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EFL Teachers' Perceptions of a Long Shift to Online Learning in a Saudi University during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Abstract

Discovering the new variants of coronavirus by the end of 2020 pushed many countries to continue suspending universities and schools. A complete change to online learning seemed the only available option to continue education given the detection of new coronavirus variants. Such a long time of using online learning can display how teachers experience this hard time of the pandemic. The researchers performed this study to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of online learning in a Saudi university during this period. They aimed to have a closer look at EFL teachers' perceptions of the sudden shift into online learning. They focused on the teachers' benefits, drawbacks, and suggestions. They used a questionnaire and interviews to collect qualitative data to answer research questions. Results showed five benefits and two drawbacks of using online learning to teach English in that Saudi university. The benefits are being a good and useful option for teaching during the coronavirus pandemic, motivation of teachers, ease of access and use, interacting between teachers and students, and being less teacher-centered. The drawbacks are disruption by poor Internet and technical issues and cheating by students on assessments. The participants provided some suggestions to improve the benefits and overcome the drawbacks.

Keywords: benefits and drawbacks, COVID-19, online learning, Saudi EFL context, teachers' observations

Introductory Remarks

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a world pandemic in March 2020. The confirmed cases in the world were 509,167 with 23,335 deaths including 1012 cases with three deaths in Saudi Arabia as per WHO situation report 67 (WHO, 2020). Therefore, many countries decided to shut down universities and schools. Similarly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) suspended educational institutions (Saudi Gazette, 2020).

After months of border closure, the KSA partially resumed air travel in August 2020. Certain precautionary measures were enforced, such as the use of face masks, hand sanitizers, and social distancing. The US Food and Drugs Administration issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the COVID-19 vaccine in December 2020 ("Pfizer-BioNTech," 2021). The new Pfizer vaccine was used to vaccinate people in several countries including the KSA.

Unfortunately, new coronavirus variants were discovered in the UK with more contagious than the original strain ("Coronavirus latest," 2021; WHO, 2021), and in South Africa and Brazil ("About Variants of the Virus," 2021). To combat the new variants, many countries shut down borders again and imposed a lockdown to prevent the spread of these new variants (Reuters Staff, 2020). The KSA detected the new coronavirus variant in January 2021 (Taha, 2021), and it extended the border closures extension till May 2021.

Universities and schools were closed in many countries as a result of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). A sudden shift to online learning took place to continue education (Hassan, Mirza, & Hussain, 2020). Indeed, online learning was used in many countries including the KSA via various platforms, such as Blackboard before the pandemic (Alshehri, Rutter, & Smith, 2019). However, online learning platforms were used to complement face-to-face learning. Because of COVID-19 and its new variants in many countries, education came to a full online mode.

The problem then was to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of online learning from the perceptions of Saudi university EFL teachers in light of the overnight change to online education as the only teaching option in the near future. This study aimed to describe the teachers' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of online learning in teaching English when new coronavirus variants appeared. In addition, it aimed to have a closer look at the teachers' experiences and suggestions to develop the benefits and lessen the drawbacks of online learning.

Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of online learning for EFL in a Saudi university during the coronavirus pandemic?
2. What are teachers' suggestions to enhance such benefits and to alleviate drawbacks?

It was important to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of the whole shift into online learning in a Saudi University during COVID-19. Moreover, this shift lasted for a long period and was the only accessible option to teach especially after the presence of the new variants (Taha, 2021). In online teaching, teachers are responsible to ensure that the content offered to students is engaging and not very difficult because students get bored and frustrated easily. Therefore, teachers attempt to make lessons more interesting and easier (Almansour & Alahdal, 2020).

Literature Review

Many research studies reported several benefits and drawbacks of online learning in several language learning settings (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2019; Al Shlowiy, 2021; Coman et al., 2020; Dhull & Sakshi, 2017; Guatam, 2020). Online learning can be defined as promoting and supporting teaching and learning through suitable information and communication technologies (Ellis, Ginns, & Piggott, 2009). With this definition in mind, online learning can comprise educational platforms, such as Blackboard and Moodle; video-conferencing tools, such as Skype and Zoom; mobile applications, such as Telegram and WhatsApp; and social media sites, such as Facebook and blogs. These technologies include both synchronous and asynchronous means of communication used for teaching and learning purposes.

Before coronavirus appeared in 2019, many studies discussed the benefits and drawbacks of online learning. For instance, Islam, Beer, and Slack (2015) conducted a review of e-learning studies in the UK higher education. The benefits included flexibility of teaching and learning, encouraging students to learn resulted in better engagement and interaction between teachers and students beyond the limitations of location. On the other hand, the drawbacks were the lack of clarity of students' learning styles, inability to prepare appropriate teaching materials, technical challenges, failure to build online assessments, lack of training to use e-learning effectively, time skills of management, and loss of students' interest.

