Professional Development and Teaching Practices of EFL Palestinian Teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Three Female Teachers

Khaled Dweikat
Faculty of Educational Sciences
Al-Quds Open University, Palestine
Corresponding Author: kdweikat@qou.edu

Munther Zyoud
Faculty of Educational Sciences
Al-Quds Open University, Palestine

Abstract
The current study investigated the activities and practices used by three female EFL teachers during the coronavirus pandemic between March 2020 till February 2021. The study also explored the difficulties and obstacles faced by the three teachers during that period. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative approach utilizing a case study design was employed using three tools: teachers' written reflections, content analysis of teachers' posts on the social media, and a focus group meeting via Zoom. The significance of the study emerges from its objectives to contribute to EFL teachers' professional development during the emergency cases. Results revealed that the three teachers were able to cope with the new situation by adopting new methods of content delivery and new forms of communication as well. These teachers used online technologies such as Facebook, YouTube, and Microsoft Teams to communicate with their students and the parents as well. However, some challenges emerged, including the financial situation of the families and its impact on students' access to internet connection and family affordability. Under these conditions, teacher training programs are in demand for using appropriate technologies that engage the students and attract their attention.

 Keywords: Coronavirus pandemic, EFL teacher reflection, teacher professional development, teaching practices, female teachers, case study

Introduction

Investing in the education and health sectors are an important priority for any population. These two sectors are essential components and indicators of the developed countries. Unfortunately, in the developing countries like the newborn State of Palestine, these sectors have suffered for ages. Recently, under the spread of COVID -19, the situation is getting worse due to the current world financial crisis on the one hand and the financial crisis afflicting the Palestinian Government as a result of unfair Israeli measures on the other hand. These conditions as well as others have aggravated the situation in all sectors and the educational sector is no exception. Responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have created several challenges for teachers including "problems caused by the urgent conversion to online language teaching" (Macintyre et al., 2020), and to not being trained in the necessary technical, and pedagogical skills to integrate digital technology instruction (Schleicher, 2020). Naqvi & Zehra (2020) added that "the transition to online mode was quite hasty, and most of the institutions were in somewhat of a trial and error phase".

What might have augmented the current situation is that no one single model for online learning can provide equitable educational opportunities for all. And the virtual learning is not a cheap fix for the ongoing crisis (Kaden, 2020), and some problems are related to financial stability, access to open resources, and access to devices and instruction (Uro; Lai, L & Alsace, 2020).

Taking into consideration the local and global contexts, the current qualitative study aimed to identify the types of activities and practices used by three female EFL teachers in Palestine and the significant difficulties and obstacles faced by them during the COVID-19 pandemic. These objectives were guided by three questions: 1) What are the new roles and responsibilities of the teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic? 2) What are the significant difficulties and obstacles faced by the teachers? 3) What is to be done to empower teachers to succeed during an unexpected crisis when provided with the right technology and required support and training? The study's findings hoped to shed some light on the fundamental shifts in teaching practices and teachers' responsibilities in the Palestinian context during this global pandemic. Findings are also expected to contribute to the existing literature related to teacher education and professional development during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular.

Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions worldwide have suffered a lot to the extent that most countries have closed schools and universities for months. In Palestine, the first closure of schools started on the 5th of March 2020. This closure was accompanied by a quarantine that lasted for about two months. Accordingly, neither the students nor the teachers were able to go to school. In this regard, the World Bank started working with ministries of education in many countries to support their efforts to utilize educational technologies of all sorts to provide remote learning opportunities for students (World Bank, 2020). This unplanned and unprecedented disruption to education changed the work of many teachers suddenly when schooling transferred to an online environment (Kaden, 2020) and teachers started their journey towards new forms of content delivery with inadequate devices to use the learning platforms and connect with students(Uro et al.,2020).

To ensure educational continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Palestine has taken several measures to continue the educational process. These included using distance learning and activating the work intensively through the portal of the electronic communication environment, which serves as an educational portal that connects students and parents with teachers and school management at all academic stages (World Bank, 2020). Under these conditions, teachers had to work overtime for long hours to help students learn at home using different methods and techniques to support access to remote learning during this worldwide crisis. Primary and secondary school teachers in Gaza Strip, for example, opted to use social media so that students would not fall behind. These new methods and techniques were necessary measures since students have been forced to stay at home sometimes for weeks with no physical presence at school. The UNESCO report in (2020) declared that "both future teachers and in-service teachers need reform and should feel comfortable with the technology to perform the full benefits of the training". Hence, the teachers have been told to intervene through planning online activities that included stories, reading, games, experiments, competitions, interactive worksheets to engage students and attract their attention while being at home.

