Challenges Faced in EFL Learning in Jordan During the Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the challenges and obstacles of e-learning during the pandemic that EFL teachers and students faced, the study discusses some suggestions and solutions to improve online classrooms that can play an important role in improving the learning and teaching process. The study shows that both teachers and students faced different challenges in learning online. Poor internet connection, , less motivation, less participation, poor interaction and less understanding are the most challenging problems in online learning. However, online classes are accessible, convenient, and easy to review for exams. The study indicates that an effective online learning environment is crucial to enrich effective EFL learning outcomes.

Keywords: EFL; Jordan; Online learning; pandemic; Covid 19; disadvantages; advantages; challenges; solutions.

1. Introduction

The spread of Covid 19 not only causes health crises in the world, but it also affects many aspects of life, including education. The pandemic has a direct impact on all fields of education. Public and private educational institutions shift from traditional education to e-learning (online). Transition learning from face- to- face to online learning created a lot of barriers for teachers, students, parents, and decision makers. The sudden spread of the pandemic without prior preparation forced educational institutions to use online platforms to reach out to students, webinars have become temporary classrooms, parents have been asked to monitor their children at home, and students have been deprived of social interaction between peers. Measures are likely to influence sustainable lifestyles through factors such as reduced contact with other people. It is possible that the effects of such deprivation of social contact will extend beyond the period of physical distance and might affect the population for years to come. In face-to-face learning activities, learning media can be people, objects around, environment and everything that can be used by teachers as an intermediary to convey subject matter (Rosalina et al.,2020). The outbreak of pandemic brought about education challenges to

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the traditional physical face-to-face teaching and learning processes due to closure of institutions and lockdowns. The global decision to close the educational institutes was rational to keep social distancing to stop its spread (Rajab et al., 2020). This research focuses on EFL learning challenges and obstacles during the pandemic and the possible facilities and solutions that can be delivered to overcome these problems in the future.

1.1 Background: This literature study aims to analyze online learning difficulties faced by EFL educators and students during the spread of Covid 19. Discus solutions to solve them. Research data sources are collected through printed or online textbooks, articles from journal websites, law regulations, and other sources relevant to the research problem.

1.2 The study aims to answer the following questions:

Q1. What are the challenges of online EFL learning and what facilities do educators and students need during online learning?

Q2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching English online?

2. Challenges

The current study highlights on three main challenges faced language teaching /learning process during the spread of Covid 19, a special focus is on (1) teachers' challenges, (2) learners' challenges, and (3) technology challenges.

2.1. Teachers' Challenges

Teachers at Jordanian institutions are equipped with the necessary technology skills but are not equipped particularly in using the internet as a mechanism in teaching at classrooms. Adopting it will enable them to break the boundaries associated with traditional teaching environments and provide them with flexibility and opportunities to further advance their teaching strategies to meet the needs of the learners. Hence, professional staff development and training in online education is important. (Mubaslat ,2012).

Transition learning from face -to- face to online learning causes a lot of obstacles for teachers, and challenges that the teachers face when doing online learning in this pandemic era. Challenges to applying online learning are in facilitation such as internet connection, the location of home living, and the process of online learning itself such as the teachers' knowledge in computer technology for designing interesting online activities, The use of new knowledge and communication technologies; online teaching and learning environment is unlimited and complex since it is less communicative due to the lack of interaction, and fostering an effective online learning climate determined teachers to search for activities that distinguish between the strength and the weakness of online learning (Nelson & Thompson, 2005). Social presence is an important way to promote the social and interpersonal communication needed for online teaching and learning (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2014). The

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teachers miss the deep interactions of their students, so they cannot control students' affectively which is also important for the teaching and learning process (Liu et al., 2009). Although teachers manage to get all students to come to virtual classrooms at the same moment, there are basic elements in the teaching process which become major obstacles such as bad pictures and sound, lack of lip coordination and verbal clues, time lags, turn-around, etc. (Coverdale-Jones. 2000; Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Wang 2004). Teachers' challenges toward online learning during the pandemic are divided into three parts (1) the supporting equipment like internet connection (2) the learning process such as the interaction, the explanation, the generation gap between teacher and students (3) classroom management which is an important challenge since teachers must control the teaching process online.