Arkorful and Abaidoo (2014) reviewed the literature concerning the use of e-learning in tertiary education in Ghana as well as internationally. They found

several advantages, such as flexibility in time and place, ease of access and use of information, motivation of students to interact with each other and with their teachers, cost-effectiveness as it eliminates travel expenses, and students' learning at their own pace as the classes are recorded. The disadvantages were feeling remote and isolated because of the lack of physical interaction between teachers and students; inferiority to face-to-face education in respects of clarifications, explanations, and giving feedback; worse communication skills of learners, cheating in assessments and plagiarism in assignments; deterioration of the socialization role of the educational institutions; and being suitable only for social sciences and humanities not for sciences that require hands-on applications.

In another study at Maharshi Dayanand University in India, Dhull and Sakshi (2017) found these benefits: ease of access, convenience, paced learning that suits different students, and teachers being facilitators not transmitters of knowledge. The drawbacks included frustration caused by technical glitches, computer anxiety by some learners that prevented proper interaction with technology, and stress caused by over-involvement with the Internet (compulsive web surfing or database searching).

In the KSA, several studies about online learning found similar advantages, such as ease of access (Khalawi & Halabi, 2020) and student motivation (Al-Qahtani, 2019). Similar disadvantages were reported including the absence of human-like communication, facial expressions, and physical interaction (Khalawi & Halabi, 2020).

Al-Qahtani (2019) studied EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of virtual classes and whether these perceptions enhanced communication skills. This study was performed with 15 teachers and 15 students at King Khaled University. It shows that 62% of the teachers had positive attitudes towards virtual classes. They benefited from the convenience of the classes that were sensory-rich media to motivate students and enhance the learning process. On the disadvantages side, teachers reported technical issues, needed more training, and required blended classes rather than virtual-only classes. Nine teachers disagreed that virtual classes can develop the EFL four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Nine students agreed that online classes can develop their EFL four skills.

A year later, Khalawi and Halabi (2020) investigated the EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of online learning and its relation to learner autonomy in another Saudi university. Twenty teachers and 22 students participated in a questionnaire. The results showed that 75% of the teachers had positive attitudes towards virtual classes although 80% of them preferred face-to-face classes rather than online classes. They faced many technical issues and Internet disconnections. They also missed the human-like communication, facial expressions, body language, and students' interests and punctuality. On the

other hand, students believed that the virtual classes made them autonomous learners.

Focusing on EFL teachers' perceptions of using online learning, Freihaat (2020) used a survey and interview to collect data from 81 instructors at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. The results showed that the instructors' perceived drawbacks of online teaching were the following: cheating on online exams by students, teachers' lack of knowledge in using some applications, and restricting the time of some applications such as Zoom. They expressed their need for more training to develop online materials, teaching techniques, and classroom management skills.

Online Learning in a Pandemic

The researchers sought to find out EFL teachers' perceptions of online learning when the new variants of the coronavirus appeared. In the KSA, Almansour and Alahdal (2020) described the state of online education during COVID-19 in the Electronic University and Qassim University. They explored the teachers' and students' attitudes towards online education and their skills in dealing with online education. The results showed that both teachers and students had positive attitudes towards online education in both universities. However, teachers reported the technical problems and Internet issues that disrupted online classes. Besides, teachers called for more interactive, interesting, and engaging courses as some students become bored easily. It was suggested to break long lessons into shorter parts to appeal to students because learners' boredom was the main drawback.

In five Saudi universities, Khafaga (2021) studied EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of using Blackboard Collaborate-based instructions. Online questionnaires and interviews were used by 29 teachers and 311 students. Despite some challenges, Blackboard provided a flexible teaching environment that offered synchronous and asynchronous means of communication between teachers and students. It provided several opportunities to engage in discussions and take tests online. Regardless of their positive attitude, about 59% of the teachers required the technical skills to use Blackboard. About 50% of the teachers faced difficulties to teach via Blackboard and needed face-to-face teaching. About 35% of them faced technical issues while teaching on Blackboard. As many as 71% of the students communicated easily with their teachers via Blackboard. However, only 37% of the students were able to complete their assignments and get feedback from their teachers. About 65% of them reported that the time allotted for online tests was not sufficient.

At King Abdulaziz University, Hakim (2020) found that 50 EFL teachers enjoyed teaching their classes via the Blackboard Ultra platform during

COVID-19 in spite of weak Internet connectivity, inability to access modern equipment, and learners' low motivation. About 76% of them believed online classes could improve the learners' skills of communication and writing. About 88% of the teachers thought that online teaching could accommodate the learners' learning styles. About 84% of them reported online teaching motivated students. However, low tech-savvy teachers needed intense training to deal with technology. Some teachers struggled to track their students' writing and grade them. Some teachers complained about the learners' low motivation, while others demanded a revisiting of the online assessment.