A report issued by UNESCO (2020) revealed that " over 1.9 billion students in more than 190 countries have been forced to leave schools due to the pandemic". Consequently, teachers have been immediately tasked with the implementation of remote learning modalities, often without sufficient guidance, training, or resources. The transformation from face-to-face learning to online learning indicated the lack of readiness for schools and teachers to adapt to change, which has forced them to look for alternative methods (Beng; Wardle & Collie, 2020). Such a situation imposed new challenges confronting the teachers who required support with technical and pedagogical aids to help them adjusted to this global situation. Unfortunately, the focus of educational institutions in this process was not on pedagogy but on presenting the curriculum online with various tools (Eder, 2020), while a significant number of teachers around the world show interest in using educational and social platforms like Moodle and Edmodo (Ghouname,2020). Meanwhile, a survey conducted by The CTF/FCE in June (2020) among 17,443 Canadian teachers revealed that Facebook was the most frequently used platform used by almost 47% of teachers.

In this regard, Johnson; Veletsianos & Seaman (2020). (2020) highlighted the importance of using different strategies to ensure student's learning and engagement in a virtual environment, which is considered a heavy burden for the majority of language teachers who were stressed enough, given their typical workloads, time pressures, and playing challenging roles (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

Literature Review

The continuing spread of COVID-19 with its huge impact and various threats on teaching and learning practices worldwide has provided a rich field for investigation and research. Researchers, as a result, have marched to study the effects of the pandemic on education, and the responses of states, institutions and individuals to ensure the continuity of education. Daniel (2020) maintained that reassuring students and parents is a vital element of institutional response to promote the responsibility of schools to take the benefits of asynchronous learning to teach remotely.

To start with, Daraghmeh et al. (2021) aimed to examine the effect of the shift to virtual learning in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic on the experiences of 35 English teachers who completed a professional development program at one U.S. university. Results showed different ways to empower virtual technology and acquired knowledge and skills of English teacher graduates to deliver EFL professional development with a more pedagogical focus and to build a kind of partnership and cooperation among EFL educators in Saudi Arabia.

In the Chinese context, Zhang et al. (2021) utilized semi-structured interviews with six informants to examine the online assessment practices of EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results revealed that the EFL teachers made assessment decisions and selected assessment methods based on policy, the local context, and their own teaching experience and reflections. Furthermore, the teachers' online assessment practices were fluid and context-dependent with improvised change mediated by contextual and experiential factors.

In contrast, Koşar (2021) aimed to explore 25 pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions of the impact of distance teaching practicum on their preparedness for the first year of teaching. Results showed that the participants did not believe in the role of distance teaching in enhancing their professional learning and preparing them for the first year of teaching. In addition, they did not think that teaching practicum through face-to-face could be replaced by distance teaching practicum.

In the USA, Kaden (2020) studied the COVID-19 school closure-related changes to the professional life of a secondary school teacher in Alaska who had to teach his students online. Findings revealed an increase and change in the workload of the teacher and that online education can support learning for many students but has to be carefully designed and individualized in order not to deepen inequality and social divides. In a different context, Markus (2020), who examined the learners' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that the learners perceived online learning as helpful, and their perception of online education was good. Besides, Internet access, financial issues, and online education implementation were some challenges faced by the learners.

In Oman, Syahrin and Salih (2020) investigated the online learning experience of 32 undergraduate ESL students at a higher learning institution during the Covid-19 pandemic. Findings revealed that the technologies used by students in their ESL online classroom complement the students' preferred online learning style. Furthermore, the role of the students was passive and the pedagogy was delivered in a formal way.

Naqvi and Zehra (2020) explored the teacher technology self-efficacy, the challenges faced, and the innovative practices adopted by the EFL teachers during the crisis. Results found that the majority of the teachers had a strong sense of self-efficacy in using technology and considerably positive learning experiences and novel innovations. Moreover, the results found that Microsoft Teams seemed to be the most popular program used, followed by Google Meet and Zoom. The most challenging aspect of online teaching was the assessment design, followed by education, providing feedback, and grading. Challenges included timely submission of assignments and handling of technological hazards faced by students.

Regarding the challenges in online learning, Dhawan (2020) discussed the challenge to engage students and make them participate as well as the shift from offline mode to online mode, with the ability to adapt their teaching methodologies, and to manage their time. Another challenge was to develop the content that covers the curriculum. Ensuring digital equity was a major challenge when the teachers and students have no access to suitable digital devices, internet, and Wi-Fi. This created problems for many students who might have lost the learning opportunities.

In Pakistan, the study of Malik (2020) pointed to gender exclusion from access to technology as a critical dimension of inequality during this disruption since girls are less likely to have regular access to any form of technology, especially in rural areas and those in the poorest households. Within the same context, Noor; Isa & Mazhar (2020) investigated the perceptions of Pakistani school teachers regarding their online teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results highlighted the challenges confronted by teachers in delivering online lessons via Google Classroom, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, such as high-cost Internet packages, uncooperative learners, low attendance of learners, teachers' technology confidence, limited availability of educational resources, lack of ICT knowledge, and poor network infrastructure.