2.2. Learners' Challenges

Many things can create challenging EFL learners in the classroom, whether it's a face-to face setting or a virtual one. Students may be bored, young learners might have short attention spans, teens could be trying to impress their peers, or adult students might not feel confident in their English-speaking abilities. Students face some issues such as using the blackboard tool, online class access, class downloading the related material, audio, and video playing (Alturise, 2020). The internet cost, difficulty in understanding applications in other languages. Learners confronted some difficulties accessing online exams conducted since some formats or extensions are not supported by their devices. There are also some other issues that the learners faced, such as, time management, anxiety, coronavirus disease stress and the lack of digital skills in using applications platforms, the need for all online learning equipment, tools, systems, lack of real English language practice with the teachers and their classmates (Alanezi & Alazwani, 2020). Moreover, students will not be able to directly contact the instructor whenever he or she has an issue. Instead, the student would have to rely on different technical or virtual methods like emails and messaging applications to contact the instructor. Learning the details about assignments, solving queries, submitting those assignments, and many other tasks would require more time than usual. Because of this, students might not be able to keep up with the increased load of assignments.

2.3 Technology Challenges

Through this study, it seems that the pandemic revealed the challenges of adapting technology in education, including many inequities starting with the lack of access to computers and the internet, weakness and interruption of the internet, weak platforms to send files instead of getting the best platforms such as Microsoft, Google, and Zoom platform to conduct some lectures, the lack of preparation for the course in these applications in advance to refer to them at any time, or unable to sign in to education platforms, experience IT, technology use tools (volume, velocity, variety, value and complexity challenges). The students are not happy with distance education and many obstacles have been encountered (Bataineh et al., 2020; Rajab et al.,2020). E-Learning in Jordanian institutions is not different from most developing countries, the use of ICTS and the implementation of e-learning in Jordan are still in an early stage, inability of the basic ICT infrastructure such as computers, internet access,

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and a local area network. Jordan is currently facing challenges while learning online in the field of education, including political fragmentation, deteriorating financial and security situation, lack of funds (liquidity), lack of ability to provide equipment, as well as the quality of the internet the bad.

3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Online learning
3.1 Disadvantages

Technology has affected every little aspect of life, and the language learning process is no exception. In previous years, the use of technology in language learning has developed and grown, and nowadays in Jordan the use of technology has expanded to reach a new term called online learning, but despite the development of technology and education, online education has some disadvantages.

The first problem is understanding the subject matter. For example, not all students may understand the topic dealt with or the subject represented in the reading material delivered online (Efriana, 2021). E-learning may be less effective especially when it is related to clarifications as well as explanations. Face -to- face education is much easier for teacher to control students' attendance. Some students fill out the attendance list at first, but then they are no longer active until the end of the class, some students even leave the classroom online to do other activities without being controlled by the teacher (Efriana, 2021). Since tests for assessments in e-learning can be done using a proxy, it will be difficult, if not impossible to control or regulate bad activities such as cheating. Teachers require to use a lot of on-screen participation, such as playing games where the student needs to see the teacher and their colleagues, holding up interesting objects (related to the lesson) in front of the camera, or having the student write words on the virtual whiteboard, capturing the student's attention is important to keep them on the track.

Disadvantages of E-Learning According to Bijeesh (2017), without face-to-face interaction in the classroom and no classmates who are possibly able to help and remind the e-learning students, pending assignments, and losing track of deadlines are high. Therefore, Arkorful and Abaidoo (2014) emphasize that social interaction in a learning process is essential. It enables students to have opportunities for relations among students using discussion forums. However, e-learning may help exclude obstacles that are potential to hinder participation including the fear of talking to other learners. As students and the teacher are not meeting face to face, it would be a little bit difficult to control or regulate bad activities like cheating. Therefore, teachers must have good communication skills with their students when they are teaching online since online education involves the increasing use of asynchronous video communication, as well as the lack of personal contact which is essential for developing trust between students and teachers (Dennen et al., 2007). The fact that there are technological requirements to enable full participation in online education is also another drawback for students, and that it can only be successful if the communication tools used in the classroom are accessible to the student. Some communication tools may not be suitable for some students;