In non-Saudi EFL contexts, it seems that teachers' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of online learning during COVID-19 are the same. Nugroho, Ilmiani, and Rekha (2020) employed self-reported reflections and interviews to collect data from 17 EFL teachers in Indonesia. The main problems were lack of online learning platform, students' demotivation, Internet disconnection, and cheating in online assessments. Teachers offered insights to solve these problems by adopting free, open-resource online learning as well as developing special materials for online teaching. To them, online learning was a way to connect with their students and to keep education going through the coronavirus pandemic.

Moving to Romanian universities, Coman et al. (2020) analyzed 762 students' perceptions of using online learning platforms and their capacity to integrate information. Although the study was primarily on students' perceptions, many references involved teachers. The students accepted online platforms and saw their importance during the pandemic although they encountered the following drawbacks: disruption by slow Internet connection, teachers' unpreparedness, distraction by chatting and games, the feeling of isolation because of lack of physical interaction, and concerns about physical health including back problems. Teachers used only limited functions of the available teaching tools and needed to adapt their teaching methods to suit online classes and to motivate students.

A systematic review to explore the strengths and weaknesses of online learning during the coronavirus pandemic and similar crises was conducted by Dhawan (2020). The strengths of online learning included flexibility of time and place, ability to accommodate a large number of students, interaction, and collaboration between teachers and students. However, the weaknesses of online learning were technical difficulties, disparity of students' various abilities and confidence levels, students' anxiety, frustration, distraction, lack of personal attention, and missing physical interaction.

Previous studies and reviews shed light upon several benefits and drawbacks of online learning. It is clear that teachers accept online education, especially during the pandemic. They have a positive attitude towards it although they lack some technical skills to teach. As with any teaching method, online teach-

ing may have its benefits and drawbacks (Guatam, 2020). Understanding such benefits and drawbacks is important to make the utmost of online teaching. Teachers can be effective online via the use of a variety of modes such as text, audio, and video to facilitate students' learning to overcome the challenges of online teaching including screen issues, training issues, technical issues, and physical-distance issues.

This existing review of literature guides the study to go beyond the teachers' positive perceptions of online learning as one of the learning options. What about using online learning as the only learning option? What about forcing teachers and students to use online learning without any preparation or notice? Therefore, this study investigates the advantages and disadvantages of online learning during COVID-19 as the only teaching option, which teachers were forced to use. This is the gap that the researchers aim to enrich the literature with some in-depth details. They explore the participants' perceptions and experiences to teach English in the pandemic and how they observe the sudden changes in the learning contexts and students' skills and behaviors.

Research Context

Setting

This study was conducted at the Foundation Program (FP) in one of the Saudi universities. The FP is a one-year program that is also called the Preparatory Year Program. Commonly, the FP adopts the quarter, rather than the semester system of study, which lasts for eight weeks. It teaches English, Mathematics, and computer skills to prepare the learners to start their undergraduate studies. There were about 57 EFT teachers at FP.

Participants

All EFL teachers at FP were invited through their management to participate in this study. Ten male EFL teachers in the FP agreed to participate in an online questionnaire and interview. Their ages ranged from 30 to 50 with the mean age as 40. They were four Saudis, two Americans, one British, one South African, one Sudanese, and one Jordanian teacher. They all had earned Master's or Doctoral degrees in Applied Linguistics and held the rank of lecturer or assistant professor. They taught a four-level integrated-skills course called Interchange (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2017). It ranged from beginner level (A1) to intermediate level (B1) as per the Common European Framework of Reference for languages. The textbook used in this study was at B1 level (intermediate level) that was taught online by Blackboard.

Data Collection Methods

This study follows the qualitative nature to access the inner world of perception and make meaning by understanding, describing, and explaining the social process from the participants' perspectives and experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The researchers attempted to make conceptual comparisons across the functional contexts and rich data to produce formal theories. To collect in-depth data, the researchers employed a questionnaire and interviews to answer the research questions.

Questionnaire. The researchers used a fifteen item self-devised online questionnaire (Appendix A). It contained four main sections: (a) Availability of digital devices, Internet, and platform; (b) Benefits of online learning; (c) Drawbacks of online learning; and (d) An open-ended question. The questionnaire was shared with two professors of Applied Linguistics who went through them and provided constructive feedback to finalize the questions. It was sent via Google Forms to the ten teachers to complete it and return it anonymously.

