understand the content that forms the skills of the culture of working with information and deepen competencies) showed higher performance in the experimental group the teachers worked with; activity indicators increased when working with students (especially the average).

The results showed positive dynamics and efficiency during distance learning which allowed us to integrate the topics of media literacy, media culture and culture of information consumption in special courses: “Mass media in the world information space” of the Humanities University. At the Technical University, English teachers purposefully offered students to study
mass media materials in the classroom. Such tasks aroused students’ interest and increased motivation to acquire cultural and informational competence. Discussions in the mode of online conferences (Zoom, Google meet etc.) were used, tests were offered in the Moodle platform where the main university courses are located. It is convenient for teachers and students to work in this way. They coped with the tasks, had the opportunity to help each other during online discussion of the manipulative content of the processed materials, gained experience in fact-checking and learned to evaluate information properly. It is easy to understand the core of the competence “culture of working with information”, as well as its presence / absence and the dynamics of formation with the help of questionnaires, test blocks and diagnostic questions. Students evaluate the distant learning system positively. The integration of special topics into education courses has strengthened cognitive interest, revitalized the learning process and helped to study media literacy.

It should be noted, that there is a great need to form a culture of working with information in the society of the new type. Thus, the teachers must form the need, show the importance and significance of the culture of working with information in a variety of information, its incredibly large-scale accumulation, widespread and increasing destructiveness due to ignorance and lack of this competence. It is more difficult to form a system of knowledge, skills and abilities, as it could be seen from the experiment, in conditions of distance learning, but the motivation is stronger, and the activity component is more pronounced: it is necessary to work with a lot of miscellaneous information independently.

Thus, let's summarize the results according to the stated criteria:
*Motivation criterion* is a motivation, awareness with the need and desire to acquire the competence of “a culture of working with information”.

Table 7. Comparative analysis of values and motivation criterion of experimental and control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 –st value</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>4,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 –nd value</td>
<td>4,2</td>
<td>4,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 –rd value</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>3,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 –th value</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>3,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 –th value</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td>2,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cognitive criterion* is an ability to understand the content that forms the skills of media culture and deepen competencies.

Table 8. Comparative analysis of cognitive criterion values of experimental and control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 –st value</td>
<td>3,9</td>
<td>2,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 –nd value</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 –rd value</td>
<td>3,7</td>
<td>2,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 –th value</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>3,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 –th value</td>
<td>3,7</td>
<td>3,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Activity criterion** is an ability to apply knowledge in practice and use them even in non-standard situations.

Table 9. Comparative analysis of activity criterion values of experimental and control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–st value</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–nd value</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–rd value</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–th value</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–th value</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be concluded, that the values are higher in the group in which this competence has been formed intentionally.

The data obtained as a result of mathematical processing of values of control diagnostic check values, give grounds to say that students’ interest in improving a culture of working with information begins to appear even under conditions of experimental training. The study showed that after the scientific experiment having been done, the dynamics of the levels of a culture of working with information is obvious, in particular, the average value has increased.

The problem of the study was to show the importance of forming a culture of working with information among the students during distance learning, which means the ability to evaluate and perceive information properly, prevent manipulation and distinguish truth from falsehood.

It was necessary to perform the following tasks to perform it: to analyze the need of the formation of skills of the culture of working with information, to assess the feasibility of the developed model of its formation and to conduct an experiment to determine effectiveness.

The researchers proved the students’ need to form skills of media culture and proper information consumption in the process of research, especially in the distance-learning mode. The pedagogical environment is decisive for their formation of such skills. Even e-learning allows you to do it with the right methods and tools. After all, it is important to model the need for such competence and to show its implementation to solve problematic professional problems. The teacher’s task is to encourage students to use the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities in consuming information not only if it is needed, but also in everyday life. It is necessary to convince students of the importance of critical attitude to information, verification of authenticity, use of fact-checking techniques, etc. Students’ interest in improving the culture of working with information begins to be discovered in the conditions of experimental learning.

Writers estimated the feasibility of using an organizational model for the formation of this competence which includes the following components: 1) purpose and goals - to encourage students’ desire and readiness to form a culture of working with information; 2) pedagogical conditions - comprehensive motivation of educational activities of future professionals to the formation of cultural competence within working with information; structuring the content of professional training for the formation of a culture of working with information; argued the choice of optimal methods; 3) criteria of formation – value and motivational, cognitive, activity...
criteria. We substantiated theoretically and confirmed experimentally that the effectiveness of the formation of the competence “a culture of working with information” is achieved through the implementation of a combination of these three components providing the formation and development of relevant skills. E-learning is also suitable for the implementation of this model.

Researchers conducted a pedagogical experiment on the formation of a culture of working with information and evaluated its results according to the proposed criteria: value and motivational, cognitive, activity criteria. All criteria showed an order of magnitude higher value in the experimental group than in the control group. Thus, the experiment proved that humanities and technical students are equally ready to obtain this type of knowledge. The main thing is to choose the material for processing correctly and purposefully, to conduct disputing lectures, discussions, trainings, etc. It is also important to take into account students’ self-assessment of the level of their skills to search, analyze, process and disseminate information.

Authors suggest that it might be worth beginning to form a culture of working with information by integrating relevant topics and tasks for discussion into learning courses. We have shown, though incomplete, but an effective mechanism for how to do it practically in the conditions of distance learning. Of course, this technique needs to be improved, and also develop more criteria, involve specialists of different disciplines for the implementation of the developed model into practice.

The uniqueness of the study is that the very formation of a culture of working with information is a pedagogical issue because it is possible to form certain skills and abilities and explain their importance only during training. Pedagogical conditions included motivation to the formation, the content of training future professionals, pedagogical experiment and evaluation criteria. The study showed achievement. Therefore, the organizational model should be recommended for implementation at other faculties, because it is important for everyone to be able to assess, perceive, assimilate, create and disseminate information properly regardless of speciality.

In the future, we are planning to design a special course on information production and consumption which is going to be subject-oriented on the formation of a culture of working with information.

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Formation of the Culture of Working
Markiv, Zarivna, Khymai & Shalova

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ISSN: 2229-9327
Abstract
The Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) triggered substantial shifts in the education systems worldwide as teaching and learning have had to shift from face-to-face to an entirely virtual model due to the closure of educational institutes. The present paper is a descriptive-analytical investigation of the challenges of the current pandemic-imposed E-teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to female preparatory (PY) year students at King Khalid University (KKU). It identifies teachers’ and students’ responses about the ongoing issues with E-teaching of ESP with to put practical solutions to them. The study is conducted at The University Center for Girls’ Studies- Al-Samir Campus-Abha during the academic year 2020-2021. Twenty English Language instructors at the English Language Center (ELC) and eighty students of the preparatory year at the College of Medicine enrolled in Intensive English Course (Njl-019) participated in the study. It adopts mixed qualitative methodology with the teachers’ semi-structured interview and students’ questionnaire as tools to collect data, and descriptive analysis as a method to interpret data. The study finds out reciprocity of teachers’ and students’ responses in pinpointing the factors posing serious challenges in teaching and learning ESP courses as majorly related to technology, pedagogy, and Assessment. Considering these challenges, the study puts forth practical suggestions to promote virtual teaching and learning of ESP courses. The suggested solutions are hoped to help providing successful standards for virtual ESP teaching and learning as per the constraints of quality modern education.

Keywords: Assessment, Covid-19, ESP, E-teaching, King Khalid University, pedagogy, Saudi Arabia, technology

Introduction

Epidemics are one of the inescapable aspects of life and the most challenging and threatening calamities that strike the planet and put man in front of the challenge of survival. Beside the dramatic loss of human lives and the unprecedented challenge to human public health, social, cultural, political, economic, and psychological aspects, the disruption of education systems around the globe caused by pandemics is formidably challenging.

Coronavirus Disease is the recent yet most hazardous and contagious disease that first arose in Wuhan, China in 2019. It was later coded “COVID-19” abbreviating “Coronavirus Disease 2019” and was declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). The mortality rate and the uncontrollable spread were gravely distressing. The major symptoms of Coronavirus include sore throat, runny nose, relentless coughing, or sneezing, breathing difficulty and lethargy. Research shows that older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer were more likely to develop serious illnesses from coronavirus (W.H.O, 2020).

To contain the spread of the virus, all world countries started adopting different safety measures in line with WHO (2020). Emergency was declared in all security and health institutes and complete lockdowns, social distancing and quarantines were imposed all citizens were asked to continue from homes to curtail the spread of the virus.

This pandemic has caused huge universal disruption of education impacting learners and teachers worldwide in kindergarten, primary to secondary schools, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and universities, all countries across the world closed down educational institutes in an effort to mitigate the pandemic. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020), monitoring, over 100 countries implemented nationwide closures, impacting over half of the world’s student population. Moreover, 94 percent of learners internationally were affected by the pandemic by mid-April 2020, representing 1.58 billion children and youth, from pre-primary to higher education, in 200 countries.
With a population of more than 34 million, Saudi Arabia is the second-largest country in the Arab world. Saudi Arabia is among the leading countries that hastened to contain the crisis of Covid-19 outbreak by implementing initiative and unprecedented precautionary measures beside substantial support packages to prevent the spread of the virus. A national committee consisting of the government ministers for Health, Education, FDA, Interior and many others was established to follow global updates and to prepare for the possible introduction and spread of the virus from early January 2020. Travel ban was implemented, and all international flights were stopped from and to the Kingdom. Umrah was entirely suspended by March 4th and the two holy mosques in Makkah and Madinah were put to daily closure for cleaning and disinfection. In March 2020, the Saudi government shifted schools and universities to remote learning and virtual classrooms. Furthermore, the five daily prayers in all hundreds of thousands of mosques across the country were banned and all Muslims in Saudi Arabia were requested by religious authorities to pray at homes for the very first time in the history of the Kingdom. Digital health was quickly activated and utilized for several services that allow people to seek medical help and receive medical prescriptions without the need to visit the medical centers. (Algaissi, Alharbi, Hassanain, & Hashem, 2020)

The Saudi Center for Disease Prevention and Control (SCDPC) abruptly issued health protocols and guidelines and public health considerations. Awareness campaigns were initiated, and governmental local awareness messages were also daily via text messages and media outlets. By the end of March 2020, Saudi Arabia issued a curfew and imposed a strong financial penalty on lawbreakers. Eventually, the Saudi government enforced lockdown and isolation of several suburbs and districts in major cities and started extensive mass testing in communities.

As with countries around the world, Saudi Arabia suspended attendance at all educational institutes and continued the teaching and learning process through alternative means using television, online provision, and instructional packages. It had ensured the continuation of the remote educational process and maintained the safety for more than six million students in public schools and universities according to the UNESCO reports. The Saudi ministry of education established a specialized committees and work teams to ensure the readiness of the education and
training system to produce results that guarantee the safety of education personnel while the UNESCO admitted that Saudi Arabia’s transition to distance learning had been a “success story” as online classes were set up within ten hours of the decision to close schools in late March and lessons were broadcast via satellite on 20 TV channels. Additionally, lessons were also available on YouTube where views reached more than 61 million. Nevertheless, in higher education, 27 public universities hosted two million virtual classes and more than six million panel discussions in the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020.

Located in the Southern region of Saudi Arabia, King Khalid University (KKU) is one of the leading universities in the kingdom with more than seventy thousand students and over twenty sites. The university offers Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D. degrees in various Arts and Sciences subjects beside many other short courses, diplomas, and training. The E-Learning Management System (LMS) and Distance Learning Education of King Khalid University is among the top available commercially in KSA believing in E-Learning as “the means of making education better, cheaper, more available or more responsive” (Mason & Rennie, 2008, p. 2). The LMS is supported by the Classroom Capture Application, Authoring Tools, e-Assessments, Virtual Classroom Tools, and a highly capable Learning Object Repository (LOR) that can share learning objects drawn from a variety of international open learning resources and content providers (Alwalidi & Lefrere 2010). The system is overall fully supported and easily accessible. The courses can be taught as fully online mood or blended mood. When the ministry of education announced the switch to E-learning as an essential measurement to cope up with Covid-19 spread in the country, the sudden and inadvertent decision has undoubtedly caused severe challenges for students, educators, parents, and the society as a whole. KKU, however, did not face big problems as E-Learning was already introduced and practiced as an optional teaching and learning style. Nonetheless, the unanticipated and swift mandatory implementation of virtual teaching for all brought forth a couple of challenges that handicapped quality E-teaching and Learning, especially in the first preparatory year at the university where students are just transferred from school to university with the undeniable existence of the psychological and academic gap between both education levels. The preparatory year aims to fill this gap between high school and university and makes the transition easier, empowering students to succeed in this new environment, and giving them the skills to adjust and flourish in the new challenging university educational system with its unique atmosphere and methods of evaluation, quality teaching and learning at this level is highly necessitated.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an oriented form of language teaching that addresses the demands of certain communities of learners interested in obtaining some professional skills and practicing job-related performances. ESP displays some differences from ESL (English as a Second Language), EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and EGP (English for General Purposes) due to its oriented focus. Hutchinson and Waters give a short but detailed account of it, underlining the fact that it has to be perceived as an approach, and not as a product. “ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material. Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19).

Teaching ESP courses is to some extent a challenging task for teachers and learners as it is “language in context” that entails real life learning situations and scenarios that tend to
imitate specific working or professional settings the ESP students are interested in. ESP course emphasizes on the value of exercising the necessary English language skills students would primarily utilize in their future fields of activity, rather than concentrating on grammar, vocabulary, and language structures. Therefore, Lorenzo Fiorito stresses that ESP “assesses needs and integrates motivation, subject matter and content for the teaching of relevant skills” (Lorenzo, 2005, p. 2).

Teaching ESP courses has always been a daunting task and a major experiment test for every teacher in charge of it as it focuses on the specific needs of the learners and concentrates more on language in context and the students’ prerequisite of acquiring a particular set of professional skills and job-related functions. These challenges are intensified in virtual learning which is vastly different from the traditional face-to-face learning system. The paper discusses the ongoing issues with teaching ESP online with the aim of putting practical solutions to ensure successful ESP E-learning and teaching.

**Research Questions:**
The study aims at answering the following research questions:

1) What are the current challenges confronting English Language instructors in the E-teaching of ESP courses to preparatory year female students at King Khalid University?

2) What are the current challenges facing preparatory year female students in the E-learning ESP courses at King Khalid University?

3) What effective solutions can be suggested to overcome the challenges of E-teaching and E-learning on ESP courses at King Khalid University?

**Research Objectives:**
The objectives that are expected to be achieved by this study are:

1) To identify the current challenges confronting English Language instructors in the E-teaching of ESP courses to preparatory year female students at King Khalid University?

2) To identify the current challenges facing preparatory year female students in the E-learning ESP courses at King Khalid University?

