



The Difficulties of Online Teaching and Learning English Language during the Covid19 in the Faculty of Languages at Benghazi University

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Abstract:

This study reveals the difficulties that undergraduate university students and lecturers encounter in distance learning during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This shift to online education has led to tension among students and faculty members. The study was based on a sample of students and lecturers in the English department at the faculty of languages in Benghazi university. This research investigates students and lectures views on online education. It focuses on students and lecturers' obstacles and whether they found any advantages in online education. This research followed a qualitative approach and analyzed thirty students and fifteen lecturers' views through interviews. The analysis of the interviews showed that both students and their lecturers faced a lot of obstacles during online teaching and learning. These obstacles and weaknesses overweighed the advantages. This implies that both groups preferred face-to face teaching and learning and find it more authentic and affordable.

Kew words: online teaching, online learning, difficulties, COVID-19, advantages.

Introduction:

When the World Health Organization announced COVID-19 pandemic, educators and educational settings have been required to shift to online teaching via e-learning systems. Therefore, most high educational institutions had to transform their methods of teaching and learning from face to face to online teaching and learning (Ali, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Murphy, 2020). However, higher education institutions encountered several difficulties imposed through IT and technological developments. Such institutions, had to deal and cope with such technological developments in spite of the limited abilities and resources that were available. The educational settings had to face an increasing demand to upgrade their teaching levels of efficiency and quality in a short period of time. For most university students and teachers, online learning was a new experience and they had difficulty in dealing with online technology platforms. Therefore, higher education institutions can develop strategies that assist students in understanding their obstacles and preferences in case there is a spread of any disease or any other emergent circumstances that require remote teaching and learning. This study explores university students' and lecturers'



attitudes about their challenges in accepting and using online learning and the obstacles they faced during online teaching and learning. This research contributes to the existing literature in the field of online foreign language teaching and learning during the COVID-19.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To assess the students' and lecturers' views on the effectiveness of online teaching and learning English language.
2. To explore the most common difficulties of online teaching and learning that students and their lecturers encountered.
3. To investigate the teaching methods and platforms that students consider useful in online learning.

Research Question:

- What are the most common difficulties of distance learning that students and their lecturers encountered?

Contribution to Knowledge:

The outcomes of this study intend to contribute to the literature in the field of online foreign language educational settings. In addition, it aims to present insights that could contribute to the development of improved online teaching and learning settings.

Limitation of the Study

This study focuses only on the obstacles and advantages of distance learning in the English Department at the Faculty of Languages in Benghazi University during the corona virus pandemic. It is limited to Benghazi University and does not include any other Libyan universities. In addition, the study focuses on the difficulties that encountered students and their university lecturers in the online educational settings.

Literature Review

The sudden transition to online teaching and learning did not allow university members of staff and professionals to plan a properly designed online instruction that eases the transition from face to face education to remote online education. This situation in turn had an effect on students and their lecturers.

Students' Attitudes

Students' attitudes towards educational technology directly affect their learning process (Ali, 2020). GarciaBotero et al. (2018) studied the factors that affect behavioral intentions and the use



of online language learning. The authors found that students' attitude significantly impacts their intention to adopt online technology for language learning. Murphy (2020) indicated that using online learning programs increased the students' knowledge of technological tools. He believes that the knowledge and experience gained may help students with their future abilities and perception of self-efficacy regarding.

Teachers' Attitudes

Factors that affect the implementation of online learning studies on the use of IT technology is associated with teachers' attitudes and their level of proficiency to deal with new technology (Gialamas & Nikolopoulou, 2010). According to Sayeh and Razkane (2021) teachers' attitudes towards the online teaching experience during the COVID-19 revealed that the teachers' levels of anxiety and control of the platform played a significant role in their decision to implement online learning tools in their teaching. Similarly, Adov and Mäeots (2021) argued that different internal and external obstacles impede teachers' use of online platforms. They noticed that poor infrastructure, lack of control, and lack of digital skills are the main obstacles for teachers. They also reported that teachers with positive attitudes towards online learning only complain about external obstacles, while teachers with negative attitudes complain about both internal and external factors.