Similarly, Adnan and Anwar (2020), who investigated the attitudes of Pakistani students towards compulsory digital and distance learning university courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that online learning cannot produce desired results in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, where a vast majority of students are unable to access the internet due to technical as well as financial issues. Participants also reported that traditional classroom learning was more effective as compared to online learning or distance education. Furthermore, students who access the internet through smartphones cannot take the advantage of online learning because online content is not fully accessible via smartphones.

Ghouname (2020) aimed to explore the EFL teaching and learning practices in the Algerian context during the Covid-19 pandemic. Findings revealed that the most used tool for educational purposes was Facebook since it provides easy access to the group to share videos, lectures, and even assignments, followed by a Moodle platform. The findings also demonstrated that students prefer face-to-face interaction in the classroom more than virtual learning. The results also showed that students are motivated to employ YouTube and Moodle.

König; Jäger-Biela & Glutsch (2020) conducted a study among early career teachers to identify the extent to which they maintained social contact with students and mastered core teaching challenges. The results revealed that information and communication technologies (ICT), mainly digital teacher competencies and teacher education opportunities to learn digital competence, are instrumental in adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closures.

In Turkey, Koçoğlu and Tekdal (2020), who analyzed the educational activities conducted during the pandemic, found that the teachers of various disciplines pointed at accessibility and flexibility domains. The participants also indicated that the levels of resource and material used were similar, and the learning levels could be controlled with measurement and evaluation methods.

Yao; Rao; Jiang & Xiong (2020) examined the impact of recorded videos versus live broadcasting on student performance, and the roles teachers should play in online teaching among 1,024 students. Results revealed that live broadcasting teaching with more teacher-student interaction is more conducive to improve students' academic performance. Results also maintained that teachers should not only assume the role of transmitting knowledge in online learning but also play the role of a "leader" and "accompanier" through practical guidance and communication.

Similarly, Durak1i and Çankaya (2020) attempted to examine the views of 32 students in four universities about emergency distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic. Results indicated that two universities used the software of Microsoft Teams as a distance education system, while others preferred Moodle and ALMS while the students who used Microsoft Teams were more satisfied.

Sutiah; Slamet; Shafqat & Supriyono (2020) aimed to uncover the implementation of distance learning that was carried out suddenly as a result of Covid-19. Results showed that students preferred face-to-face learning rather than distance learning, because they faced many difficulties during distance learning and they were worried about not achieving their learning outcomes. Nevertheless, distance learning was an appropriate alternative when classroom learning is suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly when supported by platforms, such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, and Zoom.

Lie et al. (2020) examined teachers' online engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic among 18 teachers from four regions in Indonesia. Results highlighted that teachers in remote areas would need a more top-down intervention from education authorities. Five related factors of online learning processes against five levels of engagement have been highlighted: learners, teachers' prior exposure to online learning, technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and the support system. The study found most teachers enhanced their technical knowledge regardless of their prior exposure to technology.

In Chile, twenty-seven EFL teachers were the target group of a study conducted by Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) to explore the challenges and opportunities of using virtual teaching. Findings indicated that lack of direct interaction with learners and the sudden change of setting affected the participants' learning process.

MacIntyre et al. (2020) sought to uncover the stress and coping responses of 600 language teachers. Results revealed that teachers do their best by adapting, adjusting and continuing to aim for effective communicative language teaching using a range of online resources.

Burke (2020) suggested specific measures to be implemented during the COVID-19 school closure, including communication with students, parents, teachers, and other staff members through e-mails and phone calls, maintaining access to learning materials like Google Apps, Moodle Cloud, Edmodo, or social media tools (WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Yahoo).

Khlaif; Salha; Affouneh; Rashed & ElKimishy (2020) explored the case of Afghanistan, Libya, and Palestine as developing countries that have suffered from violence for many years before the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim was to investigate how teachers responded to school closure. The study found that teachers developed their skills to use emerging technologies and design suitable digital content. Moreover, they built strong relationships with the local community to assume their responsibility in Emergency Remote Learning (ERL) by establishing community centers for students from low-income families. Assessing and engaging students were crucial issues in ERL.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned review of literature, the current study seems to fill several significant gaps in the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on EFL teaching practices. Firstly, to the researchers' knowledge, very little research has been conducted so far in the Palestinian context to explore the impact of this worldwide pandemic on the professional development of EFL teachers and their teaching practices as well. Secondly, the current study employed a purely qualitative method utilizing three tools: teachers' written reflections, content analysis of teacher's social media, and focus group meetings via Zoom. Thirdly, the study focused on the practices of three female teachers who were chosen purposefully after finishing a one-year program for teacher professional development implemented by the Ministry of Education in Palestine and funded by the World Bank.