3) To propose effective solutions to overcome the challenges of E-teaching and E-learning on ESP courses at King Khalid University?

**Literature Review**
Covid-19’s challenges in teaching English Language courses have inspired many educators and researchers globally to address these continuous challenges. In Saudi Arabia, the year 2020 witnessed a colossal momentum in the research body related to the impact of Covid-19 on Education starting from the very early childhood education to higher education and concentrating on variety of scientific, social, financial, health and language fields.
Instantaneously, studies related to Teaching and learning English language flourished with educators and researchers delving into the epidemic-driven issues hampering the successful online delivery of English language subjects. Many studies related to English language teaching in Higher Education appeared where different perspectives of the concurrent situation are discussed.

Akhter (2020) conducted a study on the hundred EFL Saudi students from different colleges to explore the problems caused by the pandemic imposed virtual teaching of English Listening course. Highlighting the major problems hampering learning Listening skills effectively, Akhter finds out that online learning is dissatisfactory due to the lack of planning and preparation. The technical and methodological drawbacks of teachers hinder successful learning and cause low achievement levels of students. According to Akhter, online teaching amidst covid-19 crisis has been effective, yet “Change in attitudes and technological literacy would help students gain confidence to be successful with a positive vibe in their courses” (Akhter, 2020, p. 7). She suggests comprehensible training for teachers to optimize their online learning activities, develop their information literacy and correct their misperceptions about online learning which will consequently make the students comfortable with online learning.

Hakim (2020) investigated technology-integrated classrooms and the challenges facing EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hakim’s study sample included fifty English Language instructors from King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The most common challenges she highlighted were the inability to access the modern equipment, interrupted or weak internet connection, learners’ low motivation level and attention deficit. However, the study reported a positive inclination of many language instructors towards technology in EFL online classes. The study’s findings assert that “online techno-led EFL classes, though effective, still have issues that should be addressed by the teachers, learners and, mainly, by the institutional management” (Hakim, 2020, p. 6). He recommended the productive use of techno-led online EFL classrooms, focusing on strategic skill-based learning taking place and establishing a strong virtual link between the instructors and learners.

Rahman (2020) explores the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language online during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia and teachers’ satisfaction with online English language learning classes. The study is conducted designing a questionnaire for fifty EFL faculty members of various Saudi Arabian universities. The study reveals promising results reflecting the usefulness and efficacy of teaching English as a foreign language online if proper training and orientation programs for teachers and students are implemented, and online language learning platforms and tools are up to date.

Almekhlafy (2020) highlights the perceptions of Saudi students toward the Blackboard application in the process of learning Preparatory Year (PY) English courses as the mere tool of learning and the impact of the students’ perceptions on their use of Blackboard. Surveying one hundred and twenty-six students of level one and one hundred and two students from level two at the preparatory year program at Najran University, the researcher compares the perceptions of both groups and finds that level one students have higher impression with BB than level two students. The findings suggest that the students’ prior experience of e-learning via Blackboard impacts the students’ perceptions.
Mahyoob (2020) examined the difficulties and hurdles encountered by English language learners (EFL) in Science and Arts College, Alula, Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, during shifting to virtual learning in the second semester of 2020. According to the study, COVID-19 pandemic has “negatively influenced the learners’ performance and learning outcomes” (Mahyoob, 2020, p. 10). The study evaluated the learners’ new experiences in online education and evaluate the practicability of the virtual approaches of learning. Analyzing one hundred and eighty-four learners’ responses to a based questionnaire, the study found that the major problems that impact online EFL learning during COVID-19 are due to technical, academic, and communication challenges. The study results revealed that most EFL learners are not satisfied with continuing online learning, because they are not achieving the anticipated improvement in language learning performance.

Dahmash (2020) explored the benefits and challenges of blended learning during the spread of COVID-19 from the perspective of English as a foreign language (EFL) student at King Saud University. The results show that blended learning profited the EFL students by endorsing their writing skills and persuading them to search online, alongside fitting their circumstances and being economical. On the other hand, the study also identifies that the challenges EFL students faced included technological troubles, weaknesses of the instructor’s performance, problems with online tests, attitudes to online learning and limited resources, and the university council’s decisions. The paper recommends utilizing the benefits and overcoming the challenges of blended learning while teaching English in an EFL context.

Karim and Hasan (2020) conducted a study at of Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University at Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia to observe the challenges and prospects of a virtual system of learning from the undergraduate EFL students’ viewpoint. A structured questionnaire was created and employed as the research instruments for collecting the data and it was carried out among 221 students The study finds that about 80% of students agreed that virtual classes are more convenient than regular classes and 66% of the students are satisfied with the new virtual system of learning, 60% of students feel more confident during online classes than face-to-face classes, and 59% students feel that remote learning could replace the face-to-face mode of learning. On the other hand, only 23% of students faced internet issues. The findings show that most of the learners are prefer the virtual method of learning which is “a huge achievement that such an overwhelming number of students are feeling satisfied with the online mode of learning” (Karim & Hasan, 2020, p. 213). Hence the curriculum designers should consider the pedagogical practices and students’ preferences while designing the syllabus.

Al-Ahdal and Al-Qasham (2020) scrutinize the situation of online learning and assessment surveying professors at Saudi Electronic University and Qassim University. The study results show that majority of the faculty members admitted having an intermediate computer proficiency level on online learning assessment. They often use online quizzes, forum posts, evaluations, and reviews; and they always use easy tasks as online assessments. Resultantly, cheating is easy to do and difficult to detect; and the output and performance are more difficult to perform electronically. The study stresses that online students require a more organized framework and more support to keep on schedule and present.
Al-Nofaie (2020) identifies the advantages and challenges of online learning to understand the perception of EFL students at Taif University, Saudi Arabia, and their learning experiences during the pandemic period. The study compares the synchronous and asynchronous aspects of BB in teaching Morphology subject. It shows that students preferred the asynchronous environment to the synchronous one due to its flexibility. Nevertheless, the study reveals that virtual education is not always appealing to students. The study recommends university authorities to set out more practical educational plans in the case of emergencies to enlighten the practices of university instructors and designers of professional development courses in the near future.

Al-Ghammas (2020) examined the perceptions of university faculty members towards the application of online assessment using the 'Blackboard' platform during Covid-19. One hundred and seventy-one faculty members of English departments at universities throughout Saudi Arabia participated in his study. Although participants of both genders positively remarked on the use of online assessments, they had concerns about the online assessment-related dimensions, i.e., validity, practicality, reliability, and security. “The biggest concern for language instructors using online assessment is cheating, which is difficult to avoid” (Al-Ghammas, 2020, p. 170). The study asserts that COVID-19 could be the turning point in dealing with evaluation issues as large classes, lack of government resources, and the need to make teaching and assessment appropriate for the young generation known as digital natives. Full online assessment practices in Saudi Arabia in which faculty can be implemented all times.

Generally, all the above-mentioned studies conclude some sort of common dissatisfaction and concern with the issues related to teaching EFL courses online that need to be addressed. However, they have tackled EFL and GE skills generally. No study to date has tackled ESP courses that differ in their focus, nature, constraints, and importance from EFL and GE. The present study aims at filling this vital gap and adding to the body of literature related to the effects of covid-19 on teaching and learning ESP courses within the Saudi higher education context. It targets teaching ESP courses as the most challenging language subject and emphasizes the role of proper online teaching practice in achieving the learning outcomes of the course. The study suggests significant required improvements in online teaching practices that help the effective delivery of the ESP lessons and better engage the students boosting their linguistic competencies in their professional fields.

**Methodology**

**Instruments:**

The study aims at examining the challenges of teaching English in Medicine course to Preparatory Year students from teacher’s and students’ perspective. For this purpose, mixed-method was adapted. The data collection instruments are semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The chosen methods are particularly apt for acquiring a specific data type (Lawthom & Tindall, 1994). Semi-structured interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents must answer preset open-ended questions and thus are widely employed by different healthcare professionals in their research. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are utilized extensively as interviewing format possibly with an individual or sometimes even with a group (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These interviews are based on semi-structured interview guide, which is a schematic presentation of questions or topics that needs to be explored by the interviewer.
On the other hand, Questionnaire is an effective research instrument that consists of a series of questions to gather information from respondents (Kabir, 2016). A questionnaire was designed to consist of sixty questions divided into three parts: the first part is associated with the participants’ responses to challenges related to technology, the second part asks questions pertaining to the challenges pertaining to pedagogy, the third part focuses on the challenges related to evaluation.

Participants:

The interviewees are twenty English Language Instructors at ELC, KKU, while the questionnaire was sent to for eighty students of the preparatory year at the College of Medicine enrolled in the Intensive English Course (Njl-019).

Study Context:

The study took place at King Khalid University, the Joint Programs, English Language Center, Al-Samir Female Campus, Abha, during the academic year 2020-2021 (1441-1442 H). King Khalid University is one of the Saudi government universities, located in the southern region in Abha city. KKU hosts more than 73000 students in more than 47 colleges and departments spread in the south region of Aseer.

The Joint Programs at KKU is a program that lays the educational foundation and sets up the principles for affiliating and nurturing all subsequent education for candidates to the Bachelors degree in different fields. It prepares students to join various academic pathways and ensures high rates of success. It acquaints the students with the various academic disciplines at the university and integrates them into the university environment before deciding on their future fields of study at the different disciplines offering basic skills courses in English, computer, engineering, and medical language to accustom students to the knowledge and learning environment of the university. The program at KKU continues for one year including two semesters as well as an optional summer extension to give students the chance to re-study the failed subjects and enable them to pass the program and proceed to their specialty colleges complying with the criteria of each college. Passing the PY courses successfully is a requisite for proceeding to the first college year and continuing studies at any discipline.

English Language Center (ELC) at King Khalid University (KKU) offers intensive and non-intensive courses to set students on the right track towards their professional careers and enrich their cultural backgrounds. ELC aims at preparing students to study their academic majors in English by establishing English language courses for academic and special purposes for all students in all colleges and assisting them in using the English language for their own communicative purposes. The center focuses on enhancing and upgrading the level of students' language skills and keeping students abreast of the global developments in their specialties by familiarizing them with the digital resources and raising the level of educational attainment in the various colleges of the university.

At KKU, ESP courses are designed and taught at the ELC during the preparatory year to prepare first-year students of Medical & Health Sciences, Engineering, Computer Science, Law and Business departments in their respective fields of specializations, enhancing their employee-level of English and competence in various professional areas. For Health Sciences students,
ELC offers Intensive English Course (019-Njl) with six credit hours and twenty contact hours, teaching three main subjects: Reading and Writing, Listening and Speaking and English in Medicine. While Reading and Writing and Listening and Speaking focus on general language skills, English in medicine concentrates on Professional English for Medical purposes.

*Figure 3.* The division of English Language subjects in the intensive English course (019-Njl 6) taught to Medical colleges students at KKU (Adapted from King Khalid University, Joint Programs, Course descriptions, 2021)

The prescribed textbook is “English in Medicine” from Cambridge Professional English series, the third edition. The book comprises of seven units sequentially ordered from the very first doctor-patient interaction of history taking, until the last stage of treatment. Each unit is divided into parts including language focus, hospital-based conversations and speaking activities, medical vocabulary, medical reading and writing and medical case follow-ups.

*Figure 4.* The prescribed textbook for Professional English for Medical colleges students at KKU

The learning outcomes of the course are stated in the course specification as following:

- Acquire medical terminology and English vocabulary familiar and routine matters.
• Identify the communication pattern for describing students' background, environment, and their daily needs.
• Reproduce sentences and frequently used expressions related to personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment.
• Recognize the main ideas of a text on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.
• Identify writing techniques in the medical field.
• Communicate in day-to-day life and use medical terminology effectively.
• Improve academic and social interactions among students; and their ability to use the knowledge of different skills in spoken and written discourse.
• Develop argumentative skills.
• Talk about topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.
• Use medical terminologies and summarize.
• Apply reading strategies - Previewing/ Skimming/ Scanning texts on familiar matters regularly encountered in the medical field.
• Write a simple text on topics related to medical field.
• Use different types of texts for different purposes/tasks
• Predict, draw conclusions
• Talk about topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.

Procedure
The research was executed within a period of sixty-five days. The instructors’ interviews were taken via the IMO app due to the social distancing measurements for covid-19 prevention. Every instructor’s interview took from 1- to 15 minutes. Next, the students’ questionnaire was built via google form and the participation invitation with the form link were sent to students through email. The results of interviews and questionnaire were analyzed descriptively using Microsoft Excel.

Findings
The collected data has shown important indications of particular facts about E-teaching of English for Medicine to the PY students at the ELC, KKU during the pandemic. In the first part of the questionnaire, the students as well as teachers were asked questions related to technological challenges. As shown in figures five and six, there is a sweeping agreement among almost 95% percent of the participants that teaching and learning English in Medicine in the traditional face-to-face method is far better and more effective than online learning. Another similar percentage believed that they face technical problems while longing into the university learning management systems due to various reasons of internet connection, system collapses or device technical issues. In another question, 45% of students and 21% percent of teacher admitted having technophobia and low digital competence.
The second part dealt with the teaching methodology. In the student’s survey as shown in Figure seven, 70% of the students believed that the teaching is “teacher-centered” where teachers typically focus on translating medical terms and conversations while students only listen and write notes. Just a few agreed that teachers make them participate in the interpretation and meaning-making process. In the question related to the audio-visual aids, all the participants admitted having audio tracks of the textbook conversations. Still no interactive videos or educational movies are used to create interest in the virtual class. Only 25% admitted that their teacher uses educational games and educational activities in the class. In another question, 80% of the students declined to have any online communities or groups in the subject to enhance collaboration and technoparticipation in the subject. The teacher’s responses to the interview supported the findings of the students’ survey in this aspect as 90% of the teachers admitted using teacher-centered grammar-translation method as a primary teaching methodology and that they seldom use communicative and collaborative tools. Teachers has also complained of the lack of sources and the digital educational material of the course. This finding demonstrates the traditionality of teaching methodologies, miscommunication, and monotony in the online classes, which has a vital role in lowering students’ interest in attending the classes, understanding of the subject and handicapping the learning process massively.
The last section of the questionnaires and interviews was related to the online assessments of the subject. In the question related to the types of online assessments the student are evaluated by, almost all students answered that subjective online BlackBoard tests are the only method of evaluation. No year work or final marks are allotted for any other types of practical assessments such as oral presentations, collaborative projects, digital or virtual reality video productions or communicative profession-related tasks. In the question related to the level of difficulty of online assessments, two-thirds of the students believed that the exams vary from medium to low level of difficulty. Also, about 80% percent of the students assure that all the online assessments are summative evaluation that merely tests the quantity of information without assessing the actual cognitive-linguistic ability of students.

