Challenges and Difficulties Faced by ESP Teachers in Teaching during COVID-19 Pandemic in Iraq

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Abstract
E-teaching quickly became an essential way for educational institutions and universities during the global COVID-19 pandemic, as teaching during the breakdown has brought education to a new level. The present study aimed to investigate the challenges and difficulties faced ESP teachers in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq and also clarify the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on changing the methods of teaching. The study is important to show the role of online teaching and the teachers' barriers to online teaching. The study aims to answer the following question: Are there any challenges and difficulties faced the ESP teachers in e-teaching during the covid-19 pandemic? And what are the factors that cause these challenges and difficulties? The study is limited to ESP teachers at Al-Nahrain /College of political sciences during the academic year 2022-2023. The participants of this research are ESP teachers, who have been teaching English for specific purposes for years. Twenty ESP teachers were chosen randomly for this study. An online questionnaire and interview were designed by using Google Forms for this purpose. The data analyzed qualitatively. The results showed that there are many problems facing the ESP teachers in online teaching. These problems may be solved by acquiring training, technical skills, and the development of information and technology. The conclusion showed there are numerous challenges and difficulties face Iraqi teachers in teaching on-line.

Keywords: Challenges and difficulties, COVID-19 pandemic, ESP teachers, Google Forms, Online Teaching

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Introduction

Online education is a process of learning that combines distance education with the practice of face-to-face instruction through electronic devices (Harasim, 1989). It is flexible and provides a learning experience different than in the traditional way it helps educators to communicate through computers and World Wide Web (Ascough, 2002). The educational institutions in Iraq have directed that the learning and teaching process need to be from home since March 16, 2020 (Serin, 2022).

The way of teaching has changed since the Covid 19 crisis rose, whereas change forced all teachers to get used to the online classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected event in the world. The pandemic brings complex problems and difficulties in learning and teaching in universities and colleges. Most teachers have to move to online teaching directly with no training and tools; moreover, not all students and teachers have enough knowledge about e-learning management and how to use the platform programs (Naqvi & Zehra, 2020).

E-learning and teaching were not very standard in Iraq before the pandemic. Now it is the only method and technique used to reduce the knowledge void that appeared because of the effect of the outbreak. There is a lack of experience and effective planning of e-learning systems in most Iraqi universities (Crawford, Butler-Henderson, & Rudolph, 2020). Online teaching problems related to the lack of direct interaction between teachers and students, as not all teachers were ready to implement lessons from home (BBC, 2020). However; changing the methods of teaching from traditional to online was not an easy task (Atsani, 2020).

The pandemic has brought many changes to the educational system. Hasan and Bao (2020) stated online classes are considered one of the solutions and crucial needs due to institutional isolation during unpredictable times.

Online teaching offers many advantages for both teachers and students. It provides convenience and flexibility for the learning and teaching process. The teachers and the students can hold the lessons from their places (Khazaal, 2021).

In Iraq, generally, many teachers weren’t ready to use technology in teaching online, because teachers do not have enough knowledge and experience of how to use online platforms like Google Classroom which was adopted in Iraq (Ameen & Willis, 2017). Online teaching is necessary in many ways, and it forces teachers to face a lot of challenges. In return, teachers should know how to overcome those challenges.

The present study aimed to investigate the challenges and difficulties faced ESP teachers in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq.

The current research addressed the following main questions:
- Are there any challenges and difficulties faced the ESP teachers in online teaching during the covid-19 pandemic?
- What are the factors that causing these challenges and difficulties during the covid-19 pandemic?
The study is limited to the ESP teachers at Al-Nahrain /College of political sciences during the academic year 2022-2023.

Literature Review

E-learning Education

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” Nelson Mandela.

Online education is getting information and knowledge through computers and other devices. Online
teaching is a flexible method that offers stimulating golden chances to expand the learning environment for varied student populations.

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the way of teaching and learning from traditional to online globally (Watermeyer et al., 2020). The use of new technologies such as e-learning and teaching in Iraqi universities is limited, because the teachers and students are still not ready to accept the new method of teaching in such a short period of time (Ahmed, 2022).

Many changes have also been seen in the way of taking education due to technology. Today, the teaching-related material used in online education can be sent from one place to another through technology online.