Methods

The current study aimed to investigate the types of activities and practices used by three EFL female teachers in Palestine during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also aimed to explore the significant difficulties and obstacles faced by the three teachers during the pandemic.

Study Design

This study follows a qualitative design based on the case-study approach. The case study approach involves "researchers exploring a case or multiple cases over time using various sources of information such as observations, interviews, audiovisual methods, and documents to report a case description or case-based themes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

Participants

Three female teachers have been chosen through the purposeful sampling method from three different areas in the West Bank of Palestine. The criteria for selecting these teachers were based firstly on their participation in Teacher Education Improvement Project (TEIP)-Additional Financing, which was funded by the World Bank for the aim of improving the competencies and classroom practices of the teachers of 1st - 4th graders in the West Bank and Gaza schools. Secondly, they have been working for the Palestinian Ministry of Education for 10-15 years. All of them have a Bachelor of Arts in teaching English as a foreign language, and their mother tongue is Arabic, while their ages were between 33 - 45 years. The study took place between March 2020 and February 2021.

Instruments and Data Collection

To answer the questions of the study, three tools have been used to collect the required data for the aim of obtaining more reliable data from different resources; hence, increasing the validity

and trustworthiness of the results. The first tool asked the three teachers to provide written reflections showing how they responded to school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, to serve the students who were affected by school closures in the Palestinian context. Alsuhaibani (2019), maintained that engaging teachers in reflective practices help them develop a deeper understanding of their teaching, monitor their professional development, and enhance their self-confidence in their teaching. Furthermore, reflective practitioners can review and reflect on their assumptions and beliefs underlying their teaching practices (Richards, 2017).

The second tool employed the content analysis approach to examine and analyze the pages of social media, including Facebook and WhatsApp, used by the three teachers to communicate with students, parents, supervisors and colleagues. The third tool invited the three teachers and their supervisors to participate in a focus group meeting via Zoom to ask them about their experience and practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly concerning their roles and responsibilities in distance learning and online environments. The session has been recorded automatically using the Zoom facility. The focus group meeting was based on the semi-structured format with three main questions: 1) What are the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools on your methods and strategies of teaching? 2) How did you respond to the needs and interests of your students during the pandemic? 3) What are the challenges and obstacles you faced during this period?

Data analysis

To achieve the objectives of the study, data analysis was accomplished utilizing the thematic analysis approach based on the data collected through the three tools. Such an analysis has been done by identifying the repeated themes and patterns relevant to the study questions. These themes have been transformed into categories. To maintain consistency, the themes have been analyzed by the two researchers separately to identify patterns and themes through a coding process consisting of six phases: identifying and compiling data, generating representative codes, searching for themes within these codes, reviewing themes to identify those that answer the questions of the study and finally drawing results to discuss them concerning the study questions. The coding was conducted by the two researchers independently, which enabled the researchers to review the data for the second time, and find common features and indicators between these units.

Moreover, transcripts of the Zoom meeting, results of the content analysis of the social pages of the three teachers and the written reflections have been uploaded into a trial version of MAXQDA database to facilitate organization and analysis. MAXQDA helped to locate words and phrases relevant to specific categories. Thus, additional themes emerged and have been included in the coding process.

Results

The current study aimed to investigate the types of activities and practices used by three EFL female teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and to explore the significant difficulties and obstacles faced by the teachers during the pandemic. These objectives have been guided by three main questions.

Results related to the first question: ***What are the new roles and responsibilities of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?***

The continuing spread of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide has imposed several challenges for teachers either in developed countries or developing countries. To confront these challenges, teachers in Palestine found themselves under a pressing need to adapt their roles and responsibilities to meet the requirements of the current situation. Results of the data obtained through the three tools used in this study revealed that the teachers in general and EFL teachers, in particular, were able to cope with the new situation through adopting new methods of content delivery and new forms of communication as well. Luckily, as stated by Teacher B from the town of Kufr Dan, the MoE took the initiative of training teachers around the country to use Microsoft Teams, Google forms, Zoom, and Microsoft outlook in their teaching practices. However, this step has been met with some objections from the teachers, especially those who have not been accustomed to using online technologies and those elderly who are about to retire. Regardless of the teachers' complaints, the MoE continued teacher training programs during the pandemic, believing that the ongoing pandemic requires all teachers to adopt new roles and responsibilities to ensure the continuity of education. Such frequent closure of schools implied the need to move towards distance online learning. Thus, the role of the teacher shifted from a face-to-face instructor to a monitor and a facilitator in distance online learning.