A question was asked about the attitude of the students towards the online assessments. Seventy-percent confessed that they take online tests lightly and depend on books, google and WhatsApp friends and groups in solving the online tests. Just a few students said that they prepare seriously for online tests, yet do not deny taking assistance of external help anyway. This widely doubt the credibility of these online assessments as authentic determining factors of students accurate academic level and linguistic competencies. Teachers responded identically to these questions pertaining that to the rules they get from the ELC and University E-learning committees that give them no chance to assess students pragmatically in line with the course
objectives. Only on-campus midterm and final exams were claimed to reflect students’ academic progress in the subject realistically.

![Figure 9. Students’ response to attitudes towards online assessments](chart)

**Discussion**

From the afore-mentioned results and findings of the study, the findings of the challenges faced in E-teaching and E-learning of English in Medicine subject from both students and teachers’ perspectives can be summarized as follows:

**Challenges related to Technology**

Due to the geographical location of the university in a mountainous region, internet issues are the most problematic issue in online teaching and learning, especially for those living remote countryside areas and villages. Internet connections are unstable and costly due to which having a good and high-speed internet connection is rare and unaffordable.

Lack of digital competence is another challenge hindering the online teaching and learning process, especially in teachers. Many teachers and several students lack the required skills to access the internet on developed devices and deal with the learning management system and its tools or engage in active teaching and learning.

Majority of the educators and the learners in the city lack computer literacy and fail to solve hardware or software-related issues on time and depend on specialized shops and computer-repair technicians that wastes a lot of time and money.

Technophobia is a significant emotional obstacle in learning and teaching English in Medicine online. The study reported some teachers as well as students fearing the evolving technology and facing troubles using it and feeling negatively towards it. This leads to frustration which causes them to withdraw from the frustrating situation, making them do not want to continue learning or teaching in frustrating environment and putting them always under fear and pressure. This largely affects their teaching and learning performances especially in a subject as English in Medicine.

Lack of digital resources for English in Medicine is another hamper in implementing effective teaching. Authentic dictionaries of Medical terms in English are hard to find in digital form. Teachers waste a lot of effort and time in searching related resources and references or
making it themselves. There are also some resources but are not easy to access for teachers and students. All technology-related challenges of this study support the findings of Akhter (2020), Hakim (2020) and Mahyoob (2020) which reveals that technological obstacles are the key challenges hampering effective online teaching and learning process.

Challenges related to Pedagogy

Most of the teaching methodologies teachers adopt in online English in Medicine class are traditional and teacher-centered. These teaching methodologies give rise to students’ disinterest in the subject despite its importance to their health specialties and cause passiveness in the online classroom, their failure in subject comprehension, and dependence on memorization rather than competence. This fact has resulted in low academic achievement in the course.

The Grammar-translation method most of the teachers use in teaching medical vocabulary depends totally on the teacher as the sole contributor and the students merely learning grammatical rules then applying those rules by translating sentences between the target language and the native language. There are no developed communicative or interactive teaching methodologies that engage the students and motivate them to learn, neither is there any sort learning-in-context activities which are highly important in teaching professional English. The finding corresponds with the findings of Rehman (2020) and Al-Ahdal and Al-Qasham (2020) as they also asserted the issue of teacher’s lack of effective online teaching methodology as an essential requirement for successful e-teaching.

There is a lack of audio-visual aids in the online classroom. Video gaming and video production and digital resources are not used either because of the resources or the teacher’s digital illiteracy. This has resulted in the monotony and ineffectiveness of the class; hence students lose interest in attending, and that harms their academic progress.

Lack of active online communities and collaboration is significantly noticed. There is miscommunication between the educator and the learner and between learners themselves. There is an absence of collaborative practice of medical English in the context which is undoubtedly essential for the productive online environment to infuse a sense of belonging and camaraderie and to keeps online learners connected and motivated.

Challenges related to Evaluation

The only approved assessment for the course is summative tests including quizzes, midterms, and finals. These tests are based on testing student’s information and memorization without reflecting student’s linguistic competence and understanding of the subject.

Validating the findings of Dahmash (2020), Al-Nofaie and Al-Ghammas (2020), the study finds that all online tests are objective asynchronous tests with a time limit of twelve to twenty-four hours. More than one attempt are allowed which increases the temptation to cheat causing unreal and irrational exam results and doing injustice with the accurate academic level of students.

All the evaluations in the course are subjective written exams that depends on student’s memorization without practice in the context. No oral assessments are included in the assessment
policy to achieve the learning outcomes of the course that majorly focuses on developing oral professional skills.

According to Jonathan McFarland, an associate Editor for Medical Humanities at Arts and Humanities in Higher Education online journal, “the scientific importance of English is such that, whenever I have a meeting with my residents – and I have many, both residents and meetings – I find myself emphasizing, over and over again, the need for them to learn English.” (McFarland,2015, slide 55). Based on the statement of McFarland, the study recommends some suggestions for promoting the process of teaching and learning in English in Medicine online courses:

Internet connections should be stabilized and facilitated in service and price for students and teachers especially for those living in countryside and villages far from the city center. Education support initiatives and packages should be provided by government and private authorities in the concerned field.

Intensive training courses should be given to staff members and students to nurture their digital competence and enhance their technical skills. They should be trained to access the internet on developed devices and deal with the learning management system and its tools and engage in active teaching and learning.

Computer literacy should be developed so that teachers and students should not only have the ability to use technology but should be able to use it effectively to find information, evaluate sources, create content, and communicate with others effectively, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments.

Technophobia-reduction programs should be launched to reduce psychological reactions to computer technology, decrease computer anxiety, enhance computer cognitions, and augment computer attitudes. Psychologically based intervention strategies should be provided, and effective computer-based education should be availed to students and teachers to aid accessing computer technology with confident and competent usage. Support and help units and groups within the university centers and departments can be established and made available for all. Financial as well as psychological supports should be given equally to all in need.

Digital resources and learning references related to English in Medicine should be made available and easily accessible for teachers and students. E-textbooks, e-dictionaries and animated reference books should be available and leading academic journals in the field of medicine should be made free to access to enhance reading skills and different educational videos and movies should be at the reach of teachers to use them in teaching.

Online teaching methodologies in English in Medicine class should be more efficient and effective as compared to on-site teaching. Teachers should maintain their digital presence utilizing a variety of diverse communication methods such as discussion boards, emails, announcements, and forums to be present in each online classroom. Plenty of opportunities to engage with the content using discussion forums and groups within the class so that students can engage in feedback and support with their fellow classmates and benefit significantly from
actively engaging in this type of communication. Variety of learning styles should be promoted to enhance their learning capabilities and educate them about the importance of both group work and individual achievements. Using an assortment of appropriate and easily approachable resources such as digital publications, news sites, online videos and incorporating digital resources is strongly recommended.

Prudent selection of teaching methodologies that suit the course objectives and learning outcomes should be adopted instead of traditional methodologies. The focus should be given to the contextual use of the English language rather than merely translating vocabulary and grammar. Developed communicative and interactive teaching methodologies that engage the students and motivate them to learn and help them learn in context should be activated. Self-studying, instructive and constructive approaches, flipping and adaptive learning should be triggered.

Audio-visual aids should be actively utilized in the online classroom. Video gaming and video production and digital resources should be used to boost students’ interest in attending and upgrade their academic progress.

Active online communication and collaborations should be augmented to bridge the communication gap between the educator and the learner and between learners themselves and enhance the productive online practice of medical English in context. Teachers should set the communication plan and encourage students to interact through communal discussions, and in-class and out-class spaces.

Formative and open-book exams should be designed to evaluate students’ comprehension and critical competence rather than assessing their memorization of medical terms and their translation.

Synchronous tests during live sessions should be given to truly reflect students’ linguistic performances and do justice to their accurate progress levels. Oral assessments should be included in the assessment policy of the course to ensure achieving the learning outcomes of the course that majorly focus on developing the oral professional English language skills to practice it fluently in the medical field.

The study’s recommendations substantiate the principles of Good Online Teaching Practice (GOTP) and pedagogic principles for effective online teaching introduced by Anderson & McCormics, 2005 as shown in Figure 10. In a nutshell, these principles emphasize on the consistency of Learning methods quality should be prioritized on quantity, appropriateness of student activities and the type of assessment. Learning outcomes, online learning processes, and assessment strategies should be correspondent to each other. Synchronous and asynchronous teacher–student interaction must be encouraged as a critical element for stimulating students toward excellent performance. Online pedagogy should incorporate learning strategies that promote demonstration of higher order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) and communication skills (writing, reading, speaking, listening). Effective team-work and collaborative sociality should be encouraged. Active and interactive should be fostered incorporating audio, video, and links to other virtual worlds to create authentic, cooperative
problem-solving activities that enhance student to build meaningful knowledge dynamically. Nonetheless, self-directed learning should be augmented to bridge the transactional gap by motivating and instilling responsibility in students for congregating and constructing knowledge through independent and collective learning activities. As for assessments, both summative and formative assessment should be applied in online teaching to reflect on learners’ progress and have delivery of valid and reliable evaluations. Feedback must be promptly given to students to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves. Effective time-management and timely task completion should be boosted to establish the basis for high performance. In an online setting, it is pertinent to set clear expectations for quality student performance to encourage students to make extra efforts and perform well. Different talents and learning styles should be respected always and online activities should allocate several opportunities to tackle the various learning preferences and skills. Online teaching should have a system for effective supervision and monitoring including setting standards for students, facilitation, guiding, setting boundaries, giving effective feedback to ensure the attainment of proposed outcomes of online learning and help students to optimize learning.

**Figure 10.** Recommended Principles of good online teaching practices (Adapted from Anderson & McCormics, 2005)

**Conclusion**

Online teaching has been imposed to all Saudi educational institutes as an emergency social distancing measure to combat with the horrendous outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, which consequently posed considerable challenges to teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes. The current study was intended to examine these challenges to put practical solutions to them. Data analysis revealed that there are many challenges related to technology pedagogy and evaluation. The study draws effective solutions to grant successful online learning and teaching of ESP courses including addressing technological problems, nurturing teachers’ and students’ digital competence and enhance their technical skills and availing digital resources for
all. Outstanding and advanced teaching practices that incorporate configuration of the online teaching and learning with active delivery of curriculum and objectives, synchronous and asynchronous interaction between teacher and student should be adopted to reassure the development of higher-order thinking skills, active learning, and self-directed learning in students. Online assessments should be both formative and summative. Capacity building and faculty development programs for the development of competencies such as digital competency, pedagogical competency, and technical competency in the times of COVID-19 should be given paramount attention and care. This study highlights some of the aspects of the online teaching and learning process of English for Specific Purposes at one of the Saudi public universities from both teachers’ and students’ perspectives. Further studies are recommended for more understanding of the topics mentioned, beside other related matters, on the level of the selected university and other universities from different standpoints to utilize the potential of online teaching and learning as a flexible, learner-centered channel of boosting students self-directed learning skills, suggesting effective solutions to the challenges that hamper its successful implementation. Although online teaching and learning of medical English and ESP generally is somehow challenging, it has the potential to turn out to be a mainstream in the future.

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References


Investigating the EFL Courses Shift into Moodle during the Pandemic of COVID-19: The case of MA Language and Communication at Mostaganem University

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Abstract
The ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 has affected all countries worldwide in all sectors, mainly in the education sector. Schools and Universities were closed. Teaching and learning were transformed from face to face environments to online platforms. In light of the latter, a pivotal query in this study was to investigate the shift of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and teaching into Moodle online learning platform and how the delivery of online EFL courses was (un-)beneficial for students to end up the academic year. This research paper sets out to deconstruct recent calls for integrating several E-learning platforms or apps into the Algerian university. To carry out this study, we used an interview with six Algerian university teachers as a first research tool to cover all issues that arose regarding the use of MOODLE e-learning platform imposed by the Ministry of Higher Education. Another target in this paper is to uncover the main difficulties our colleagues have faced during the confinement. The second research tool we used in this survey was an online class observation followed by six questions on Moodle, the Google Meet app, and a closed Facebook group. We chose 24 MA Language and communication students from the English language department of Mostaganem University to reveal the obstacles they faced throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic. The results showed that both teachers and students are ready to access various online platforms or apps as alternatives such as Zoom, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups to continue teaching and learning English.

Keywords: Algerian University, Covid-19, EFL courses, MOODLE, Online platforms.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused drastic changes worldwide at various levels, and the sector of education was/is at the heart of these alterations. The latter has been subject to sudden adjustments that were imposed by the long period of quarantine. To confront the unexpected conditions born due to a total or partial confinement, most countries of the world have found out that online platforms and e-meetings were the best way to carry on the academic year with the least deficiencies for educational institutions, teachers and students alike.

In less technologically developed countries, this transition was difficult and precarious for most teachers and students at either level: the basic and higher education. For instance, in Algeria, Baccalaureate pupils of 2019-2020 class had to watch YouTube videos where teachers, selected by the ministry of education, gave lessons on the parts of the program that remained after schools were closed. As they were not familiar with this new teaching method, most pupils around the national territory did not follow these lessons on TV or YouTube, and if they did, they often were distracted by entertainment videos, Facebook notifications or Instagram new posts. Also, most of them preferred to attend private courses. As for higher education, all Algerian universities had to create official online learning platforms, which were MOODLE, to oblige teachers to upload the remaining lectures from the second-semester. However, Algerian university students have found that downloading lectures in PDF or/and PPT format was/is similar to searching the lectures on GOOGLE or other research engines. On the one hand, they have found themselves lost in following their teachers’ courses and always missing the point while reading the downloaded lectures. On the other hand, the interaction between teachers and students was absent throughout this experience. Therefore, most students were unable to develop their cognitive skills.

For English as a foreign language (EFL) students, the issue was not only related to the above-mentioned points but also to the necessity of developing the four macro skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Students could not practice their listening or speaking skills, in particular, through reading lectures on the university MOODLE. Moreover, teachers could not enhance their students’ writing and reading skills this way as there is no interaction. Moreover, they could not find effective ways to assess and evaluate their students via this platform.

To solve the above-listed issues, many university teachers have considered using other alternatives to obtain a successful continuation of the teaching and learning process with their students while realizing a synchronous and asynchronous student-teacher interaction. Therefore, online meetings on ZOOM or GOOGLE MEET, Facebook closed groups were created to deliver courses, alternative. In this context, the present research study aims to reveal the obstacles encountered by teachers and MA language and communication students on MOODLE during confinement. Also, it calls for integrating several E-learning platforms into the Algerian university to encourage and develop online teaching and learning.

The current study, therefore, sought to investigate what was going on among teachers and student during confinement by asking the following research questions:
1. To what extent has the official university MOODLE online learning platform helped EFL MA students Language and communication students to follow and understand their courses at home, during confinement?
2. Are Facebook closed groups, Google Meet app as alternatives more effective for MA language and communication teachers from the English department at Abdelhamid IBN Badis University, Mostaganem, to deliver EFL courses?
3. What are the obstacles and challenges teachers and students of MA language and communication in the English language department at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University have faced when using online learning platforms?