Advantages of Online Education for Teachers

Danchikov et al. (2021) argue that teachers can interact online with their students to share knowledge and provide practice. Teachers organize activities for students and set common goals, joint activities and mutual understanding between their students. Dhole et al. (2021) believe that a great change took place in the education system where classes changed from traditional mode to modern online education. This in turn is considered as an advantage because recently the COVID-19 situation imposes distance online learning for safety and at the same time students continue their education. Al-Mawee & Gharaibeh (2021) add that online learning helps teachers to access a huge number of students.

Advantages of Online Education for Students

Online courses give students access to work with one another and these courses are more flexible and convenient. In other words, you can learn at any time and in anywhere you want (EDHEC Business School, 2021). Technology has become essential in the educational system. Using the Internet has a great role in spreading knowledge via online classes (Almahasees, Mohsen & Amin, 2021). EDHEC Business School (2021) emphasizes that your technical skills will be improved with online learning. Al-Mawee and Gharaibeh (2021) argue that online learning facilitates different subjects for students.

Disadvantages of Online Education for Teachers

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of challenges with higher education because teaching in this domain depends on in-person interaction (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). Teachers will find themselves under stress because of challenges that face them in their teaching.



Accordingly, stress over a long time can lead to teacher exhaustion (Sokal, Trudel & Babb, 2020). Teachers around the world were not prepared for this change in education from the traditional way to teaching online (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) emerged a new challenge for teachers who were required to adapt rapidly to the digital teaching and learning environment (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

Disadvantages of Online Education for Students

Almahasees, Mohsen & Amin (2021) believe that remote learning makes students face a lot of challenges because they struggle to cope with online courses. Moreover, in online courses students lack interaction with their teachers as opposed to face-to-face learning. Al-Mawee & Gharaibeh (2021) indicated that research has proved that students who were already suffering in face-to-face learning are more likely to get lower grades in distance learning.

Methodology

This study was based on a qualitative research approach. The researcher conducted interviews with thirty students and fifteen lecturers at the English Department at the faculty of languages in Benghazi university. The first interview was conducted with students in order to consider their learning obstacles, weaknesses and if there are any advantages. On the other hand, the second interview was conducted for lecturers to examine the teaching obstacles, disadvantages and whether there are any advantages. The selection of the students' sample included students who wanted to participate from different semesters. In addition, the sample included lecturers who wanted to participate in the interview. The interview questions were prepared in advance. Each question that was asked to the students in their online learning was alternatively asked to their lecturers on their online teaching to create compatibility.

Validity and reliability

Bryman (2012) argues that in order to achieve validity, the research data should be interpreted without bias. This research achieved validity by describing and analyzing the qualitative data of students and lecturers' views without bias. Gray (2014) suggests that validity could be obtained in interviews when the interviewer's questions concentrate on accomplishing the research objectives. To achieve validity, he also recommends to avoid having any influence on the interviewees' answers. Similarly, this research accomplished validity through answering the research question and achieved the objectives through students' and lecturers' interviews. Regarding reliability, Guba and Lincoln (1994) indicate that qualitative research reliability is measured by 'dependability' and 'confirmability'. The interview questions were reviewed by members of staff in the Faculty of Languages. This research, dependability was obtained through the assessment of the interview questions to avoid misleading and overloaded questions. Confirmability was obtained when suggested amendments by members of staff of the interview questions were refined. The researcher also prepared probes in order to be consistent when clarifying misunderstood questions.



Data Analysis

Students' Qualitative Analysis

30 out of 40 students agreed to participate in answering the interview.

In response to the first question

“Which do you find more effective in understating lessons, online or face to face lectures?”

29 students out of 30 (96%) mentioned that face-to-face lectures were more preferable as opposed to online learning. 2 students out of 30 (6%) mentioned that both are acceptable. However, only one student out of 30 (3%) preferred online teaching.

As for the response to the question

“What kind of online teaching systems are more useful and practical?”

(For example: Google classroom, Telegram, Facebook, What's app... etc.)”

Most students answered that they preferred Telegram over other types of online platforms. Yet, four students stated that Google Classroom is also favored. Only one student preferred Facebook. In addition, a single student mentioned Zoom.

When discussing

“Do you have any difficulty in using online platforms and attending online lessons?”

21 students out of 30 revealed that they do have difficulty in using online platforms. Some students further explained that the difficulty is due to weak internet connection and electricity blackout. A student clarified that the difficulty could be due to the type of online platform. In which some are easy to use, while others are difficult. Another student mentioned that watching lessons online consumes a lot of money. 9 students out of 30 declared that using online platforms are difficult.