Online education aims to give chances for all learners to get the required knowledge in an equal manner and to control their learning experiences. It helps students and teachers create practical and easily-accessible teaching and learning environment (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020).

The Importance of Online Teaching

Online teaching and learning refers to the education process via the Internet. It includes real-time, anytime, and anywhere interactions. It has opened new doors for many people professionally.

The way we learn in our society is based on communication, and the existence of the Internet is changing the way knowledge work in the community. Online education becomes a part of the curriculum where the teacher is teaching, it makes the teaching and learning simple, easy, and more effective.

Kerras and Salhi (2021) tried to investigate the difficulties of Algerian students and the challenges of the educational systems of Algeria during covid-19 pandemic. The findings showed that covid-19 crises offer an unprecedented opportunity to increase the resilience of national education systems and transform them into equitable and inclusive systems.

Strengths and Weakness of Online Teaching

The shift from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom came with advantages, but also with some, disadvantages. Online education and Internet training are the best ways to study or teach from anywhere in the world. Trang, T.T.L. (2022) clarifies in his study the advantages and disadvantages of online learning at a University in Vietnam during the Covid – 19 pandemic. A qualitative research design was used in this study to discover the students’ attitudes toward online learning in the pandemic era.

The results showed that online learning platforms are quite popular among all students across the country and all parties seem to adapt to this mode of teaching and learning.

There are many benefits of online teaching.

1. Personalized Experience: Online teaching allows the teachers and the students to know each other more personally.
2. Flexibility: Learning and teaching can occur at times more convenient and productive for students and teachers. Teachers and students mutually decide when they are willing to invest in the study (Brown, 2017).
3. Accessible and Comfortable: Students and teachers can stay in their homes or any other place location and continue their education (Bijeesh, 2017).
4. Affordability: Online learning makes the education canal process in schools and universities much more accessible to most the population than to physical understanding knowledge.
5. Easy Communication: Online students have better opportunities to collaborate with classmates through virtual group work and meetings. The figure shows the challenges of online teaching, advantages and disadvantages of teaching online for teachers and students.

![Challenges of online learning diagram](image)

**Figure 1. Challenges of online learning**

Despite the many advantages of online learning, there are some disadvantages on its plate. Al-Kayed (2020) in his research, investigated the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. About 227 subjects were randomly selected teachers in basic private schools in the Al-Jama’a district in Jordan, the results indicated that e-learning has advantages and at the same time it has disadvantages. The following are the disadvantages of online learning:

**Social Isolation**

Social isolation is a significant disadvantage of online teaching. *As we know*, e-learning becomes a source of isolation, because it offers students to study from home instead of in person.
There is no human contact, and socializing with peers can contribute to mental health problems (Ghoshal, 2020).

**Lack of Motivation**
Lack of motivation is severe matter among students. Some students find it hard to focus during online classes. The lack of teacher and student interaction can lead to problems with motivation and engagement (Martin & Bolliger, 2018).

**Unavoidable Cheating**
Through traditional teaching methods, most teachers can personally monitor students; the most significant disadvantage of the e-education process is cheating. Most of the students share their answers, knowing nobody was watching them.

**Focus on Theory Instead of Practice.**
Online learning can cause many problems for students, and there’s no hands-on experience like conducting experiments. The lack of development of communication skills would lead to students having theoretical knowledge only, so it is difficult for the teachers to know who understands the lesson and who is not.

**The Internet Connection**
To join online classes, students need a strong internet connection that they can type assignments on; they may face many technical problems, like slow internet, which may lead to delays in submitting the daily homework.

**Health-problems**
E-learning requires sitting on a computer for online education for many hours, which means that eyestrain, bad posture, and other physical problems may affect the learner's health constraints (Ghosha, 2020).

**Technological Limitations**
Another major problem of online classrooms is technological limitations such as internet access. It requires computer access, proper internet access, and basic computer skills to learn online effectively.

**Teacher Experiences**
In online teaching, teachers need to gain enough knowledge of using digital technologies. Generally, schools and universities need to train teachers with the latest technology updates. When teachers have not enough practice in online teaching, they won't be able to do the lack necessary skills.