Based on these research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Because EFL MA students of Language and Communication could not understand most lectures after downloading them from the university's MOODLE, they have used Facebook closed group and Google Meet to follow their studies with their teachers and mates.
2. Facebook closed groups; Google Meet app could be more effective alternative tools to help MA language and communication teachers to deliver their courses and create interaction with their students.
3. Teachers and students have faced many obstacles and challenges on online learning platforms such as slow internet connection, inappropriate timing, and some students' unwillingness to study online.

Accordingly, a theoretical survey will be presented in the following section to cover the main concepts and key points related to the main research area on which this research paper is based, namely the rise and growing need for teaching / online learning strategies in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and the long period of quarantine.

2. Literature review

During the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, various sectors of society were affected; all countries had to take many decisions to confront this multilayered crisis, and Algeria is no exception. In this section, we address our concerns and interests in the education sector. The latter has been deeply affected by the coronavirus epidemic. More particularly, “the Covid-19 pandemic has forced schools and universities to shut down, and inevitably disrupts the traditional forms of face-to-face learning.” (Syahrin & Salih 2020, p. 48).

Azzi-Huck & Shmis mentioned that “in the meantime, fourteen days after the fact, 120 countries have closed schools impacting almost a billion students across the world that have experience closures of their schools for the period.” (as cited in Shahzad, Hassan, Aremu et al., 2020, p. 2) In this circle of fear-provoking, universities transformed face-to-face education to online. Therefore, the higher education system started operating through E-learning (Azzi-Huck & Shmis 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020 a, b); and the delivery of learning has become through technology and the internet (Gros et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2017; Aljawarneh, 2020).

In Algeria, as in many countries, the prime ministry closed schools and universities and supported online learning platforms to allow for more social distancing. “The transition to online learning was the only option during the situation’s gravity because of the COVID-19 outbreak.” (Mahyoob, 2020, p. 352 ) Also, the Algerian state decided to continue distance teaching to avoid academic year failure on February the 18th 2020. To facilitate this sudden transition to distance learning and teaching and make it successful, “the Ministry of Higher Education has recently
trained, mainly novice teachers on how to work with platforms like Moodle and Blackboard.” (Ghouane, 2020, p.22).

Accordingly, the current research study focuses on the benefits of various E-learning interactive platforms in education. The latter are becoming widespread worldwide; they are considered as a generator for 21st-century students. They create a more significant impact on all students' types, much as the part-time and Full-time or distance learning student in the higher education institution (Azhari & Ming, 2015).

At present, in higher education and during the confinement period and Covid-19 pandemic, with several e-learning platforms or apps, teachers have been empowered to deliver their courses through online platforms, such as MOODLE. The latter stands for Modular Object-Oriented Term Developmental Learning Environment, which is also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).” (Lopes, 2014, P. 5361). Martin Dougiamas developed it in 2004 to facilitate working in collaborative communities and to create appropriate options for the program. MOODLE has become well known worldwide to conduct courses online to support blended learning and then group content or similar activities, instructors continue their teaching by technologizing their teaching methods. Recently, in Algerian higher education, MOODLE e-learning platform has unexpectedly been integrated to substitute the traditional teaching method in all universities to reinforce and enrich the quality of programs as it requires self-regulated students and modern teachers. Thus, this investigation focuses on MOODLE's sudden integration into Algerian higher education, and the obstacles teachers and students have faced. To this end, on the one hand, our research study aims to investigate whether incorporating MOODLE to pursue higher studies at university during quarantine since March 2020 was successful or not. On the other hand, we attempt to examine a number of other e-learning tools adopted among university teachers, such as Facebook closed groups and Google Meet.

France-Presse reported in the Jakarta Post that about six million organizations use Google Meet. As for the latter, it is upgrading its platform. Javier Soltaro, G Suite vice president, said that this platform would be available to all users worldwide, enabling people to build communication, make collaboration and keep in touch as long as a pandemic is still going on. When users have experience in Google Meet using, they find the ease and usefulness” (as cited in Purwanto&Tannady, 2020, p. 2835)

In this regard, and because many Algerian university teachers are aware of the opportunities that various online platforms offer, many instructors have challenged themselves to overcome the difficulties they have faced during the COVID-19 pandemics. For instance, to keep in touch with MA students as long as a pandemic is still going on, authors of the present research preferred to move from MOODLE to Google- Meet and Facebook closed groups as alternatives to continue teaching e-learning, Human Resources Management (HRM) and Applied linguistics courses.

3. Research methodology

This research study is descriptive and exploratory. We used an interview method to assess teachers' perceptions of integrating the university MOODLE e-learning platform and other
virtual spaces such as Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups to continue the teaching process and avoid an academic year failure. Additionally, we used online observation followed by six questions while being through e-learning platforms, MOODLE, Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups to assess students' satisfaction when using other virtual learning spaces to continue their learning process.

3.1 Methods

This research study seeks to highlight the teachers’ and students’ challenges, obstacles and perceptions when using some online learning platforms such as MOODLE, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups, for delivering English courses, during confinement since Mars 2020. To deconstruct our experience of teaching online with our students during this time and to present the views and perspectives of our colleagues, we used online observation followed by six questions and interview research tools to obtain relevant data on the perceptions of teachers and students on delivering and attending lectures on university MOODLE and/or on other platforms suggested by some colleagues, including the closed Google-Meet and Facebook groups.

3.2 Context

Our research study took place on Abdelhamid Ibn Badis university Moodle, Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups. These platforms represent three different online contexts. MOODLE is free software, a learning management system that provides a platform for e-learning, i.e. it is an online learning platform; Google-Meet is a video-conferencing application that allows its users to interact via video meetings. As for Facebook closed groups, they are created by Facebook users to create a virtual community in this social networking site.

3.3 Participants

Our respondents were six EFL university teachers and 24 MA one language and communication students.

3.4 Procedure

This research study took four months of observation (March-June) on the MOODLE platform, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups with our students. We have interviewed our colleagues (participants) individually to confirm our insights towards the delivery of online EFL courses failure during confinement. As for our students, we have observed their interaction with us on both Google-Meet and Facebook closed group on the one hand and the university's Moodle on the other hand. Moreover, we have asked them six closed-ended questions regarding their familiarity with online learning platforms and the obstacles they have faced.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on our experience and the answers we received from our participants, we could confirm our conception of the university MOODLE failure in the department of English. This platform has failed in providing teachers with an effective online tool to deliver their courses during confinement. It also failed to offer the students an interactive platform that allows them to stay connected with their teachers during the quarantine. On the other side, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups are more supporting and supportive pedagogical tools that teachers can use during the quarantine and even after the pandemic is over.
In fact, since March 2020, both students and teachers have been struggling because they could not have access to MOODLE. They have been under pressure from repeated calls from the Ministry of Higher Education to continue uploading lectures to MOODLE. The corollary of this was the rushed and chaotic upload of the university MOODLE lectures. As a result, students got lost while downloading these courses from the platform. In this respect, the next section presents what we have observed and got as answers about the students’ perception of the online learning platforms they have used during the quarantine.

4.1 Students’ perceptions of Integrating MOODLE Online Learning Platform, Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups

1. Did you find MOODLE as a supportive, helpful and suitable pedagogical tool?
   ➢ All of our participants did not find MOODLE as a supportive educational tool at first. They believe that it was imposed inexperienced by the Ministry of Higher Education, without being ready for such an experience.

2. How many times have you downloaded lectures from MOODLE?
   ➢ During the first months (March and April), students revealed that they were unable to access MOODLE to download the lectures.

3. What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access the online learning MOODLE platform?
   ➢ For our students, many obstacles have handicapped their online learning process on MOODLE. They are many, such as (the slow internet connection, the lack of online learning training, and no MOODLE guide was submitted to students, to know how to use MOODLE, etc.

4. Did you contact your teachers to ask them for help?
   ➢ The majority of students said they did not contact their teachers to ask for help regarding the use of Moodle, except eight students said that they emailed two of their teachers to get further information and clarifications regarding the MOODLE platform.

5. According to you, is integrating only the MOODLE into the educational system appropriate? If no, what do you suggest?
   ➢ All students have agreed that using one online learning platforms is not enough. They believe that using other e-learning platforms or apps would help students improve their understanding of courses, such as applied linguistics, e-learning, and HRM. They could have determined and detected the difference between being through the university Moodle and the other two virtual spaces because their teachers taught them the courses listed above on Google Meet and Facebook closed group during the quarantine.

6. On Google Meet and Facebook closed groups, how do you describe this short experience with your teachers?
   ➢ All students have enjoyed their experience with the Google- Meet and Facebook closed groups. They said they had interacted with their teachers in different ways: speaking, texting and interacting. It has allowed them to enhance their reading, speaking and writing skills. Also,
students have felt that they have been more autonomous in the learning process as they could download lectures and understand the course content.

4.2 Teachers’ perceptions of MOODLE Online Learning Platform Use

In our interview, we have asked six of our colleagues about integrating the online learning platform MOODLE at university to deliver their courses.

1- How did you find MOODLE use to deliver courses?

Our participants argued that they have not found integrating MOODLE appropriate to avoid the academic year failure. They said they needed sufficient training on how to master using MOODLE to develop and continue the teaching process. Besides, they said that uploading lectures, on MOODLE, in PDF or PPT format was/is not possible and convincing. Also, they said that social and economic factors affected the learning process of students. Some students could not complete their learning process online due to poverty as they do not have smartphones or laptops and due to geographical area since some students live in rural areas where there is no access to the internet.

2- Did you appreciate using MOODLE to upload EFL courses?

Our participants have not appreciated teaching on MOODLE because they found themselves alone without students on the Moodle designed by the university. They did not feel they were teaching, and the same was true for students. They told us teaching without students' inclusion was a failure. Moreover, they told us: "there was no synchronous or asynchronous interaction with the students, needless to mention the issue of teachers' autonomy."

3- What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access on MOODLE?

As students, they have faced many obstacles that have handicapped their online teaching process on MOODLE. They are many, such as the slow internet connection, the lack of online teaching training, no MOODLE guide was submitted, at the beginning of the quarantine, to teachers to know how to use MOODLE.

4- Have you used other online learning platforms or apps as alternatives to deliver the courses and solve the academic year failure?

The teachers’ answer to this question was 'yes'; one teacher said she used Google Meet to teach the MA students online to realize good students’ interaction and autonomy. As for the remaining teachers, including the first author, they said they used Facebook closed groups, messenger and zoom to help students understand the content courses, increase their autonomy, and at the same time continue their teaching process. Their short experience online was appropriate and beneficial for them and their students. As a result, they encourage colleagues and students to take advantage of various platforms and apps, such as Zoom, Facebook closed groups, Google Meet, Youtube etc.

4.3 Suggestions and Recommendations

The previous sections presented the main findings of our investigation. From the answers of our participants, students and teachers, we could have confirmed that our hypotheses were valid. Moreover, as teachers in the department of English at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, and since we have gone through the same experience as our participants, the following
suggestions and recommendations are presented to help both teachers and students have a successful online teaching /learning experience:
- Video conferencing applications like zoom and Google Meet are more beneficial than the university's Moodle since the former allows for asynchronous interaction between teachers and their students.
- Facebook closed groups can be more beneficial than the Moodle designed by the university since our students feel more comfortable with the former; they master it better than the Moodle.
- The university's Moodle can be re-designed in a way that allows teachers to create forums and chat rooms to interact synchronously or asynchronously with their students.
- Students must be encouraged to use the various online platforms for an educational purpose instead of using social networking sites for self-entertainment purposes.
- Teachers should be free to use the online learning platforms they find more useful and operative to teach their students through.
- Students must be well trained in using the online platforms before they are required to attend courses via Moodle as our students are not accustomed to these platforms.

5. Conclusion

From our experience of teaching MA students online during quarantine, we could have concluded that uploading courses to faculty MOODLE in PDF or PPT format was/is not effective or beneficial for teachers and students alike. In the beginning, many students could not access the platform; therefore, they could not download the lectures. In other words, our students were not ready to be autonomous learners to leave them alone on this platform with PDF or PPT files. It was frustrating for most of them as the majority of students prefer to be taught face to face by a teacher rather than going online to download lessons. However, the Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups as alternatives were much more successful than the university's platform. On the former, students could synchronously interact with their teacher and ask questions when texting their teacher. Thus, the ministry and policymakers should rethink the feasibility of integrating the university online learning platform, especially those that do not allow student-teacher interactions.

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References


**Appendices A and B**

**A. Students’ six questions after online class observation**
1- Did you find MOODLE as a supportive, helpful and suitable pedagogical tool?
2- How many times have you downloaded lectures from MOODLE?
3- What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access the online learning MOODLE platform?
4- Did you contact your teachers to ask them for help?
5- According to you, is integrating only the MOODLE into the educational system appropriate? If no, what do you suggest?
6- On Google Meet and Facebook closed groups, how do you describe this short experience with your teachers?

**B. Teachers’ questions during the interview**
1- How did you find MOODLE use to deliver courses?
2- Did you appreciate using MOODLE to upload EFL courses?
3- What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access on MOODLE?
4- Have you used other online learning platforms or apps as alternatives to deliver the courses and solve the academic year failure?
The Impact of Metacognitive Online Reading Strategies on Online Reading Disposition of Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract
The scientific knowledge related to online reading dispositions and factors affecting the occurrence of these dispositions is limited. Therefore, this treatise aims at studying the impact of metacognitive online reading strategies on online reading dispositions. To achieve this goal, the mixed method was employed using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Students’ responses were keyed to AMOS software. The statistical analysis has shown students' preference for utilizing support strategies to tackle the problems they might face while they engage with online materials. Reflection, as a disposition, was the most frequently reported by students through their responses to the questionnaires. Further, the results confirmed the impact of metacognitive online reading strategies on online reading dispositions, which was the aim of this paper. These findings provide a holistic understanding of the nature of the relationship between metacognition and dispositions, paving the way for further research that touch other aspects of online reading dispositions.

Keywords: Online reading, metacognition, dispositions, reading strategies, Saudi EFL learners

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Introduction

People become more dependent on Internet as a source of acquiring information and even as a learning tool. Therefore, educational institutes have started to offer and deliver their courses digitally via Internet, and many instructors use the Internet as an instrument to hold their courses and interact with their students. Consequently, these changes force students and people who work in the field of education to employ different strategies and skills to cope with the updating nature of internet information.

As a result, EFL learner face some obstacles when they deal with materials written in English. To tackle these difficulties, students employ various strategies to comprehend vague words and gain the optimal meaning from the texts (Marboot, Roohani, & Mirzaei, 2020). Metacognitive reading strategies provide an aid for students to overcome obstacles they might face while dealing with texts displayed on the Internet.