In relation to students' responses to the question

“What type of teaching practices and strategies do you find useful for learning?”

9 students out of 30 (30% of them) insisted that face-to-face lectures are much better than online learning without referring to any teaching practices that are useful for online learning. However, 10 students out of 30 (33%) find that PowerPoint as an online teaching platform is useful for learning online lessons. 7 students out of 30 (23%) believe that recorded videos is useful because it enables students to watch and repeat online lectures whenever needed. 2 students out of 30 (6%) stated that recorded voice lectures are useful in general and one of them specified that Pdf with attached sound explanation is useful.

According to the replies to the question



“What are the main learning difficulties you face in online classes?”

Students have different answers to this question. Students stated cannot ask as many questions as opposed to in face to face lectures. They further explained that clarification in face to face lectures is better. Some students referred that difficulties are due to electricity blackout and weak internet connection. Unfortunately, some students stated that some lecturers provide slides but without explanation. This point was not clear enough whether the voice explanation was not attached from the beginning or due to weak internet connection or the lecturers forgot to attach their explanations. Moreover, students complained that watching lectures through internet consumes a lot of money. In addition, they indicated that some lectures do not even answer their inquiries and questions. Others added that they do not understand lessons. Accordingly, it seems that some lecturers do not check students' delivery. While few students admitted that sometimes they do not have internet to watch online videos. Other students indicated that some lecturers' voice that are attached to their videos are too low, and students can barely hear them. Other students added that some lecturers do not even explain lectures properly as they do in face to face lectures. Only 2 students out of 30 stated that there are no difficulties.

In relation to answers of the question

“What are the advantages of online learning?”

11 students out of 30 (36%) consider watching or listening to lectures in online platforms, at any time that suits them is an advantage. In addition, 7 students out of 30 (23%) indicated that they can repeat watching or listing to lectures as much as they want whenever needed. However, 12 students out of 30 (40%) believe that there are no advantages for online learning. As a result, their answer in this manner could denote that they prefer face- to-face teaching and learning. 6 students out of 30 (20%) referred that they liked to learn through PowerPoint. One student argued that online learning is useful when teachers provide examples with their explanations, which he considers it as an advantage.

With regard to the question

“During attending online lessons, do you receive any homework for practice?”

15 out of 30 (50%) argued that they do not receive any homework during online classes. On the other hand, 12 students out of 30 (40%) stated that their online lecturers do give them homework. 3 students out of 30 (10%) indicated that their lecturers only sometimes give them homework.

In response to the question

“In your opinion, how would online lessons be improved?”

3 students out of 30 stated that they do not know. This may denote dissatisfaction or are ignorance to the methods of how to improve it. 5 students out 30 (16%) believe that online sessions



could be improved by live videos instead of recorded videos or voice messages. They consider that live videos enable them to ask questions with lecturers and clarify any unclear themes. 5 students out of 30 (16%) argued that it cannot be improved and the university should return back to face-to-face teaching and learning. Other students' replies included several matters, such as: There should be one fixed online platform and lectures should be set on a fixed specific time. The university should improve its' IT infrastructure. lecturers should explain lessons and interpret. Lecturers should reply to students' questions and inquiries. Lecturers should explain lessons in better methods. Lecturers should bring an effort to explain lessons not only read them and it would be better for such sessions to be followed by practice and supported by videos and photos. Lecturers should upload their lectures in advances to their teaching sessions. Chatting groups on Telegram are helpful for students to answer their inquiries. Some students suggested blackboard, Google Classroom, Zoom, and using PowerPoint in explaining lessons.

As for replies to the question

“If you have any questions or inquiries, how do you contact your teachers?”

6 students out of 30 (20%) declared that it is hard to contact lecturers, in which most of them do not reply. 12 students out of 30 (40%) stated that they contact their lecturers, yet most of them do not reply. Some students indicated that they contact them by messaging them or calling them on their mobile numbers, personal groups, personal accounts, and emails. Others, on the other hand, mentioned that they prepare their inquiries and meet their lecturers face to face at university to answer their questions. 12 students out of 30 (40%) argued that they mostly contact them through Telegram.

In regard to the question

“Do you believe that the assessment during online lessons is fair enough?”