Using their written reflections, the three teachers in this qualitative study, indicated that they had acquired rich experience in employing some strategies relevant to distance online learning, and that has been due to their one-year participation in the Teacher Education Improvement Project (TEIP), funded by the World Bank and implemented by the MoE and five Palestinian universities working in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2017-2018. Therefore, the three teachers faced no difficulty using some technological tools to teach and communicate with students who were learning at home during the schools' closure. Teacher D from Nablus city maintained that her YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zb-OsvOfQ-Y, which has been created in September 2016, includes 573 videos, around 350 were uploaded during the COVID-19 pandemic. These videos show students' activities and interaction with tasks and skills taken from the English for Palestine curriculum, such as a role play about Visiting Palestine (Fourth Grade), My Hobbies (Second Grade), Dramatization of I don't feel well (Third grade), to name a few. An excellent example of students' active participation was a 3-minute video uploaded to Teacher D YouTube channel showing a fourth-grade student named Leen talking to her father about COVID-19 and the importance of wearing the mask.

Ms H, the EFL supervisor in Jenin Directorate of Education, maintained that most of the teachers in the Directorate were trained on how to use the Zoom application to deliver the English for Palestine content and to communicate with their students at the time of school closure. This application enables the teachers to exchange pictures, worksheets, competitions, files, e-exams and links with their students with the help of their parents, who used to join the meetings. Additionally, Teacher B and Teacher L, who are working in Jenin Directorate of Education, were strongly motivated to employ a variety of techniques and supplementary resources, including Facebook groups, YouTube videos, online- worksheets, songs, and stories, small teacher activities, competitions, games, puzzles and role-play activities. What seems promising is that these

resources were technology-based and delivered to the target students while studying at home, as shown in the content analysis of the Facebook groups created by the three teachers.

Meanwhile, the three teachers tended to use the supplementary videos prepared by the Palestinian programmer Safaa Jaidi and presented on her YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/user/engSafa2. This channel is considered the best one that supplements the English for Palestine curriculum since it includes 956 educational videos.

Results related to the second question: ***What are the significant difficulties and obstacles faced by the teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?***

As the spread of COVID-19 almost took place all of a sudden, neither the teachers nor the MoE in Palestine was ready to cope with the inevitable transition from face-to-face teaching into distance online learning. Teachers, in particular, have faced several challenges and obstacles along about one year of the pandemic. Teacher B, for example, wrote about the problem of creating a Facebook group and sharing the link with her students who are within grades 1-4 (6-9 years old). "Not all parents were cooperative in this regard and teachers were not trained to employ online strategies," she maintained. Teacher D added that some teachers opted to initiate individual endeavors to continue the teaching process through individual digital applications at the same time of schools closure, such as YouTube channel (Teacher D), Facebook and WhatsApp (Teacher B), and Facebook group (Teacher L). Furthermore, not all students were able to participate in the online lessons for different reasons. Other challenges involved lack of awareness of the effectiveness of online learning among the parents, poor internet connection in some areas, and not all students can afford the internet connectivity or even afford devices for all family members.

As Teacher L from the city of Jenin spelled it out, the closure of schools created a kind of social separation between the teacher and the students. Therefore, the teacher had to communicate with the parents to work with them for providing some sort of motivation to the students and some academic assistance as well. This meant that the technologies were used and shared by three parties at the same time: the teachers, the students, and the parents. This situation became even worse to some families in remote areas where the internet connection is poor." In some cases, we had to motivate the parents to work with us and with their kids," Teacher L complained. "It wasn't a piece of cake either for them or for me, and, unfortunately, not all parents are convinced of the validity of this kind of remote learning, especially for students at this elementary stage," said Teacher B in the Zoom focus group. Teacher D also clarified the impact of schools closure, by saying that most of her young students, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, were unable to pay attention to what she was teaching over distance because students were not used to such form of communication when the teacher is physically absent. She added that she prefers face-to-face teaching with some online activities because, in face-to-face communication, she can maintain students' attention and their self-dependence while accomplishing the tasks.

Results related to the third question*: **What is to be done to empower teachers to succeed during an unexpected crisis when provided with the right technology and required support and training?***

Referring to the teachers' written reflections, and the discussion raised in the Zoom focus group, the three teachers agreed that distance learning represents a golden opportunity to the students, because it gives them the chance to learn at their own pace, creates students autonomy,

and self -dependence. Teacher L asked for more incentives for the best teachers who have remarkable contributions during the pandemic. Teacher B, likewise, agreed that teachers need to be motivated to work harder during the pandemic because of the low percentage of students' attendance in online meetings.

The three teachers also agreed that the integration of parents into the teaching and the learning process during the pandemic is essential since it helps them monitor their kid's progress and motivate the kids to attend online classes. Teacher D, on the other hand, maintained that the mothers in her area were cooperative and used to send their positive feedback and comments into the Facebook group. In this regard, the teacher asked the supervisors attending the Zoom focus group, to organize training courses on integrating different types of social media into the educational process, especially YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, since these are heavily used by the parents.