Digital texts cause students to act in different ways, showing different behaviors while engaging in reading English materials offered on the Internet. However, their dispositions vary from one student to another according to different factors (Dewi & Sahiruddin, 2020).

There is a shortage in research that examine the intended variables and what is the relationship between them. Therefore, in order to reach a full understanding of the employed metacognitive reading strategies and the potential dispositions that might take place while engaging with digital materials, a research was conducted on this area which would give further explanation for the nature of this relationship, also, it would try to delineate theoretical thinking about this relationship.

Literature Review

Metacognitive Online Reading Strategies (MORS)

Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) have placed metacognitive reading strategies into three categories, namely, global, problem-solving and support strategies. Global strategies help learners monitor their reading, review content, check its appropriateness of the content, observe text’s characteristics, such as length and organization, and anticipate the text meaning. Problem-solving strategies are actions that readers take while working straightforwardly with the content, particularly when the content becomes troublesome. These strategies involve inferring from obscure words, modifying the reading rate, settling the conflicting data, and rereading the text to promote comprehension. Support strategies are what readers use to expand comprehension, for example, utilizing a dictionary, taking notes, shedding light on certain information, or translating from one’s first language to the targeted language.

Anderson (2003) compared ESL and EFL students’ different uses of metacognitive online reading strategies, using the Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS), which was specifically created for his study, based on the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). The adapted Online SORS (OSORS) consists of 38 items that measure metacognitive reading strategies. The items are subdivided into three categories: global reading strategies (18 items), problem solving strategies (11 items), and support strategies (nine items). The findings of this study revealed no differences between participants and in the use of global and support reading.
strategies between the two groups. Anderson’s paper has an important role in the literature by being the first study on online strategy uses of L2 readers.

**Online Reading Dispositions (ORDS)**

According to Claxton* and Carr (2004), learning requires capability, however, capability alone is not sufficient for learning to occur, especially in academic settings. Learning also takes specific dispositions, or affective variables, which, according to Boggiano, Main, and Katz (1988), is a “domain of human attributes not attributed to knowledge, skill, or behavior” (p. 5).

Furthermore, Carr and Claxton (2002) defined disposition as a “tendency to edit, select, adapt, and respond to the environment in a recurrent, characteristic kind of way” (p.3). Basically, a learning disposition is a pattern of behaviors, situated in the context of the environment that when recognized and developed by those who can manipulate the environment, may lead to gaining knowledge, skills, and understandings. Thus, while online reading comprehension involves specific skills and strategies, there exists the likelihood of affective factors that determine how these skills and strategies are used.

Five dispositions were chosen from three sources: 1) a review of the literature; 2) preliminary results of verbal protocol analysis of seventh-grade students’ online reading (Zawilinski et al., 2007); and 3) classroom observations that took place during a study investigating the development of the Internet Reciprocal Teaching model—(Leu et al., 2005). These included: persistence, flexibility, collaboration, reflection, and critical stance. Since positive dispositions can lead to effective learning, it was thought that these five dispositions were likely to affect online reading comprehension.

_Persistence_ refers to the firm continuance in a course of action during online reading, despite ongoing difficulties. Online reading is often challenging- (Eagleton & Dobler, 2007). It requires rapid, ongoing decision-making, evaluation of those decisions, and frequent revisions to initial decisions regarding what and where to read as readers locate, evaluate, synthesize and communicate information (Coiro, 2009). Students may give up when they do not find the information they seek.

_Flexibility_ refers to the learner being able to transfer skills to novel situations and to apply new approaches when the initial one is unsuccessful. When reading online, students require diverse ways of thinking about conceptual and procedural knowledge (Lawless & Schrader, 2008).

_Collaboration_ refers to students being able to work together in online environments to solve problems. While offline comprehension has long been operationalized as an individual task, it is becoming evident that learning in the 21st century requires greater collaboration among students.

_Restoration_ refers to thinking about one’s own thinking process while continually looking for more effective and efficient ways to expand these abilities. Online reading comprehension
requires continual reflection when students monitor and evaluate how they locate, evaluate, synthesize and communicate information (Coiro, 2007).

Finally, critical stance refers to having a healthy skepticism regarding the information that the student is considering. Evaluation of online texts also requires this critical eye (Fitzgerald, 2000). There are many challenges that students face while using the Internet since the texts are not vetted, are multimodal, subjected to manipulation, and can be authored by anyone (Tate & Alexander, 1996).

Carr and Claxton (2002) suggested that learning is an interaction of capabilities and dispositions. Studies investigating the capabilities of students while reading online are emerging, e.g. (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006; Coiro, 2007), however, little is known regarding the specific dispositions that strengthen these skills (Yaghi & Abdullah, 2020).

Problem Statement
The body of research has investigated the students’ usage of metacognitive online reading strategies in different places around the globe, however, there is a literary gap investigating the disposition students show while reading digital texts. Furthermore, the impact of metacognitive online reading strategies on students’ online reading dispositions has not been studied before. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to understanding this issue, seeking to map out a conceptual thinking of this relationship.

Questions of the Study
a) What are the most and least used metacognitive online reading strategies (MORS) employed by Saudi EFL learners?
b) What are the most and least frequent online reading dispositions (ORDS) of the Saudi EFL learners?
c) Does MORS impact ORDS?

Methods
This paper employed a mixed research (quantitative-qualitative). Therefore, the tool utilized a questionnaire for the quantitative stage and a semi-structured interview for the qualitative stage. The overall goal of mixed-methods research (combining qualitative and quantitative research components) is to expand and strengthen a study conclusion and, therefore, contribute to the published literature. The mixed-method added value by increasing the validity of the findings, informing the collection of the second data source, and assisting with knowledge creation (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela, 2006).

Participants
The research was aimed at students admitted in the Preparatory Year Deanship (PYD), at Majmaah University, in the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020. To achieve the goal of this paper, a sample 301 of PYD students was used. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students to explore their points of view about the relationship intended to be studied in this paper.
Instruments

The study employed the metacognitive online reading strategies questionnaire OSORS to explore students’ tendency toward using and employing MORS. It has been adapted from Anderson’s MORS questionnaire (Anderson, 2003). (Anderson, 2003) describes reading as “an active, fluent process that involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning” (p.85). The survey originally has 38 items (18 items on global strategies, 11 on problem solving strategies, and 9 items on support strategies).

Furthermore, the dispositions from the online reading comprehension (DORC) questionnaire (O’Byrne & McVerry, 2009) were adapted for this research, which allowed participants to show the dispositions they might expose while reading online. This questionnaire consists of five main constructs, flexibility, reflection, collaboration, persistence, and critical instance.

Both questionnaires were tools for achieving the goal of the quantitative phase of the paper. The participants were asked to grade questionnaires statements according to Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= I am not sure, 4 = agree and 5= strongly agree).

Accompanying the results from the quantitative phase, five students were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method. The aim of utilizing semi–structured interviews is to deepen the understanding of the quantitative phase. Also, it would present a clearer view of the relationship among variables since respondents provide direct and honest responses to the interviewer’s questions.

Research Procedures

Students’ responses to questionnaires were gathered and keyed them into the AMOS software in order to find out the main statistics and understand the impact of MORS on ORDS. In addition, five students were interviewed as a complement to the qualitative phase.

Results

Quantitative Phase

This section addresses the descriptive statistics that answer the questions of the study. It highlights the highest and lowest statements reported by students and focus on the main striking results that would offer more elaboration on the variables and the relationship between them.

Question 1: What are the most and least used metacognitive online reading strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners?

Table one demonstrates the mean and standard deviation for each OSORS statement. The value of the mean refers to the frequency of use which ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Reading Strategies</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I have a purpose in mind when I read online.</td>
<td>GRS1</td>
<td>2.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I participate in live chats with other learners of English.</td>
<td>GRS2</td>
<td>2.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I participate in live chats with native speakers of English.</td>
<td>GRS3</td>
<td>2.679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Impact of Metacognitive Online Reading Strategies on Online Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>GRS</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I think about what I know to help me understand what I read online</td>
<td>GRS4</td>
<td>3.123</td>
<td>1.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I take an overall view of the online text to see what it is about before reading it.</td>
<td>GRS5</td>
<td>3.060</td>
<td>1.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I review the online text first by noting its characteristics, like length and organization.</td>
<td>GRS6</td>
<td>3.073</td>
<td>1.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>When reading online, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.</td>
<td>GRS7</td>
<td>3.361</td>
<td>1.314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I read pages on the Internet for academic purposes.</td>
<td>GRS8</td>
<td>3.172</td>
<td>1.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading online.</td>
<td>GRS9</td>
<td>3.128</td>
<td>1.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read online.</td>
<td>GRS10</td>
<td>3.238</td>
<td>1.293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I use typographical features like boldface and italics to identify key information.</td>
<td>GRS11</td>
<td>3.228</td>
<td>1.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the online text.</td>
<td>GRS12</td>
<td>2.957</td>
<td>1.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I check my understanding when I come across new information.</td>
<td>GRS13</td>
<td>3.149</td>
<td>1.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I try to guess what the content of the online text is about when I read.</td>
<td>GRS14</td>
<td>3.255</td>
<td>1.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I check to see if my guesses about the online text are right or wrong.</td>
<td>GRS15</td>
<td>3.046</td>
<td>1.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I scan the online text beforehand to get a basic idea of whether it will serve my purposes.</td>
<td>GRS16</td>
<td>2.974</td>
<td>1.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I read pages on the Internet for fun.</td>
<td>GRS17</td>
<td>3.099</td>
<td>1.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I can distinguish between fact and opinion in online texts.</td>
<td>GRS18</td>
<td>3.096</td>
<td>1.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.074</td>
<td>1.332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Problem Solving Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I critically evaluate the online text before choosing to use the information I read.</td>
<td>PSS1</td>
<td>2.997</td>
<td>1.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading online.</td>
<td>PSS2</td>
<td>3.222</td>
<td>1.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.</td>
<td>PSS3</td>
<td>3.189</td>
<td>1.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading online.</td>
<td>PSS4</td>
<td>3.089</td>
<td>1.365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>When the online text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.</td>
<td>PSS5</td>
<td>3.219</td>
<td>1.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading online.</td>
<td>PSS6</td>
<td>3.142</td>
<td>1.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read online.</td>
<td>PSS7</td>
<td>3.083</td>
<td>1.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>When I read online, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.</td>
<td>PSS8</td>
<td>3.060</td>
<td>1.373</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Impact of Metacognitive Online Reading Strategies on Online Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Supporting Metacognitive Online Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Yaghi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>I go back and forth in the online text to find relationships among ideas.</td>
<td>PSS9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>When the online text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.</td>
<td>PSS10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>I think about whether the content of the online text fits my reading purpose.</td>
<td>PSS11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Support Strategies</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>I take notes while reading online to help me understand what I read.</td>
<td>SS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>When the online text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.</td>
<td>SS2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>I print out a hardcopy of the online text, then underline or circle information to help me remember it.</td>
<td>SS3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>I use reference materials (e.g., an online dictionary) to help me understand what I read online.</td>
<td>SS4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>I use tables, figures, and pictures in the online text to increase my understanding.</td>
<td>SS5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>When reading online, I look for sites that cover both sides of an issue.</td>
<td>SS6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>When reading online, I translate from English into my native language.</td>
<td>SS7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>When reading online, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.</td>
<td>SS8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the online text.</td>
<td>SS9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The abbreviations used in this table are: M = mean, SD = standard deviation, GRS1–18 = global reading strategy items, PSS1–11 = problem-solving strategy items, SS1–9 = support strategy items.

As shown in Table 1 the 302 surveyed students reported using each reading strategy item in the OSORS with varying degrees of frequency. The mean values for individual strategy items ranged from a high of 3.361 to a low of 2.679. The most frequently reported item was item nine, “When reading online, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore” (M=3.361). This strategy was followed by item 36, “I use tables, figures, and pictures in the online text to increase my understanding” (M=3.334) and item 39, “When reading online, I think about information in both English and my mother language” (M=3.325). The strategy with the lowest mean was item five, “I participate in live chats with native speakers of English” (M=2.679). The second lowest strategy was item four, “I participate in live chats with other learners of English” (M=2.732), followed by item 14, “I critically analyse and evaluate the information presented in the online text” (M=2.957).
Looking at the average of mean values, Table one illustrates that the most used strategies reported by students are the support strategies (M = 3.196) followed by the problem-solving strategies (M=3.138) while global strategies were the least used (M = 3.075). Table two discusses the most and the least frequently reported strategies by all participants.

Table 2. The most and least frequently occurring MORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Most frequent</th>
<th>Least frequent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GRS7</td>
<td>When reading online, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.</td>
<td>GRS3 I participate in live chats with native speakers of English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS5</td>
<td>I use tables, figures, and pictures in the online text to increase my understanding.</td>
<td>GRS2 I participate in live chats with other learners of English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS8</td>
<td>When reading online, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.</td>
<td>GRS12 I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the online text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS2</td>
<td>When the online text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.</td>
<td>GRS1 I have a purpose in mind when I read online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRS14</td>
<td>I try to guess what the content of the online text is about when I read.</td>
<td>GRS16 I scan beforehand the online text to get a basic idea of whether it will serve my purposes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The abbreviations used in this table refer to items from global reading strategies (GRS) and support strategies (SS).

Regarding the most frequently used strategies, three of the top five strategies (60%) are support strategies and the other two strategies are global reading strategies (40%). On the other hand, all five least frequently used strategies belong to global reading strategies.

Question 2: What are the most and least frequent online reading dispositions displayed by Saudi EFL learners?

Table 3. The mean and standard deviation of ORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When one strategy does not work for finding information on the Internet I pick another and keep trying.</td>
<td>RT1</td>
<td>3.159</td>
<td>1.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am always learning new things when using the Internet.</td>
<td>RT2</td>
<td>3.046</td>
<td>1.430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I get stuck looking for something online, I am willing to try new things.  
When using the Internet, I try hard to learn new things.  
I am ready to learn new things on the Internet even when they are hard.  
When searching online gets tough, I am willing to spend extra time.  
I think about the words I choose when I write an email or comment.  
It is important to keep your goal in mind when reading online.  
I think about how I am reading when I visit websites.  
I think about my opinion of a subject when reading websites.  
When I choose a website to read, I think back to what I already know.  
I think about what I am doing as I use the Internet.  
I make a plan before I use the Internet for assignments.  
I ask myself if I am finding what I am looking for on the Internet.  