**Costly Fees**
Regarding e-learning disadvantages, one of the most notable things is the cost. Online learning can become expensive for students who are stretched financially.
Method

The researcher uses a descriptive quantitative analysis design to investigate the teachers' challenges and difficulties in e-teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants

The participants were 100 ESP college teachers and university professors from different colleges at the University of Al-Nahrain in Iraq. Their age from 30 to 60 years consisted of 80 males and 20 females with additional years of teaching experiences as mentioned in Table One. There were 20 ESP college teachers selected as the study sample who teach English for specific purposes, and they had more than 10-15 years of teaching experience in the College of political sciences at Al-Nahrain University for the academic year 2022-2023. The teachers did not have any experience with online teaching before the pandemic.

Table 1. The teachers' demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Background</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asst. Prof.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher’s level of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. Degree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.A. Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Instruments

The study employed two instruments (a questionnaire and an interview) to determine the ESP teacher’s challenges and difficulties in conducting on-line teaching during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Questionnaire

The researcher used a descriptive survey questionnaire on Google Forms to measure the ESP teachers' challenges and difficulties in teaching online. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was collecting the personal information of the teachers. They must put down their demographic details (age, gender, and teaching experiences). The second part was an online descriptive questionnaire; it consisted of 12 of items, sent to the participant teachers through Google Forms. The items were about the ESP teacher's challenges and difficulties through e-teaching during the covid-19. The responses are categorized into 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Neutral', 'Disagree', and 'Strongly Disagree' with the scoring scales of 5 to 1.
The Interview

The researcher was used a semi-structured interview in this study, because it is valuable and suitable to know the ESP teacher's experiences implementing online teaching and the main problems and challenges they faced, the interview was conducted during the weekend. Teachers were asked to answer the interview questions entirely online, which were mainly about the challenges and difficulties faced by faculty members; it lasted for 10-15 minutes through Zoom. The interview consists of ten items relating to different aspects of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview checklist items are presented in Table Two.

Table 2. The ESP teacher’s interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Items</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does online teaching cover the four English language skills?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you face particular problems in teaching online?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you have teaching online experiences before the coronavirus?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you think that teacher's and learner's interests, participation, and interaction through online teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you have problems with technological equipment or devices?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Do you suffer from psychological and physical impacts through online teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Do you think that teachers need to change their methods of teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you think that time management is problematic for online teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Do you think on line teaching is more interesting for students than face-to-face classes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Do you face problems with the discontinuous supply of electricity?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Results

The study aims to explore the challenges and difficulties faced by ESP teachers via online teaching. The results were conducted from the questionnaire's items related to the first part; the demographic details of the ESP teachers were collected to know the teacher's personal information, such as, gender, designation, education, and teaching experiences as shown in Table One.

Based on the result of the first part of the questionnaire's items regarding the teachers' demographics information, it indicates that most of the teachers had a high level of education and more than 12 years' experience in teaching. It is noticed from table three, in Appendix (A) that most ESP teachers believe that Covid19 pandemic has changed the methods of teaching online. The responses (18.8%) strongly agree, (17.5%) agree, (1.2%) disagree, in item two, the answers were, (4.22) strongly agree ,((5.71%) agree that online is more effective than classroom teaching, (6.11%) disagree, (1.0%) strongly disagree (1.10%) are neutral.in item three, the answers were (3.16%) strongly agreed , (4.22%) agreed,(6.10%) were neutral (6.10%) disagreed, (1.00%) strongly disagreed, in item four, the answers were (3.13%) strongly agree, (4.25%) agreed (5.11%) were neutral, (5.22%) disagree, and (1.0%) strongly disagree. in item five, the answers were (14.15%) strongly agree, (16.14%) agree (5.00 %), neutral (2.12%), disagree, no respondents for strongly disagree, in item six, the answers were (8.22%) strongly agree, (9.19%) agreed (2.00 %), neutral (1.19%) disagree, and no respondents strongly disagree, in item seven, the answers were (7.14%) strongly agree, (9.15%) agreed (3.11 %), neutral (1.12%) disagree, and no respondents
Discussion