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For example, the audio stream cannot be heard by many students because it is not within everyone's reach (Lehmann, 2004). E-learning is likely to be misled for hacking and spoofing, due to its insufficiency, as well as the ease of copying and pasting. E-learning also reduces the role of institutions in socialization as well as the role of teachers as managers of the learning process. In addition, it is not suitable for all disciplines since not all fields or disciplines can use e-learning technology in education. E-learning may also lead to overcrowding or heavy use of some websites. This may bring about unexpected costs in terms of time and money. Collins et al. (1997); Klein & Ware (2003); Hameed et al. (2008); Almosa (2002); Aminullah, et al. (2019) note that although some teachers hold positive attitudes towards ICT, others still face many problems such as lack of support from the institution, lack of ICT equipment, as well as lack of proper training. As a summary, online learning cannot lead to the desired outcomes for students and teachers due to the inadequate access to the internet and the lack of both proper training and financial resources.

3.2. Advantages

Online learning helps ensure remote learning, it is manageable, and students could conveniently access teachers and teaching materials. It also reduces the use of traveling resources and other expenses. It facilitates administrative tasks such as recording of lectures and marking attendance. Both the students and teachers become self-confident in solving different tasks during this lockdown situation. The student had become self-directed; they learn asynchronously at any time during the day (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Online learning is flexible and an effective source with easy administration and accessibility along with less use of resources and time. Regardless of time limit, students can easily access the learning material. Learner engagement is an important element to consider in the development of an effective course, especially with a view to enhancing learning outcomes ‹and save a lot of money when undertaking an online program. Not only are your housing and commute expenses eliminated, but online programs are also generally more affordable. There often access to very diverse material such as videos, photos, and eBooks online as well, and teachers can integrate other formats like forums or discussions to improve their lessons(Mukhtar, et al., 2020).

Given the abundant ways in which remote learning enables interaction, it is possible to create a dynamic environment that shapeshifts according to students' individual differences, reflected in the cooperative efforts of teachers and students. Online education has the potential to transform the education system by expanding educational opportunities, transforming student populations, and encouraging the development of new pedagogical methods, UNESCO. COVID-19 and Higher Education (2020).

Online learning has a lot of advantages with respect to tools and interesting platforms to engage students in learning. Teachers need to include multiple types of learning approaches such as podcasts, videos (teaching channel, own videos, live classes), discussions, various forms of text through articles and blogs, different assessment methods (tests, quizzes, assignments, and projects), learning activities and collaboration for better learning outcomes.

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The effectiveness of online education has shown several advantages due to increased flexibility and learning opportunities: easy access to experts, exposure to educational environments, a wide range of types of courses, and joining student communities. In addition, there is the added flexibility of setting a schedule that fits everyone's agenda. As a result, using an online educational platform allows for a better balance of work and studies. Online classes are easy to access, convenient and easy to be reviewed for exams, (Arkorful, 2014; Healy, 2014).

4. Discussion

It is not easy to rely on online education because of the issues and problems in most countries. However, all humans have the right to get education in times of disasters and crises. Due to the challenges faced by the learner and teachers, we need satisfactory solutions and make changes and improvements regarding the application of e-learning in the educational process to help the higher education ministries achieve more real success in spreading knowledge. It is necessary to make great efforts in improving the technological infrastructure as well as holding good training programs for both students and teachers. The study attempted to identify the various challenges of Teaching EFL online during a global pandemic and to provide possible solutions, it cannot be denied that during the quarantine, online teaching has repaired some of the damages to education caused by pandemic. However, questions remain unanswered as to whether teaching EFL online can meet the learners' needs and desired goals, In another study, Al-Masaud and Gawad (2014) indicated several advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. They found e-learning efficient, effective, and less costly than in-class teaching. However, they also noted that e-learning has its disadvantages; among them were "technological issues, employee acceptance, and lack of motivation from teachers and students. Khan (2016) conducted an empirical study on the features of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia. His study samples were both teachers and students, and the results indicated that e-learning could be highly beneficial due to all the resources available for online classes. A similar study was carried out by (Zakarneh ,2018), his study revealed that the participants favored English language e- learning and believed e-learning was the best way to gain English language proficiency.