When I think about the words I choose when I write an email or comment, I rate my response as:  

![Response Rating](https://example.com)  

Similarly, when I think about my opinion of a subject when reading websites, I rate my response as:  

![Response Rating](https://example.com)  

And when I choose a website to read, I think back to what I already know, I rate my response as:  

![Response Rating](https://example.com)

**Critical Instance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I trust the opinions I read on websites.</td>
<td>2.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors tell the truth when writing on the Internet.</td>
<td>2.884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust what I read on the Internet.</td>
<td>2.960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can trust the pictures on websites.</td>
<td>2.755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collaboration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy working with classmates when using the Internet.</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like doing projects with other people when using the Internet.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can work with a partner to solve problems online.</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Flexibility**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solving problems using the Internet often takes strategies I learned somewhere else.</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet requires me to make quick changes in how I read.</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When searching online, I often have to change the strategies I have used in the past.</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When reading on the Internet, you have to look at information by moving between different viewpoints</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Impact of Metacognitive Online Reading Strategies on Online Reading

Yaghi

Persistence

When I cannot find what I am looking for on the Internet, I keep trying. PE1 2.92 1.362
When I make a mistake when using the Internet, I keep trying until I get it right. PE2 3.02 1.388

2.97 1.375

Note. The abbreviations used in this table refer to reflection-related items (RT1–14), critical instance-related items (CS1–4), collaboration-related items (CO1–3), flexibility-related items (FL1–4), and persistence-related items (PE1–2).

Table three displays the responses of the 303 surveyed students regarding their online reading dispositions. The most frequently occurring dispositions were ones belonging to the reflection category, with the mean M = 3.065, while the least frequently appearing dispositions are those under flexibility category with the average mean M = 2.801. Means of individual items ranged from 3.185 (highest) to 2.775 (lowest). The most frequently reported item was “It is important to keep your goal in mind when reading online” while the least frequent item was “You can trust the pictures on websites”.

Table 4. The most and least occurring ORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Disposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most occurring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Less occurring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT8</td>
<td>It is important to keep your goal in mind when reading online.</td>
<td>CO2</td>
<td>I like doing projects with other people when using the Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT1</td>
<td>When one strategy does not work for finding information on the Internet, I pick another and keep trying.</td>
<td>FL2</td>
<td>Using the Internet requires me to make quick changes in how I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT12</td>
<td>I think about what I am doing as I use the Internet.</td>
<td>RT6</td>
<td>When searching online gets tough, I am willing to spend extra time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT10</td>
<td>I think about my opinion of a subject when reading websites.</td>
<td>FL3</td>
<td>When searching online, I often have to change the strategies I have used in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT13</td>
<td>I make a plan before I use the Internet for assignments.</td>
<td>CS4</td>
<td>You can trust the pictures on websites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The abbreviations used in this table refer to reflection-related items (RT), critical instance-related items (CS), collaboration-related items (CO), and flexibility-related items (FL).

Based on Table four, it can be seen that the most occurring dispositions belong to the reflection category 100%. On the other hand, the less occurring dispositions varied between
those belonging to flexibility, with 40%, while other dispositions were equally distributed, 20% each, between critical stance, reflection and collaboration.

**The Relationship between IV Items and DV Items**

*Online Reading Strategies’ Groups among DV Items*

The online reading strategies were divided into three groups. Each group was measured separately with the DV. For example, the global reading strategies group (group one) was measured through eight questionnaire items, labeled as GRS2, GRS3, GRS4, GRS7, GRS13, GRS16, GRS17, and GRS18; problem solving strategies group (group two) was measured through eight items, labeled as PSS19, PSS21, PSS22, PSS24, PSS25, PSS26, PSS27, and PSS28; and support strategies group (group three) was measured through six items, labeled as SS30, SS31, SS32, SS33, SS34, and SS35.

**Global Reading Strategies (Group One)**

As presented in figure one, the correlation between the IV-GRS and the DV was 0.75. According to the same figure, the standardized parameters estimations have shown that all indicators were statistically significant (P < 0.001). The CFA results also showed that chi-square was significant, at 1432.864 (df = 404, P = 0.000, N = 302). The GFI was 0.678 and RSMEA = 0.092.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Impact of global reading strategies on online reading dispositions

**(b) Problem Solving Strategies (Group Two)**

The results of CFA as shown in figure two, indicate that the standardized parameter estimates for all indicators were statistically significant (P <0.001) and loaded on this factor. Results also indicate that this model fits to the data adequately. As desired, the chi-square goodness-of-fit was statistically insignificant, at 1544.464 (df = 405 2, P = 0.000, N = 302). The GFI was 0.658 and RSMEA = 0.097.

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2.** Impact of problem-solving strategies on online reading dispositions

*Support Strategies (Group Three)*
The correlation was reported at 0.716. The chi-square goodness-of-fit was statistically insignificant, at 1423.438 (df = 349, P = 0.000, N = 302). The GFI was 0.685 and RSMEA = 0.101.

Figure 3. Impact of support strategies on online reading dispositions

To assess the hypothesized relationships between constructs, a bootstrapping sample of 5,000 was applied. Metacognitive online reading strategies (β = 0.317, t = 7.053, p < 0.001) were found to positively influence online reading dispositions. In order to determine whether these two exogenous constructs have substantial impact on the endogenous construct, their respective effect size (f²) was tested (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). In determining the magnitude of the effect size, Cohen’s (1988) guidelines were employed, in which f² values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The results indicated that the metacognitive online reading strategies (f² = 0.199) had substantial and medium effects on online reading dispositions.

Table 5. The impact of MORS on ORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
<th>Supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MORS -&gt; ORD</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td>7.053**</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Phase

The sample size of students who were interviewed was five. They were students of varying disciplines of PYD. Table six offers further details in this regard.

Table 6. Students’ distribution among disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Applied Medical Sciences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this phase, five Saudi students (A, B, C, D, and E) of PYD were selected and interviewed to investigate their points of view, as EFL learners, regarding online reading dispositions, the usage of metacognitive online reading strategies, and the impact of metacognitive online reading strategies on online reading dispositions. The respondents’
Occurring Online Reading Dispositions

In this regard, students’ responses were mostly similar. The most frequent dispositions reported by respondents were reflective. Abdullah said, “While reading online, I try to find information in different ways. If one of the sources does not satisfy me, I would go to another source. Therefore, I can move from a website to another which becomes more interesting and simpler with different search engines.”.

Faisal depicted himself, “I am a flexible person as I read fast to find the information quickly, without wasting time”. Besides flexibility, Sultan showed another disposition and that is reflection. According to him, “The most occurring dispositions I show while reading online are reflection and persistence. They allow me to learn new things and skills.”. Ahmad had a similar report, “I am fast in reading and would show some kind of reflection and flexibility.”.

Views on Online Reading Dispositions

Regarding this code, students’ views were different. Khalid’s point of view related to online reading dispositions is that they are helpful “They are okay with me since they help me in my study.” The similarity between Faisal’s and Sultan’s point of view is worth mentioning, as they revealed that their skills need further development, “I need to develop my online reading skills” and “I need to develop my skills in order to develop my online reading dispositions,” respectively.

Ahmad’s reflection was different since he acknowledged that some of his colleagues faced difficulties in employing these dispositions, while others considered them easy: “Some students find it difficult and others find it easy, and for me, it is not difficult.”

Alternatives to Online Reading Dispositions

When respondents were asked about having alternatives in case one of the online reading dispositions fails to achieve the task, they responded with certain ways to overcome this...
obstacle. Khalid said, “If one of those online reading dispositions fail, I would search other websites to find more specific information. In case of an unsatisfactory answer, I will ask my friend to help me”. On the other hand, Abdullah had a different view, he keeps switching between different websites to reach the answer; however, he does not ask for assistance from his colleagues as he is the one who always offers help.

“In the case that one of my dispositions fail or does not achieve my purpose of online reading, I will search different sources, like Youtube or Wikipedia, or switch between different sources to check the information. I rarely go to books. Personally, I am the one who offers the help, and I don’t like to receive any help from others.”

Faisal and Sultan had approximately similar responses to this point. Faisal described himself as being persistent and that he would read the text again, unless the text was difficult, in which case he will ask for his friend’s aid. “In case of one of my online reading dispositions failing, I will read the text again, and if it is difficult, I might ask my friend for assistance. I can chat or WhatsApp him”. Along the same lines, Sultan said, “If one of these dispositions fails, I will employ persistence, such as reading the text again, or I might show collaboration by calling and asking my friend to give me assistance.”

Ahmad’s answer was a little bit short and direct, although similar. According to him, “If one of these ORDS fails, I will try different things, like reading it again in order to get the main idea.” He thinks that rereading the text would be useful and fruitful and might help the reader grasp the main idea.

Understanding Metacognition

All students have shown a full consensus about employing metacognitive online reading strategies while they read online. For example, Ahmad said “It is a great question. I use some strategies in order not to consume time, like highlighting the main ideas and details after printing the materials.” Moreover, Abdullah valued the usefulness of metacognitive online reading strategies while using the Internet. According to him, “Online reading strategies are very important to me while surfing the Internet.”

Impact of MORS on ORD

In this regard, the overwhelming majority of students agreed that metacognitive online reading strategies have an impact on online reading dispositions. For instance, Sultan said “MORS have an impact on dispositions because they are related to the task; therefore, I will be fast and flexible to achieve my goals.”. Moreover, there is a great impact of MORS on ORD as was stated by Ahmad

“MORS have a great impact on ORD since it motivates me to get a high score and assisted me to get the main idea in a very short time. Sometimes, I got panicked when I look at a long article, consequently, I utilize problem-solving strategies.”

A clear difference has been reported by Khalid, “Honestly, I don’t think that there is an impact of MORS on ORD”

Suitability of MORS

The most frequently used strategies reported by students belonged to support strategies and global categories. They attributed this selection to their academic status and level of English; therefore, those two kinds of strategies are the most suitable. Sultan said, “Support strategies and global strategies are the most suitable for me because most of my colleagues are not good enough in English and they need to use a dictionary to understand the new words.”. Nevertheless, Ahmad was the only student who thought that problem-solving strategies are more appropriate and helpful “Problem-solving strategies are the most suitable for me.”
Discussion

Based on the responses of the surveyed students, it can be noted that they showed different and varied dispositions. Hence, the findings revealed that students tend to manifest dispositions of flexibility more than other dispositions. By contrast, their least frequent dispositions were distributed between collaboration, critical stances, and reflection types. These findings are a little bit different from those of other studies conducted in this field. The following will give insights about the differences between this current study and other research.

Coiro (2003) has found that successful online readers have an ability to deal with daily updates that occur in the texts. She also mentioned that those skillful online readers show different dispositions during online reading including persistence, flexibility, and patience. In addition, they display creativity and confidence while using the Internet to comprehend diverse online texts.

In a study conducted by Tsai and Tsai (2003), it was found that school students with higher internet self-adequacy utilized PCs more accurately and productively, settling issues autonomously as opposed to requesting help. Correspondingly, they were more able to criticize and evaluate the information they experienced on the Internet.

One of the most important studies that has directly addressed this issue is the study of (O’Byrne & McVerry, 2009), who created and steered an instrument to inspect online reading dispositions, which they depicted as “attitudes and beliefs that lead to the pattern of behavior that promotes gains in the acquisition of knowledge.” The study has discovered three factors, reflection, persistence, and collaboration, which were noteworthy in the advancement of online reading dispositions. (O’Byrne & McVerry, 2009) conducted further research in order to find more online reading dispositions that might occur while students are engaged in online reading. In the same line, Yaghi and Abdullah (2020), have discussed the online reading dispositions, and the outcomes are consistent with the current study, in which most occurring dispositions belong to reflection category.

In contrast to the current study, (Hooper & Herath, 2014) have conducted a research where they aimed to investigate the changes on behaviors of online readers. The most striking result in their study was the respondents’ answering that there was a change in their patience due to the large amount of reading material which highly pressured them and negatively impacted their patience.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of metacognitive online reading strategies on online reading dispositions. Therefore, based on the students’ responses to the OSOR questionnaire and interviews, an image of this relationship has emerged. The following paragraph will comprehensively discuss the results and shed light on the previous studies.

The analysis of this current study has revealed interesting results. Students’ responses in the questionnaire have reflected their tendency to employ online support reading strategies. However, the variances of the mean scores among the three different strategies were not significant. There were slight differences since they stemmed from varying students and levels. The findings of this study were found to be consistent with those of a study conducted by Taki.
(2016), who found that Iranian students preferred to use support and problem-solving strategies while reading online in a second language. Similarly, Vaičiūnienė and Užpalienė (2013) pointed out that students had a preference for using support and problem-solving strategies in online reading. In the same vein, H.-c. Huang, Chern, and Lin (2009) have reported the prevalence of using support strategies which has contributed to most comprehension gain. This study is also consistent with the study by S.-H. Huang (1999) and Shen and Min (2003), who also reported the dominance of support strategies among students. It is apparent that learners essentially rely on support strategies, such as translating, using dictionaries, or highlighting, to facilitate comprehension. The prevailing utilization of support strategies might be explained by convenience and the immediate feedback that students receive when utilizing them (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2004). For instance, students can use the translation mechanism to decode long articles into L1 within a few seconds. Obviously, support reading strategies save both time and effort, and they are useful for learners who are scared by large online articles. In an online reading environment of extensive information resources, learners are probably going to acknowledge and adopt strategies that can enable them to discover, assess, and utilize information quickly (H.-c. Huang et al., 2009; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004).

In contrast to these findings, Shang (2016) studied EFL usage of metacognitive online reading strategies, and found that students valued the use of global reading strategies. Along the same lines, Ramli, Darus, and Bakar (2011) have found that ESL learners tend to employ global strategies more than other online reading strategies.

It is apparent that the most repeatedly used strategies were limited between support strategies and global strategies. Out of the top five used strategies, three strategies belong to the support category. This provides additional support for the study conducted by (Ramli et al., 2011).

Overall, the learners who participated in this study reported that they employ a wide range of metacognitive strategies when reading academic online texts. Therefore, it is important to point out that the most frequent strategy was “When reading online, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.” This result highlights the usefulness of online reading by giving online readers the flexibility to pick the text to read and neglect what they dislike. On the other hand, the least employed strategy was “I scan the online text to get a basic idea of whether it will serve my purposes before choosing to read it.” The most widely used strategy among global reading strategies is “I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read online.” Among problem-solving strategies, the most popular strategy is “I think about whether the content of the online text fits my reading purpose.”

On the other hand, students have reported their preference to use tables, figures, and pictures in the online text to increase their understanding as the most employed support strategy. Students’ points of view in interviews have confirmed the findings of the quantitative phase. They revealed their preference for utilizing support and global strategies, except for one student, who had a predilection to use problem-solving strategies more than the other.

In compliance with the impact of metacognitive online reading strategies on online reading dispositions, the study confirms that there is an impact through this relationship.

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findings demonstrate that support reading strategies have the most significant impact on online reading dispositions.