24 students out of 30 (80%) indicated that the assessment during online sessions is unfair and there should be midterm tests. However, 6 students out of 30 (20%) stated that the assessment during online sessions is fair.

Lecturers' qualitative analysis

With regard to the first question

“Do you prefer teaching online or face to face?”

11 lecturers out of 15 (73%) pointed out that face to face lectures are more preferable than online teaching. While only 4 lecturers out of 15 (27%) commented that online teaching is better.

According to the replies to the question

“What kind of online teaching system do you prefer?”

(for example: Google classroom, telegram, face to face, what's app...etc.)”



11 lecturers out of 15 (73%) stated that Telegram is more preferable. 4 lecturers out of 15 (27%) mentioned that Google Classroom is much better. However, one lecturer preferred Facebook. In addition, one lecturer insisted that What's app is more useful. Another lecturer suggested that Zoom is the best platform for students. While only one teacher find that PowerPoint is more preferable.

As for the responses to the question

“While teaching online, what is your main teaching focus?”

7 lecturers out of 15 (47%) indicated that their main focus is to deliver the aims of the lesson. While 2 lecturers out of 15 (13%) emphasized that students' understanding is the most important thing. One lecturer mentioned that his focus is on developing speaking and the interaction of the students. Another lecturer stated that he focuses on methods of students' beneficial learning in general. However, only one lecturer stated that students' practice is very important. In addition, one lecturer insisted that he focuses on doing his best to explain lectures and try to make everything as clear as possible. Another lecturer indicated that his focus is on delivering the content. However, only one lecturer referred that he focuses on developing his teaching methods in his field.

In response to the fourth question

“what are the main teaching difficulties you face in online classes?”

6 lecturers out of 15 (40%) revealed that weak internet connection is the main difficulty they face. While 3 lecturers out of 15 (20%) indicated that the difficulty is due to electricity blackout. In addition, other 3 lecturers out of 15 (20%) explained that the difficulty is in lesson preparation which is more time consuming as opposed to face to face lectures. 5 lecturers out of 15 (33%) observed that absence of students is the main problem because it causes lack of interaction, especially in live online videos. However, 2 lecturers out of 15 (13%) insisted that coping with the large number of students requires a lot of time. Another lecturer commented that teaching online is time consuming. However, one lecturer complained that the difficulty he faces is due to the lack of technical equipment used in preparing lessons. While only one lecturer stated that certain type of files, which lecturers send to students, could not be opened on their devices.

In relation to lecturers' responses to the question

“What are the advantages of online teaching?”

7 lecturers out of 15 (47%) believe that the advantage of online teaching saves time, so lecturers present lectures at home instead of going to university. Although, they stated that planning lessons online is more time consuming, such as in preparing PowerPoint or videos. 6 lecturers out of 15 (40%) consider that teaching online is easy, flexible and more comfortable. 4 lecturers out of 15 (27%) stated that online teaching enables lecturers to teach at anytime and anywhere, which in turn enables them to devote more time to students. 3 lecturers out of 15 (20%) added that using internet platforms is a big advantage because it enables them to use videos and audio records easily.



One lecturer stated that teaching online is more organized. Another lecturer insisted that it is easier to be in touch with students by using online teaching.

As for replies to the question

“Do you give your students homework for practice?”

14 lecturers out of 15 (93%) stated that they do give homework to their students. However, only one lecturer stated that he does not give any assignments to his students.

When discussing the question

“how do you check your students’ delivery to online lectures?”

In relation to students’ delivery most lecturers’ replies vary which include checking their delivery through: tests, discussion groups, zoom meetings, their reflection on teaching platforms, homework, and students’ comments and questions.

With regard to the question

“How could teaching online be improved?”

4 lecturers out of 15 (27%) argued that internet connection should be improved. 3 lecturers out of 15 (20%) insisted that teaching online can be improved by providing lecturers with modern technological equipment. However, their opinions vary and include: by providing us with organized rooms, by giving lecturers laptops, by creating private channels not public ones, by giving lecturers at least 50% off on the internet charges. One lecturer stated that teaching online requires improved technology and internet access for students and lecturers for efficient teaching and learning.

In relation to the lecturers’ responses to the question

“How do your students contact you in case they have any questions or inquiries?”

10 lecturers out of 15 (67%) emphasized that their students can ask them through the discussion groups which they created on Telegram. However, 3 lecturers out of 15 (20%) stated that their students can ask them during online classes. While only 2 lecturers out of 15 (13%) mentioned that their students can ask them by sending messages or calling them.