This study discusses some of the solutions. Learners must have access to the internet, such as owning smartphones or laptops which is unfortunately not affordable for all students. According to (Skulmowsk & Ray,2020), the hardware technology, design programs, teachers' choices, responsive curriculum, supporting stakeholders are important to successfully present lessons in an online environment. In this case, Higher Education institutions should conduct workshops to train teachers to build materials, worksheets, and exams online (Barr & Miller, 2013). Ludeman, et al., (2009) note that teacher control, student engagement, and modification of the new medium that suit the needs of both the teacher and the student. Thus, the role of the teacher needs to change, the teacher should be reliable, cooperative and close to students, The EFL teacher can also proactively contact students who are less active in participating in online learning, and personally contact the parents of such students. In a collaborative classroom,

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teachers are an important part of an interactive environment focused on auditory and visual stimulation and present the subject matter in power point slides accompanied by more vibrant instructional videos. The role of the teacher here is not only to introduce the material, but also to introduce students to create new learning methods. Thus, students become creative and determined   and authors, who independently form their own experiences, and actively contribute to learning environment. This can be achieved through visual and audio while the teacher acts as a creative guide, allowing students to evaluate the electronic method to enhance students' experiences through constructive feedback (Naar, 2020). The use of semi structured, or open-ended interviews can help to gain a deeper understanding of impact and reception of online education. These challenges can also be overcome by participating in educational programs through TV broadcasts organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with the TV station to facilitate the education sector during the pandemic Efriana (2021). In the end, we are left with an urgent need for better designed programs suitable for online learning, not only now, but in the near and distant future Skinner, et al. (1990). In fact, this step has become an urgent need which may enable stakeholders to face such situations more specifically in the language teaching and learning field. Online or distance learning has become a necessity at education institutions, imposed by the nature of emergency conditions where we live.

5. Conclusion

It has become apparent that emergency conditions as what has happened during the COVID-19 pandemic requires educational institutions to highly focus on improving online and distance education. This requirement must be considered as a priority for policy makers in different countries. However, it must be noted that the implementation of online learning during the pandemic has raised various problems. Teachers, students as well as parents all encounter challenges related to limitations in technology, time, and support facilities. All these issues must be addressed by authorities in the educational system. The necessity of higher education institutions imposed by the nature of the emergency conditions in which we live, so online education and distance education in emergency situations should become a priority for policy makers in different countries, in addition, the implementation of online learning during the epidemic as part of distance learning has different problems. Teachers, students, and parents face these problems. challenges include poor IT proficiency and limited access to student supervision. Student problems in the form of inactivity access. The problem for parents with limited time to accompany the next learning, limited support facilities, the internet for children during online learning, teachers and learners lack of digital skills, lack of structured content and online resources, learners' lack of interaction and motivation, social and cognitive issues that teachers and schools should address, students face the communication problem resulting from their inability to share the same physical environment with their peers and teachers, however, when online classes are designed and internet is primarily provided to impart knowledge, students get bored easily. In this case, these various problems can be overcome through many solutions mentioned in this research, including the development of a reliable network infrastructure that teachers, students and parents must have that allows them

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to be able to take lessons remotely, provide more affordable devices, use various methods (communication, television, radio, online courses) to provide access to them, develop a clear and consistent plan, provide structured and planned instruction .The current study reveals an incredible number of large-scale efforts to use technology in support of distance learning. At the same time, this crisis revealed the challenges of technology in education, and enabled us to identify challenges and proposals to address these same challenges addressed to policy makers from different countries so that students and teachers can face some of the challenges.

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