After discussing the frequency of the three online reading strategies, this study highlights the impact of the metacognitive online reading strategies on online reading dispositions. The data analysis process demonstrates that reading strategies have an impact on the students’ behavior while reading on the Internet. The current study lends support to previous findings in the literature. For example, Castek, Coiro, Henry, Leu, and Hartman (2015) revealed that students’ tendencies and dispositions are firmly connected and affected by employing efficient reading strategies and skills that are required for online texts. Leu et al. (2004) have found that online readers need to utilize metacognitive strategies to locate and evaluate information while reading online texts. Another study by (McEneaney, 2003) also mentioned that dispositions while reading online texts would lead the reader to employ different metacognitive strategies to achieve the tasks.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study seem very supportive of the impact of metacognitive online reading strategies on online reading dispositions of students/online readers. It can be said that metacognitive online reading strategies are tools used by online readers to fulfill multiple tasks, and their usage will vary according to the students’ level, the genre of online texts and the tasks that ought to be completed at the end.

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**References**


Female Saudi University Students’ Perceptions of Online Education Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract
The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc and caused world-wide disruptions to daily activities, including education. Numerous mitigation measures were taken to slow down the rapid spread of this pandemic. The situation, subsequently, entailed utilizing technology to ensure the continuation of the educational process. The abrupt shift to online education presented significant challenges to teachers and learners alike. Uncovering students’ perceptions of their online education experience will help address and deal with these challenges. This study attempted to explore the perceptions of Saudi female undergraduate students of their online education experience amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The total of 241 female students at the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University in Riyadh answered a multi-item online survey. The results revealed that many of the respondents were happy with their online learning experience, enjoyed learning online and looked forward to their online classes. However, when asked to compare online learning to brick-and-mortar classes, more than half of the participants stated that they prefer traditional, face-to-face learning. The results of this study also revealed that the significant problems students faced in online education related to staying motivated, technical issues and the absence of face-to-face interaction. Despite the many challenges they face when learning online, the most cited advantage for online education mentioned by the participants is that it is more convenient. The results also indicated that this education mode seemed to suit shy students more, as they stated that they participate and ask questions more in online classes.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, female Saudi EFL university learners’ perceptions, e-learning; online education; technology

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on all aspects of our lives, including education. The only solution to ensure the continuation of education at all levels worldwide was to optimize the use of technology. Thus, in response to the pandemic, there was a complete shift to online instruction in most countries around the globe. The government of Saudi Arabia was proactive in implementing strict measures to contain and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. One of the earliest measures taken by the government of Saudi Arabia was the closure of schools and universities in March 2020, soon after the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in the country. This strict measure led to the abrupt move to electronic platforms, which caused some disorder to the educational process during that academic year, i.e., 2019-2020. Higher education institutes seemed to have suffered less than schools due to the availability of technological infrastructures, specifically learning management systems such as blackboard. Despite having such infrastructures, neither instructors nor students were ready for such an abrupt change.

However, when the new academic year started in September 2020, the students, along with instructors, have already had some previous experience dealing with online education. The general assumption was that things were settled, and students would not be facing as many issues with online education as in the previous semester. Many teachers, before the outbreak of the pandemic, have not embraced technology, either partially or entirely, in their classrooms for a variety of reasons. Thus, instructors with prior experience with online teaching were definitely at an advantage over their less tech-savvy colleagues. However, the situation has forced all educators to take technology onboard and move to online learning. Technology is, undoubtedly, a double-edged sword; if utilized effectively, it can be bliss; if otherwise, it can be a woe.

There was a pressing need to continue education amid the pandemic despite the disruption it has caused to educational systems worldwide. Research indicates that the impact of this shift to online education on university students has been profound, as there was a sharp drop in their satisfaction levels after the move to online courses (Means & Neisler, 2020). Further, research proves that many aspects of the learning experience are influenced by the expectations and strategies adopted by instructors, such as student satisfaction and academic performance (Bailey & Lee, 2020). Thus, uncovering students’ perceptions of their online experience is expected to help instructors deal with the areas that need to be addressed when designing and implementing an online course. The study in hand attempted to reveal the perceptions of female Saudi undergraduate students about their experience with online education amid the pandemic.

Literature Review

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Model

The tendency has been to only look at technology without paying closer attention to how it can be used effectively. Yet, the mere introduction of technology into education is never enough. There has been recent attention paid to the vital question of what teachers have to know for them to be better capable of incorporating technology appropriately into their classrooms (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (henceforth TPCK) model was proposed by Mishra and Koehler (2006) and argues for the need for a complex and situated form of knowledge for the pedagogical use of technology in the classroom. This framework is based on the understanding that “teaching is a highly complex activity that
draws on many kinds of knowledge” (p. 1020). In this model, the areas of content, pedagogy and technology, which are all essential for delivering good teaching, are treated as interrelated aspects of teaching, rather than separate entities (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Koehler and his colleagues (2007) have claimed that the relationship that holds between these three elements is dynamic and that “good teaching with technology requires understanding the mutually reinforcing relationships between all three elements taken together to develop appropriate, context-specific strategies and representations” (p.741). In other words, integrating technology effectively into teaching requires knowledge of the relationships that hold between these three elements (Koehler et al., 2007).

Content knowledge relates to knowledge about the subject matter that is taught. Pedagogical knowledge, on the other hand, is concerned with the profound knowledge about the practices and methods related to teaching and learning that cover all aspects of the educational process, including student learning, lesson planning, student evaluation, and classroom management. Technology knowledge relates to knowledge about both standard and advanced technologies and the skills needed to operate such technologies. The nature of technology knowledge (TK) tends to shift with time due to the changing nature of technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Further, this model relates to pedagogical techniques which utilize the use of technology to help teach subject matters constructively.

TPCK is a developing form of knowledge that goes beyond the individual components it consists of, i.e., technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge. TPCK represents the base on which good teaching with the use of technology depends and necessitates the understanding “of the representation of concepts using technologies” (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p.1029). The model simply argues that there can never be a single solution applied, to every course, teacher, or teaching method. Using new technology in any course is not like adding a new module to the same course. Effective integration of technology into teaching requires thoughtful consideration of the three elements of content, technology, and pedagogy, the complex relationships between these elements, and careful interweaving of these three primary sources of knowledge for teachers.

Online Education

The advent of technology has drastically changed practices in many aspects of human life. The history of online courses dates back to the 1980s, when the first course to be entirely online in the USA was delivered in 1981. The mid-1980s witnessed the first online graduate and undergraduate courses initiated by some schools and universities in the USA (Sun & Chen, 2016). A cornerstone in the history of online education was the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1991, which facilitated the fast expansion and growth of online learning and teaching in the USA and worldwide (Sun & Chen, 2016). Online education is defined as “a format used in learning when learners do not need to be in brick-and-mortar classrooms” (Sun & Chen, 2016, p. 159). Means and Neisler (2020) define online instruction simply as “instruction offered via the internet to students using their own computers” (p. 4). The internet and the World Wide Web have brought about so many changes and advantages to education. With the new generation being digital natives, online learning is expected to be more exciting and appealing.
Online education has its opportunities and advantages, such as opening up “new markets for higher education institutions” (Sun & Chen, 2016, p. 160). Online learning further facilitates the education of adult learners, who have to juggle many responsibilities, such as work, family, and study. Moreover, the nature of online environments allows for more participation by shy students who are not in favour of face-to-face classes due to their personality traits. Further, research illustrates the many benefits online education presents to teachers and learners, including improved pedagogical practices, classroom engagement, self-confidence, and communication-skills (D. Bailey & Lee, 2020). Other benefits relate to being more convenient than traditional brick-and-mortar classes, having more learner-centered activities, and increased student motivation. These benefits are witnessed due to a shift in the role played by instructors in virtual classrooms, from being mere disseminators of information to facilitators, which gives students more space for active participation in the learning process (D. Bailey & Lee, 2020).

Online learning communities are thought to provide learners with an environment that enables them to learn effectively through the growth of three forms of presence, namely teaching, cognitive and social presence (Sun & Chen, 2016). These three forms of presence are intertwined and interchangeable, with each presence playing a distinctive role. According to Sun and Chen (2016), many studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between social interaction and having a sense of community among learners and their impact on gaining a successful online learning experience. Further, a study conducted by Bailey and Card (2009) sought to reveal effective pedagogical practices for online teaching as perceived by fifteen experienced, award-winning e-learning instructors. Based on the analysis of the one-to-one interviews, eight effective pedagogical practices for online education have been uncovered. These pedagogical practices include fostering relationships, engagement, timeliness, good communication, organization, effective utilization of technology, flexibility, and having high expectations.

Learning in online education can be synchronous, asynchronous, or a mixture of both. According to Means and Neisler (2020), several practices are recommended for online instruction, including having shorter activities, live sessions, frequent assessments, group projects, using ‘breakout groups’ during live classes, sending students personal messages to ask about how well they are doing in the course or to ensure that they can access course materials, using real-world examples when explaining course content, and setting tasks that would ask students to share what they have already learned and what they think they still need to learn in the course. Means and Neisler (2020) stated that incorporating a larger number of these recommended teaching practices resulted in better student satisfaction with their online learning experiences. Of these eight recommendations, the two practices which had the most significant impact on students were including personal messages to learners on how well they have been doing in the course and activities that require them to reflect on things they have already learned and those they still need to know (Means & Neisler, 2020).

Redmond (2011) traced the journey of two academics as they transitioned from face-to-face teaching to fully online education through archived online discussions as well as three one-hour semi-structured interviews. The study helped shed light on the changing beliefs and pedagogical practices of these two academics over four years. Redmond (2011) summarized six frameworks that present a chronology of the various views on the roles played by instructors in
online education. This summary led her to explain that despite using different names for the roles played by online teachers, the activities most commonly done by teachers include designing, management, organization, facilitation, and instruction. Another significant finding Redmond reached was that “the process of facilitating discussion appears to be a key role when teaching in the online space as it explicitly appears in five of the six frameworks” (p. 1053).

The move from face-to-face teaching to entirely online, Redmond (2011) says, challenges the roles and the expectations of learners and instructors alike. One major issue is that experienced instructors in traditional, brick-and-mortar education face an identity threat when moving to online classes, and in fact, “find themselves as novices or beginners when they first teach online” (p. 1052). The results of this study illustrated a shift in the way instructors would communicate with their students online, and how they designed their online courses, which took into account the students’ experiences. The study also emphasized the significance of critical reflection, dialogue, and support during the instructors’ journey from fully face-to-face to fully online teaching. The two instructors’ progress during this pedagogical journey was enhanced by their reflections and their search for professional development. In fact, reflection, Hodges and Fowler (2020) state, “is situated as part of standard instructional design processes” (p.118).

Redmond (2011) further clarifies that the move to online education, whether partially or entirely, calls for changes introduced to practice and pedagogy to achieve effective learning outcomes. Other studies have demonstrated that the move to online education has shifted the role of an effective instructor to a facilitator rather than a teacher (C. J. Bailey & Card, 2009). However, despite the many benefits of online learning, there must be challenges that have to be addressed when planning online education. Some of the challenges identified in the literature on online education include learners being distracted by other online content, having technical problems, and having barriers to authentic communication opportunities (D. Bailey & Lee, 2020). The following section will shed light on some studies that have explored the challenges and opportunities presented by online education.

Studies on Online Education

Sun and Chen (2016) conducted a comprehensive review study on research and studies focusing on online learning. The authors reviewed literature reviews before 2008 and empirical studies after 2008. They aimed at shedding light on the good aspects and strategies of online learning and what makes it a success, thus providing a platform of discussions for both policymakers and educators on ways for developing and delivering effective online courses. This, Sun and Chen (2016) explain, is expected to offer whoever plans on embracing online education with best practices which will ultimately help them make informed decisions during the implementation process.

Sun and Chen’s (2016) review revealed that developing a sense of community within an online environment is in fact a major challenge. To achieve this sense of community, the studies reviewed in this paper indicated the importance of promoting “social presence, interaction, and collaboration” (p. 170), with social presence mainly defined as students’ participation. Thus, Sun and Chen (2016) argue that it is the duty of instructors and learners alike to “make a joint effort
to get deeply involved in constructing interaction and collaboration between the instructor and students and among students to create an effective online learning community” (p.170). This article also reviewed the best pedagogical practices and strategies that are needed to achieve effective online teaching. A significant finding is that teachers, unquestionably, play a crucial role in online education through facilitating discussions, answering students’ questions, designing course materials and assignments, and evaluating students’ learning outcomes. As Sun and Chen (2016) bluntly put it, “technology does not – and cannot – replace the role and position of the teacher” (p. 171).

Cole, Shelley, and Swartz (2014) also conducted a three-year study that aimed to uncover the level of satisfaction of graduates and undergraduates at one university with online instruction. Their research demonstrated that students were moderately satisfied with online education and more satisfied with hybrid or partially online courses than fully online ones. The most cited reason for students’ satisfaction with online education was “convenience,” whereas the top reason for their dissatisfaction was “lack of interaction.” Attempting to understand what makes online learning satisfactory to learners will help inform instructional design and curriculum development, which relates directly to student retention (Cole et al., 2014).

The “Survey of Student Perceptions of Remote Teaching and Learning” was developed to investigate the experiences of undergraduate students who were taking courses during the sudden transition to online instruction in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 (Means & Neisler, 2020). The survey aimed at revealing the nature of the courses taught online during the pandemic, as well as the variety of challenges undergraduate students faced after the transition to online education, and the features of courses associated with higher levels of student satisfaction. This study surveyed a random sample of more than 1000 college students in the United States who witnessed the sudden transition from in-person to completely online learning during spring 2020. The results of Means and Neisler’s study demonstrated a remarkable decrease in student satisfaction with their courses after the move to online instruction, with only 19% of the sample expressing their satisfaction with their online course experience. Sending students personal messages and asking them to reflect on what they have learned were cited as the two factors that had the most significant impact on student satisfaction with online courses. The results indicated that sending students personal messages on how they have been doing helped maintain their motivation, which was cited by the respondents as the most significant challenge they faced due to the move to online learning.

Means and Neisler’s (2020) report also helped reveal some of the aspects that students thought suffered most due to the move online. These included collaborating with colleagues on course work, maintaining students’ interest in the course, and making students feel like part of the class. The most significant challenges, according to the sample in this study, had to do with staying motivated, not knowing where to seek help with the course, and feeling unwell to participate in the course, either physically or emotionally. These were the challenges that related most closely to being overall satisfied with the course. Other themes that emerged from this study related to the learners’ missing the presence of their instructors and colleagues while learning, not having immediate feedback from instructors on their performance, missing the
chance to understand course content better through discussions with peers. Some of the major issues reported by the participants related to internet connectivity, limited access to suitable computer devices, having other family and/or job responsibilities, and the unavailability of appropriate places at home for doing the course work.