Furthermore, the teachers agreed on the importance of helping all teachers around Palestine to play new roles that meet the urgent needs of this critical period. One suggestion was given by Teacher B who suggested providing some kind of technological aids in the form of mobile phones and tablets to some disadvantaged groups in remote areas, to help them access the distance learning platforms.

Discussion

Results of the data obtained through the three tools used in this study revealed that the teachers in general and EFL teachers, in particular, were able to cope with the new situation through adopting new methods of content delivery and new forms of communication as well. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Lie et al.(2020), and Khlaif et al (2020)) who found that most teachers enhanced their technological knowledge regardless of their prior exposure to technology, and that the teachers developed their skills to use emerging technologies and design suitable digital content.

What helped teachers to cope with the current situation was that the MoE took the initiative of training teachers around the country to use Microsoft Teams, Google forms, Zoom, and Microsoft outlook in their teaching practices. This aspect seems to agree with Naqvi and Zehra (2020), who found that Microsoft Teams was the most popular program used, followed by Google Meet and Zoom. The MoE also continued teacher training programs during the pandemic, believing that the ongoing pandemic requires all teachers to adopt new roles and responsibilities to ensure the continuity of education. As for schools closures a study conducted by (Kaden, 2020), revealed an increase and change in the workload of the teachers and that online education can support learning for many students. Such frequent closure of schools implied the need to move towards distance online learning. Thus, the role of the teacher shifted from face-to-face instructor to a monitor, and to a facilitator in the distance learning.

The tendency to use YouTube for educational purposes goes in line with the results of Ghouname (2020), who pointed to students' motivation to use Facebook and YouTube in online learning. On the other hand, this result seems to be inconsistent with Durak1i and Çankaya (2020),

who found that the students who used Microsoft Teams were more satisfied than those who used Moodle.

The EFL supervisor in Jenin Directorate of Education maintained that most of the teachers in the Directorate trained on how to use the Zoom application to deliver the English for Palestine content and to communicate with their students at the time of school closure. This application enables the teachers to exchange pictures, worksheets, competitions, files, e-exams and links with their students with the help of their parents, who joined the meetings. Additionally, Teacher B and Teacher L, who are working in Jenin Directorate of Education, were strongly motivated to employ a variety of techniques and supplementary resources, including Facebook groups, YouTube videos, online- worksheets, songs, and stories, small teacher activities, competitions, games, puzzles and role –play. What seems promising is that these resources were technology-based and delivered to the target students while studying at home, as shown in the content analysis of the Facebook groups created by the three teachers. Such a result agrees with Sutiah (2020), who maintained that distance learning is a good alternative when classroom learning is primarily suspended, and when it is supported by online platforms like Google Classroom, Google Hangout, Google Meet, Zoom, and Jitsi Meet.

The three teachers tended to use the supplementary videos prepared by the Palestinian programmer Safaa Jaidi that is on her YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/user/engSafa2. This channel is considered the best to supplement the English for Palestine curriculum since it includes 956 educational videos. Using Facebook groups as a medium for content delivery was highlighted by Ghouname (2020), who found Facebook to be the most used tool for educational purposes because it provides easy access to the members who can share videos, lectures, and even assignments.

Teacher B complained that at the beginning of school closure, only 30% of the students participated in the activities posted to the Facebook group which implied a somewhat passive role of students. This result agrees with Syahrin and Salih (2020), who pointed to the passive part of students in the online classroom and also agrees with Dhawan (2020), who pointed to the challenge to engage students and make them participate in the online learning environment. These challenges seem to be similar to those mentioned by Adnan and Anwar (2020), and Markus (2020), who found internet access, financial issues, and online learning implementation among the most challenging elements that face online learning.

Such conditions tended to cause a kind of educational inequality to the extent that some families used to take turns using one single device, like a computer or a laptop because of some financial problems before the pandemic and during it. This result agrees with the results of other studies including Dhawan (2020), and Malik (2020), who indicated the challenge to ensure digital equity when not all the teachers and students have access to suitable digital devices, the internet, and Wi-Fi. Another challenge was relevant to gender-based inequity in Pakistan, where girls are much less likely to have regular access to any form of technology, especially in rural areas and those in the poorest households. As stated by Teacher D, some kids told her that they had to borrow their parents' mobile phones to join the Teams lessons and videotape some tasks assigned by the teacher to be uploaded to the YouTube channel.