The researcher collected the data and analyzed the results of the study: it was found that most of the ESP teachers believed that online teaching has changed the methods of teaching. The agreed responses were (18.8%), while (6.1%) were disagree with online, because they thought that regular face-to-face teaching are better than online teaching. We find that only (4.22%) agree that online education can enhance the student's and teacher's interaction, and (6.10%) disagree. Similarly, in response to question four, only (4.25%) agree that online teaching enhances students' motivation, while (5.22 %) disagreed. Some challenges were related to ESP teacher's knowledge of using computers and the internet, (16.14%) agree, while (2.12%) disagreed. The lack of computer and digital technology competency also was one of the teacher's challenging (9.19%) agree, (1.19%) disagree. The same result with the Networks connections, and low internet speed (9.15%) agrees and (1.12%) disagreed.

Teachers also suffer from time as (7.12 %) agree that have a problem in choosing a suitable time for online course design and online test preparation, (1.12%) have dis agreed. Another large group of respondents (8.15%) agreed that it is difficult for ESP teachers to follow up on the student's achievement through online , (1.22%) have disagreed .Another teachers responses (9.19 %) agreed that most ESP teachers had not got previous experience with online teaching before the Covid-19 pandemic , and only (2.16%) disagreed. The teachers also faced difficulties in keeping track of students, (8.17%) agreed, and (1.11%) disagreed. The last item related to the home environment (6.17%) they agreed, and only (1.19%) disagree; the remaining percentages revealed that most ESP teachers faced many challenges and difficulties with online teaching during the breakdown. However, the findings of the present study concluded that Iraqi ESP teachers face many challenges and problems in e-teaching during covid-19 pandemic.

The research is compatible with Kerras and Salhi (2021). They asserted that on line learning is problematic for the student and the teacher, the unavailability of computer equipment, the Internet connection, and the lack of an interactive database for the student, which made monitoring and evaluating the student almost impossible.

It is also supported by Trang’s (2022) research. He clarifies in his study the advantages and disadvantages of online learning. The results of his research show that despite the pros, such as convenience, cost and time saving, and teaching quality, online learning also brings back cons for students, namely isolation, technical problems, and cheating. All these are considered as the main factors that caused these challenges and difficulties.covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussions, it is obvious the Covid-19 pandemic crisis transformed the teaching and learning process from offline classroom to online classroom. The
sudden change creates many challenges for the teacher to learn online. It concluded that the ESP teachers were challenged and had a negative impression of online teaching. Most of the difficulties and problems are related to network connectivity. There is the unavailability of solid internet access, no continuous supply of electricity, unstable internet access, lack of teaching material at home, lack of teacher's experience in using platforms, lack of internet access, need for a schedule, having a limited amount of time, difficulty in providing feedback timely, teaching procedure or strategies, learning activity, and the used material.

Moreover, interview results discovered that ESP teachers faced different challenges in implementing online classes, and they need support to solve these problems, especially with the electricity and the internet connection, which is considered the main problem in Iraq.

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Challenges and Difficulties Faced by ESP Teachers

Khazaal

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Appendices

Appendix A: Teachers' Questionnaire

Table 3. Teacher's responses to the questionnaire items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you think that Covid19 pandemic has changed the teaching methods?</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you think that online teaching is more effective for students than teaching in a classroom?</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you think that online teaching enhances student and teacher interaction?</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you think that online teaching enhances student's motivation?</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ESP teachers have not enough knowledge of using computers and IT skills to conduct online lectures.</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ESP teachers suffer from the lack of computer and digital technology competency.</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>9.19</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ESP teachers suffer from Networks connections and low internet speed.</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ESP teachers suffer from choosing a suitable time for online course design and on-line test preparation.</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Challenges and Difficulties Faced by ESP Teachers

<p>| | | | | |</p>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>ESP teachers unable to follow up on the student's achievement through online teaching.</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
<td>8.15%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>ESP teachers did not have any previous experience in online teaching before the Covid-19 pandemic.</td>
<td>5.12%</td>
<td>9.19%</td>
<td>2.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Online teaching was challenging for ESP teachers to keep track of the students.</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
<td>8.17%</td>
<td>3.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Home environment is unsuitable for most teachers to teach via online classes.</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>6.17%</td>
<td>3.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>