Bailey and Lee (2020) also attempted to shed light on the challenges and opportunities online education presents for EFL university instructors. This survey study illustrated several key findings due to the unique situation the world is going through at the time of COVID-19 pandemic. One key finding stated that having experience teaching online was positively related to expected communication channels and activity selection. Further, instructors with no experience teaching online expressed frustration with online education and other related digital teaching activities. This group of instructors also perceived more potential problems when teaching online. The two other groups, on the contrary, perceived fewer obstacles due to their use of a variety of activities and using more communication channels to deliver such activities.

The benefits and challenges to students that have been reported were quite similar across the three surveyed groups, i.e., the no-, low-, and high- experience groups. Some of the benefits for students included having more time to answer, making use of online writing tools, and practicing writing. On the other hand, the students’ challenges the survey revealed included: having to collaborate with other students, becoming distracted, and attending online meetings. Further, it is during such difficult times that “the need to make online educational opportunities easy to access takes on new importance because many learners might not be in an emotional state to focus on learning” (Carter et al., 2020).

A study conducted by Cohen and Baruth (2017) attempted to characterize online learners and examine the relationship between learners’ personalities on the one hand and how satisfied they were with fully online academic courses on the other hand. The study also looked into the possibility of predicting learners’ satisfaction with online courses according to their personalities. The results of Cohen and Baruth’s research demonstrated that being open to experiences and conscientious significantly predicted students’ levels of satisfaction with online learning.

In the Saudi context, Mahyoob (2020) attempted to investigate the challenges faced by EFL learners at tertiary level amid the pandemic through the use of an online survey. The study focused on learners’ views on the sudden transition to online education during the early days of the shift to online mode. The sample included 184 students, both male and female respondents. The results demonstrated that most of the challenges the students faced had to do with technical issues, mainly problems with blackboard and internet connection, which had its impact on exams, tasks, and class attendance. Further, a major obstacle reported by the students was communicating effectively with their instructors during online education. The findings of this study further showed that most participants were not completely satisfied with online learning.

Based on the review of relevant literature presented above, the study in hand aimed at examining the perceptions of female EFL learners at tertiary level amid the COVID 19
pandemic. Uncovering students’ perceptions of their educational experiences, particularly novel experiences, will thus inform pedagogy and lead to better teaching practices.

**Methods**

The present article reports on a case study that attempted to reveal the perceptions of Saudi female, undergraduate students of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents were 241 female, undergraduate students aged 20-24, enrolled at the Department of English Language and Translation, the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University in Riyadh. They have completed at least five levels of their undergraduate degree. The researcher purposefully targeted students from higher levels, i.e., levels six, seven, and eight, because they would have already had enough experience with brick-and-mortar classes at university level and would therefore be able to compare their university educational experience before and after the outbreak of the pandemic and the consequent shift to online education.

The respondents had to fill in a five-Likert scale, multi-item, online questionnaire, which consisted of several closed-ended items and two open-ended ones. The closed-ended items related mainly to whether the students enjoyed online learning, were happy with their experience, and whether they preferred virtual or traditional classroom learning. On the other hand, the two open-ended questions aimed at investigating the advantages and disadvantages of online learning from the students’ point of view. The response rate to this survey was relatively high, as it reached more than 80% of the targeted group, which could be an indication of the students’ eagerness to voice their opinions on online learning. Unlike the study conducted by Mahyoob (2020), which gathered data on students’ perceptions on online education during the early days of the shift to virtual classes, the present study gathered data during the second semester in the history of entirely online learning in Saudi Arabia. Students, have already had experience with online education and the technological issues that come about with it, and are thus less likely to report on major technological issues.

The survey items sought to reveal the students’ perspectives on online education, including the challenges they face during online learning as well as the advantages they see in this mode of learning. Based on what has been mentioned above, this study aimed at answering the following research question:

What are the perceptions of female Saudi undergraduate students of online education amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

The data collected through the closed-ended questionnaire items were analysed descriptively. Descriptive analysis of the results fulfils the purpose of this article, as it provides a simple and clear interpretation of the data. In other words, descriptive analysis satisfies the aim of providing the reader with a clear idea of the participants’ perceptions of online education. On the other hand, the responses to the two open-ended questionnaire items were analysed thematically.
Findings

**Figure 1** Being happy with online learning experience

As Figure one indicates, around 40% of the participants said they are happy with their online learning experience. Only 22% clearly stated that they are not satisfied with their online learning experience, whereas 34% of the respondents were neutral about it.

**Figure 2** Enjoying online classes

Figure two presents another finding, which is relatively consistent with the previous one, that 44% of the participants said that they enjoy online classes, 31% were neutral about it. In comparison, only 25% did not enjoy online learning.

**Figure 3** Looking forward to online classes

When asked about whether they look forward to their online classes or not, 38% said they looked forward to them, 27% were neutral, whereas 35% said they did not look forward to their online classes, as shown in Figure three above.
According to Figure four, around 60% of the participants prefer face-to-face learning, nearly 25% were neutral about it, and only 16% do not prefer face-to-face learning.

Figure 4 Preference for face-to-face learning

Figure five shows that 33% of the respondents prefer online learning, 16% were neutral about it, whereas half do not like online learning. This finding corroborates the previous one.

Figure 5 Preference for traditional classes

When asked about participation, nearly half of the respondents agree that they participate more in online classes, as shown in Figure six, while 20% were neutral about this statement, and 28% disagreed with it.

Figure 6 Participating more in online classes
Figure 7 Feeling more comfortable with asking questions when learning online
Figure seven reveals that almost 55% of the sample students feel more comfortable asking questions when learning online, nearly 25% were neutral, and 20% did not agree with this statement.

Figure 8 online learning being more helpful than traditional learning
Figure eight demonstrates that almost 50% disagree with finding online learning more helpful than traditional classroom learning, whereas 24% agreed to this statement, while 26% were neutral about it.

Figure 9 Learning more in an online environment
When asked about whether they believe they learn more in an online environment or not, 25% of the participants agreed to learning more online, whereas 41% disagreed, and 33% were neutral about this statement, as indicated in Figure nine above.

Figure 10 Instructors possessing good technological knowledge
A positive finding shown in Figure 10 above indicates that most participants, i.e., nearly 75% of them, agree that their teachers have enough knowledge about using online teaching tools, 18% were neutral. In contrast, only 7% disagreed with this statement.

Figure 11 Benefiting more from recorded lectures
When asked about recorded lectures, 77% agreed that they benefit more from lectures when recorded, 13% were neutral, whereas only 9% disagreed with this statement, as shown in Figure 11 above.

Further, the survey attempted to uncover the problems students face with online learning. According to their responses, the participants’ biggest issues were staying motivated to do well in their courses, having problems with internet connection, and the absence of face-to-face interaction.

The questionnaire also included two open-ended questions on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning from the students’ point of view. The students’ responses to these two questions were analyzed thematically. The themes that emerged from their responses to the question about the advantages of online learning were mainly two themes that related to convenience and learners’ traits. The majority of responses to the question on the advantages of online learning stated that it was convenient in terms of saving time, being more comfortable and
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flexible, having recorded lectures, and not having to commute to university. Examples of the students’ responses that illustrate this theme are:

- allow us to have enough time to complete homework or projects
- saving more time instead of going a far distance to university
- the most important for every student is TIME, and online learning saves time from transportation and the way to and from university
- it is a time-saver; you do not have to wake up so early to get ready, have breakfast and then go to the university
- it saves a lot of time (commute time) that I can now use productively
- online learning is more flexible
- attending classes from your home comfort is, of course, an advantage
- better time management + flexibility
- some lectures are recorded so I can go back to them
- attending classes on time easily

The second most cited advantage had to do with learners’ traits, especially ones related to students’ shyness and how learning online helped them participate more despite being shy. Some responses that demonstrate this theme included:

- much easier to participate
- being able to participate without feeling shy
- feeling free to ask questions and answering even if it is wrong
- sending my questions without talking or being recognized
- no fear or shyness to participate or ask
- ask questions comfortably
- I can talk with my teacher without feeling shy
- that I am able to ask questions and participate more than in real life because I get very anxious
- interact with teachers comfortably
- in my presentations I become less nervous
- I have more confidence to talk to my teachers

When asked about the disadvantages of online learning, the students mainly mentioned technological problems, the learning environment with the absence of face-to-face interaction, and its effect on their levels of motivation and focus, having too many distractions, and sometimes more tasks to fulfill. The most cited disadvantage by the participants was technological issues, particularly internet connection problems, sound quality, and lagging in blackboard.

A central recurrent theme was the online learning environment and how it affected the students’ ability to focus, stay motivated, and having too many distractions around them during online classes. Some mentioned that they struggled to find a quiet place to attend their classes. Further, some participants commented on how isolating the online learning experience is, how badly they miss attending university, socializing with others, and interacting with them face-to-face. Such comments are proof enough for the desperate need to create a sense of community
among the learners when delivering an online course. The following were some of the participants’ actual responses:

- create a sense of isolation
- missing the face-to-face interaction- not getting to know the teachers personally
- loss of motivation and concentration
- absence of interaction with teachers and students
- never motivated that it kills the excellent student I have in me
- I get distracted easily
- it’s boring, so we lack attention and get distracted
- I do not feel motivated. It does not seem like a real class
- not being able to stay focused during classes
- finding a quiet place

Another disadvantage of online learning given by the participants related to having more tasks to do after the abrupt transition to online education, thus being overloaded with assignments, quizzes, and other coursework. On the other hand, a few responses mentioned by the participants related to the teachers themselves, either not knowing students, being inconsiderate of them and their time, or not knowing how to handle technological problems efficiently. Interestingly enough, the response of one of the participants was, “I think there are no disadvantages.” This response, in particular, is intriguing as it reflects how diverse the views of students are regarding their experience with online learning.

Discussion and Implications

This study revealed several findings about the perceptions of female undergraduate students of EFL online education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. One major finding is that many of the respondents were happy with their online learning experience, enjoyed learning online and looked forward to their online classes. Yet, when asked to compare online learning to brick-and-mortar classes, more than half of the participants stated that they prefer traditional, face-to-face learning. The former result could be justified when relating it to another finding of this study which indicated that students believed their instructors possessed good technological knowledge. Instructors knowing how to deal with technological tools efficiently results undoubtedly in a better learning experience. This finding is contrary to the results reported by Mahyoob (2020) who stated that most students in his study were not satisfied with their online learning experience and that they had many issues interacting and communicating with their instructors effectively. Research done on online education has emphasised the key role instructors play in online learning (Sun & Chen, 2016; Means & Neisler, 2020).

Another major finding is that the students’ most cited advantage for online education was ‘convenience,’ which was also the most cited reason for students’ satisfaction with online instruction in other studies (Cole et al., 2014; Bailey & Lee, 2020). The results also showed that the online education mode suited a group of students, particularly those who are shy. This finding is also supported in the literature, as Sun and Chen (2016) explained that the nature of online environments allowed for more participation by shy students who do not prefer attending face-to-face classes due to their personality traits. On the contrary, the most cited disadvantages for online education by the respondents in this study were the lack of face-to-face interaction and
the effect it had on their ability to stay motivated and focused, as well as having technical problems, particularly with internet connection. These challenges were similar to the challenges reported by students in other studies, such as the ones by Means and Neisler (2020), Cole et al. (2014), Mahyoob (2020) and Bailey and Lee (2020).

Having revealed students’ struggle and the many problems they have to face when attending classes online requires that instructors become more considerate of them and the issues they have with online learning. We all realize that attending classes online, amidst these difficult times, can be pretty demotivating. Thus, instructors should show empathy to students and provide them with the help and support they need. The advice for instructors is to vary the teaching techniques and strategies used during online education to address the needs of different learning styles. Following a ‘one size fits all’ approach when teaching online could lead to limited participation and classroom engagement (Bailey & Lee, 2020), which will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the learners’ motivation.

To facilitate the development of pedagogical practices, instructors should get into the habit of reflecting on their professional practice. Reflection entails that by the end of the online course, instructors would mainly ask themselves about the things that went well and those which did not, thus they would carry on doing the things that went well and look for better ways to deliver course items that did not work well. Further, as part of the reflection process, instructors can ask the students who have completed the course requirements for their views on the contents of the course and teaching strategies used during the course. Instructors might also face problems with course design and planning, particularly ones who are not knowledgeable enough about online class delivery (Bailey & Lee, 2020). Knowing that this type of problem is typical and looking for solutions, such as reaching out for help, can lead to better online teaching practices. To understand the online teaching and learning processes better, Redmond (2011) advises academics to develop the practice of critically questioning their pedagogical practices and to hold discussions with their peers on such matters. For this to be successful, she says, “there needs to be a climate of support, the participants need to be receptive to feedback from their peers, and they should engage meaningfully in reflective practice” (p.1058). As previously mentioned, personal reflections and the search for professional development helped enhance the instructors’ progress during their pedagogical journey in Redmond’s study.

The educational process has gone through a tectonic change caused by the unfolding events that accompanied the outbreak of the pandemic. This time of COVID-19 and the complete shift to online education has been a catalyst for change and has seen the introduction of technological innovations in teaching and learning. However, with learners being at the center of the educational process, an important question posed by this study is whether students are considered winners or losers of this change? Are we to consider them winners, given that most of the new generation, if not all, are digital natives? A simple answer to this question, supported by the results of this study and other similar studies, is that technology indeed has a lot to offer, yet it is not always perfect, and it can never substitute the critical role teachers play in the educational process.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about many new challenges to both learners and teachers. Further, the pandemic and the sudden transition to online education has led educators to
redefine their roles and teaching practices in virtual classrooms. Online education is all about the learners; thus, more should be done to reveal the factors that motivate learners to take part actively in an online course, given that active participation results in better learning outcomes. Education is inherently a social matter, therefore, more of the social element should be added to break the ice, engage the students, and increase their motivation during online classes. University instructors should modify their roles in virtual classrooms from being mere disseminators of information to facilitators. This presumably will help ensure the involvement and engagement of learners in the learning process, and when this is achieved, their motivation will most likely increase.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the students’ responses to this survey study, blended learning seems to be a promising option that would suit learners of different learning styles. In post-pandemic EFL classrooms, blended learning would apparently be a better approach that would facilitate integrating technology into the educational process. Despite that the sudden transfer to online education amid the COVID-19 pandemic has caught us unaware and caused considerable disruption, this experience can be viewed as a blessing in disguise. It opened instructors’ eyes to novel ways of delivering classroom instruction and has led them to learn about new virtual resources and activities. The shift to online education has been an excellent opportunity for professional development which should never end; instead, the experience has proven to instructors that there is no limit to professional development and that they can always learn something new and embrace new technologies in EFL classrooms.

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