One challenge faced by the three teachers was finding appropriate methods of evaluation that fit online distance learning, especially when schools were closed for weeks. The present finding seems to be consistent with Naqvi and Zehra (2020), who found that the assessment design was the most challenging aspect of online teaching. This result also agrees with Khlaif et al. (2020), who showed that assessing and engaging students were crucial issues in emergency remote learning. However, the three teachers prepared online quizzes on structure, listening, and writing accompanied by immediate correction and feedback, which created some enjoyment and competition among the kids. Thus, all teachers have to be trained on integrating different forms of technologies into this type of learning, especially during the pandemic or any similar crisis in the future, since digital learning could be a positive response to the COVID-19 closure period (Mulenga and Marbán,2020). This requirement seems to agree with Burke (2020), who argued that there is a need to reshape education through utilizing specific measures that ensure communication with students and parents, maintaining access to learning materials like Google Apps, Moodle Cloud, Edmodo, or social media tools (WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Yahoo).

The agreement between the three teachers on the importance of helping all teachers around Palestine to play new roles that meet the urgent needs of this critical period seems to agree with Yao et al. (2020), who stressed that teachers should not only assume the role of transmitting knowledge in online learning but also play the role of "leader" and "accompanier" through practical guidance and communication.

As for the suggestion given by Teacher B for providing some kind of technological aids in the form of mobile phones and tablets to some disadvantaged groups in remote areas to help them access the distance learning platforms, Such finding seems to be inconsistent with Adnan and Anwar (2020) who found that students, who access the internet through smartphones are unable to take advantage of online learning because a significant amount of online content is not accessible via smartphones.

Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to investigate the types of activities and practices used by three female EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to explore the significant challenges and obstacles faced by them during the pandemic. Results revealed that the three teachers were able to cope up with the new situation, by adopting new methods of content delivery and new forms of communication as well. These teachers used online technologies such as Facebook, YouTube, and Microsoft Teams to communicate with their students and the parents as well. However, some challenges emerged throughout this journey. These were related to the financial situation of the families, internet connection, and family affordability. Under these conditions, teacher training programs are in demand, especially on using appropriate technologies that engage the students and attract their attention. Moreover, teachers should be motivated and supported to help them play new roles that fit online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

About the Authors:
Khaled A. Dweikat, Ph.D. an Associate Professor of English language curriculum & Instruction .He has published 25 research papers in the fields of English language teaching, teacher

education, blended learning, m-learning and practicum . His academic interest areas are social learning networks, educational multimedia, open and distance learning, online learning and educational technology ID ORCID : https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4848-3756

Munther M. Zyoud, PhD, is an assistant professor of English Language Teaching .His publications include Using drama in teaching English and the development of speaking skills. Zyoud participated in many international projects led and funded by World Bank, and Erasmus+. Zyoud is the coordinator of Erasmus-K107 mobility with Malaga University Spain. ID ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8748-6266.

References

Adnan, M. & Anwar, K . (2020). Online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Students' perspectives. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology*, *2* (1), 45-51. http://www.doi.org/10.33902/JPSP. 2020261309.

Alsuhaibani, Z. (2019). Perceptions and Practices of EFL Pre-service Teachers about Reflective Teaching. *Arab World English Journal*, *10* (4), 62-73. https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no4.5

Beng, H., Wardle, L., & Collie, P. (2020). Teachers' responses to the school reopening strategy. Working Paper: *Durham University Evidence Centre for Education & School zone*. Available at http://dro.dur.ac.uk/31047/.

Burke, J. (2020). Covid-19 Practice in Primary Schools in Ireland. Report in April. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14091.03369.

Canadian Teachers' Federation.(2021).Canadian Teachers Responding to Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. Research Study. CTF/FCE .

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches*. (2nd ed). London: Sage.

Daniel, S.J.(2020). Education and the COVID-19 Pandemic. Prospects. *Quarterly Review of Comparative* Education,*49* (1-2), 91-96. DOI: 10.1007/s11125-020-09464-3.

Daraghmeh, A., Mead, H., & Copeland, K. (2021). English K-12 Teacher Experiences in Saudi Arabia in the Pandemic Era: A Follow-up Study of One Khbrat University Program. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* Special Issue on Covid 19 Challenges (1), 3-20. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid.1

Dhawan, Sh. (2020). Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, *49* (1), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0047239520934018.

Durak1i, G. & Çankaya, S.(2020). Undergraduate Students' Views about Emergency Distance Education During COVID-19 Pandemic. *European Journal of Open Education and E-learning Studies, 5* (1), 122-147.. www.oapub.org/edu.

Eder, R. 2020. The Remoteness of Remote Learning: A Policy Lesson from COVID19. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education. 9* (1) , 168–171 DOI :https://doi.org/10.32674/jise.v9i1.2172.

Ghouname, N. (2020). Moodle or Social Networks: What Alternative Refuge is Appropriate to Algerian EFL Students to Learn during COVID-19 Pandemic. *Arab World English Journal*, *11* (3), 21-41. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no3.2.