In response to the question

“Do you believe that the assessment during online teaching is fair enough?”

8 lecturers out of 15 (53%) believe that teaching online is unfair while the other 5 lecturers out of 15 (33%) emphasized that teaching online is fair enough. In addition, one lecturer was hesitated to answer whether it is fair or unfair. Another lecturer indicated that teaching online is sometimes fair.



Suggestions for Further Future Research

The study findings reveal that students and lecturers admitted that assessment during online learning was not fair enough. In which some students indicated that it would be better to include midterm exams. However, further investigation can be taken out to consider such dissatisfaction among students and their lecturers to improve the whole online educational settings.

Conclusion

The study analyzed the attitudes of students and lecturers in online teaching and learning of English in the faculty of languages at Benghazi university. The study showed that online education is less effective than face-to-face education. Both students and their lecturers preferred face-to face teaching and learning. The students of online learning encountered several challenges due to the shift of online courses that are due to lack of interaction between students and their lecturers, lack of practice and feedback, weak internet connection, electricity blackout, lack of IT support and facilities. Some students had totally no internet connection at home. In addition, students and their lecturers' are not satisfied about the final assessment during online sessions. Benghazi university should develop its IT technology and infrastructure, open university accounts for students and lectures and provide internet access for them. There also should be training sessions to lecturers and students to manage online platforms difficulties. The university should establish a contract with a telecommunication company to improve the students' services at an affordable price.

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Appendix A

Students' Qualitative Interview

1. Which do you find more effective in understating lessons, online or face to face lectures?
2. What kind of online teaching systems are more useful and practical? (For example: Google classroom, Telegram, Facebook, What's app... etc.)
3. Do you have any difficulty in using online platforms and attending online lessons?
4. What type of teaching practices and strategies do you find useful for online learning?
5. What are the main learning difficulties you face in online classes?
6. What are the advantages of online learning?
7. During attending online lessons, do you receive any homework for practice?
8. In your opinion, how would online lessons be improved?
9. If you have any questions or inquiries, how do you contact your teachers?
10. Do you believe that the assessment during online lessons is fair enough?

Appendix B

Teachers' Qualitative Interview Questions

Title of research: The difficulties of teaching and learning online during the Covid19 in the Faculty of Languages at Benghazi University.

1. Do you prefer teaching online or face to face?
2. What kind online teaching system do you prefer? (For example: Google classroom, Telegram, Facebook, What's app... etc)
3. While teaching online, what is your main teaching focus?
4. What are the main teaching difficulties you face in online classes?
5. What are the advantages of online teaching?
6. Do you give your students homework for practice?
7. How do you check your students' delivery to online lectures?
8. How could teaching online be improved?
9. How do your students contact you in case they have any questions or inquiries?
10. Do you believe that the assessment during online teaching is fair enough?

صعوبات تدريس وتعلم اللغة الانجليزية عبر الانترنت خلال جائحة كورونا بمركز اللغات بجامعة بنغازي

اعداد:

هالة بشير قصبيات نورة سعد العرفي

المستخلص:

تكشف هذه الدراسة عن الصعوبات التي يواجهها كل من الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس بالجامعات بسبب التعليم عن بعد خلال فترة إنتشار الوباء المعروف "بفيروس كورونا". أدى هذا التغيير المفاجئ في مسار التعليم إلى توتر لدى كل من الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس. وقد أسست هذه الدراسة على عينة من كل من الطلبة وأعضاء هيئة التدريس بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية اللغات بجامعة بنغازي. تبحث هذه الدراسة في وجهات نظر كل من الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس. حيث تركز على العقبات التي يواجهها كل من الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس وتبحث عن مزايا التعليم عن بعد إن وجدت. حيث يتبع هذا البحث الإتجاه النوعي وقد قامت هذه الدراسة بتحليل وجهات نظر 30 طالب و 15 عضو هيئة تدريس من خلال إجراء مقابلات معهم. وقد تبين من خلال تحليل النتائج أن كل من الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس يواجهوا عقبات خلال فترة التعليم عن بعد وقد زادت كمية العقبات عن المزايا. وتبين من خلال هذه الدراسة أن كل من الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس يفضلوا التعليم المباشر.