Johnson, N., Veletsianos, G., & Seaman, J. (2020). U.S. faculty and administrators' experiences and approaches in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Online Learning Journal*, *24* (2), 6–21. http://dx.doi.org/10.24059/olj. v24i2.2285.

Kaden, U. (2020). COVID-19 School Closure-Related Changes to the Professional Life of a K–12 *Teacher. Education Sciences, 10* (6),165-178;. www.mdpi.com/journal/education.

Khlaif , Z. N. ; Salha , S. ;Affouneh ,S.; Rashed, H. & ElKimishy L.A.(2020).The Covid-19 epidemic: teachers' responses to school closure in developing countries. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, *30* (1), 95-109. DOI: 10.1080/1475939X.2020.1851752.

Koçoğlu, E. & Tekdal, D. (2020). Analysis of distance education activities conducted during COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Research and Reviews,15* (9),536-543.DOI:10.5897/ERR2020.4033.

König, J.; Jäger-Biela, D. J. & Glutsch, N.(2020). Adapting to Online Teaching during COVID-19 School Closure: Teacher Education and Teacher Competence Effects among Early Career Teachers in Germany. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *43*(4), 608-622.

Koşar, G.(2021). Distance Teaching Practicum: Its Impact on Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Preparedness for Teaching. *IAFOR Journal of Education, Special Issue: COVID-19: Education Response to a Pandemic*, *9* (2), 111-126. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1291724.pdf.

Lie et al. (2020). Secondary School Language Teachers' Online Learning Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, *19,* 803-832.

MacIntyre, P.; Gregersen, T. & Mercer, S.(2020). Language teachers' coping strategies during the Covid-19 conversion to online teaching: Correlations with stress, wellbeing and negative emotions. *System*, *94*. DOI: 10.1016/j.system.2020.102352.

MacIntyre et al. (2019). Stressors, personality and wellbeing among language teachers. *System*, *82*, 26-38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.02.013.

Malik, R. (2020). Challenges and opportunities for Pakistan education systems in the COVID-19 response. UKFIET– *The Education and Development Forum*. Available at https://www.ukfiet.org/2020/challenges-and-opportunities-for-pakistan-educationsystems-in-the-covid-19-response/.

Markus, D. (2020). Is the online learning good in the midst of COVID-19 Pandemic? The case of EFL learners. Journal Sinestesia, 10 (1), 1-10. Available at https://sinestesia.pustaka.my.id/journal/article/view/24.

Mulenga E. & Marbán J.(2020). Is COVID-19 the Gateway for Digital Learning in Mathematics Education? *Contemporary Educational Technology,12*(2),1-11. https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/7949.

Naqvi, S., & Zehra, I. (2020). Online EFL Emergency Remote Teaching during COVID 19, Challenges and Innovative Practices: A Case of Oman. *Arab World English Journal. Proceedings of 2ⁿᵈ MEC TESOL Conference 2020. 17*-35. https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/MEC2.2.

Noor, S., Isa, F. Md., & Mazhar, F. F. (2020). Online Teaching Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Educational Process: *International Journal*, *9* (3), 169-184: http://dx.doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2020.93.4.

Richards, J. C.(2017). Transmissive and transformative approaches to language teacher education. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching*, *12* (1), 15-38.

Schleicher, A. (2020). Education disrupted—education built. Spotlight: Quality education for all during COVID-19 crisis. *OECD/Hundred Research Report #011.* https://hundred-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/report/file/15/hundred_spotlight_covid-19_digital.pdf.

Sepulveda-Escobar, P. & Morrison, A.(2020). Online Teaching Placement during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chile: Challenges and Opportunities. *European Journal of Teacher Education,43* (4), 587-607.

Sutiah, S., Slamet, S., Shafqat, A. & Supriyono, S., (2020). Implementation of distance learning during the COVID19 in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science. 15* (5), 1204 - 1214. https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v15i5.5151.

Syahrin, S., & Salih, A.(2020). An ESL Online Classroom Experience in Oman during COVID-19. *Arab World English Journal*, *11* (3),42-55. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no3.3.

UNESCO.(2020).Education: From disruption to recovery. Available at https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse.

Uro, G; Lai, L & Alsace, A. (2020). Supporting English Learners in the COVID-19 Crisis. The Council of the Great City Schools.

World Bank (2020). How countries are using edtech to support access to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic.

Yao, J.; Rao, J.; Jiang, T. & Xiong,Ch. (2020). What Role Should Teachers Play in Online Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Evidence from China. *Science Insight Education Frontiers*, 5(2), 517-524.   Doi:10.15354/sief.20.ar035.

Zhang, C., Yan, X. & Wang, J.(2021). EFL Teachers' Online Assessment Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Changes and Mediating Factors. *Asia-Pacific Edu Res* . https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-021-00589-3.