Interviews. The interviews were conducted individually via Zoom with the same ten teachers who completed the questionnaire to obtain in-depth answers and meaningful information about their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions. The interviews included five questions (Appendix B) corresponding to the four sections of the questionnaire (excluding the section of Availability of devices, Internet, and platform) to ensure teachers' consistency of answers. The items included: (a) Benefits of online learning; (b) Suggestions for enhancing the benefits; (c) Drawbacks of online learning; (d) Suggestions for minimizing the drawbacks; and (e) Future use of online learning the after coronavirus pandemic ends. Conducting interviews helped the researchers to employ some prompts that built comprehensive details about teachers' answers.

Data Analysis

The researchers started analyzing the data when they collected them. Data analysis occurred across the entire study. It was intertwined with data collection. They were continually comparing data items to understand and describe the participants' perceptions. Therefore, they followed the means of the Constant Comparative Method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) to explain the study problem based on participants' words and experiences. This method assists in dealing with data and investigating the verbal data from questionnaires and interviews. It combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all data across patterns, which are redefined as newly obtained data.

Data analysis was flexible in creating initial themes and categories as well as modifying the themes and categories upon more perusal and analysis of

verbal data. In addition to looking for themes to emerge, the researchers coded all items of data to compare and conceptualize them (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Therefore, two main categories were identified in the data: (a) Benefits of online learning and (b) Drawbacks for online learning. Under each category, different themes were identified (Table 1). To validate the analysis process, these categories were shared with professors of Applied Linguistics at the same university to peruse the qualitative data several times and confirm the themes and categories.

Table 1

Benefits and Drawbacks of Online Learning as per Teachers' Perceptions

Benefits of online learning	Drawbacks of online learning
1. Being a good and useful option of teaching during the coronavirus pandemic.	1. Disruption by poor Internet and technical issues.
2. Motivation of teachers.	2. Cheating by students on assessments.
3. Ease of access and use.	
4. Interacting between teachers and students.	
5. Being less teacher-centered.	

Findings

The ten EFL teachers who participated in this study had laptops and/or mobile phones with Internet connection at their homes. Their university had an online learning platform called Blackboard. Five teachers used Blackboard to teach as an additional resource before the coronavirus pandemic started. Seven teachers used social media, websites, and/or mobile applications to teach along with Blackboard, including WhatsApp, Quizlet, Kahoot, Examenglish.com, and Test-english.com.

All of the ten EFL teachers explained that online learning was a good and useful option to teach during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, teacher #1 explained in the questionnaire that it was a good choice for teaching because it kept education going while taking safety measures, such as physical distancing between individuals. The same teacher #1 stated in the interview that online learning was suitable for teachers and learners as it allowed for more educational and communication opportunities.

Another participant, teacher #5, reported in the questionnaire that he kept good interaction with his students and managed to motivate them but still he preferred face-to-face classes for issues of interaction and motivation. Teacher #5 further stated in the interview that his students spoke more and participated in an online class as they were less afraid to interact as in traditional classes (Table 2).

Table 2

Teacher #1 and Teacher #5 Answers in Benefits of Online Learning Section

Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Teacher #1	Yes. Due to the need for social distancing during the pandemic and because learning should be a continuous endeavor, online learning becomes a very good option for teaching.	More convenient to both students and teachers, more educational tools and technology available, and more communication channels.
Teacher #5	I maintain good interactions with my students using my skills and experience to motivate them. However, this cannot be compared to the face-to-face mode.	My students are less intimidated than in actual classrooms. They are more comfortable when speaking and asking questions online.

Furthermore, in the questionnaire, teachers #2, #3, #4, #6, #7, #8, #9, and #10 expressed their perceptions of the benefits of online learning which included motivation for teachers, ease of access, and use for EFL teaching, interactions between teachers and students and among students, and creating less teacher-centered classes. They also expressed their satisfaction with online learning and Blackboard as good means of education and communication during the pandemic. However, EFL teachers did not like the disruption sometimes caused by slow Internet or the cheating of students in online assessments.

Teacher #4 reported in the questionnaire that the unreliable Internet connection caused delays in classes or submitting grades to students. He explained that the same Internet problem happened to his students as well and that it was unavoidable. He further explained in the interview that some learners had limited Internet quota or could not access the Internet in certain areas.

Teacher #8 stated in the questionnaire that despite many measures taken to prevent cheating, learners found ways to cheat online, which showed in high marks for low-achievers. He further explained in the interview that cheating was very difficult to control in online assessments than in traditional assessments on campus (Table 3).

Table 3

Teacher #4 and Teacher #8 Answers in Drawbacks of the Online Learning Section

Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Teacher #4	Yes. I sometimes lose my Internet connection and need to log in again to the Blackboard as a result of the poor Internet. It happens to my students as well. It also causes some delays in submitting grades or being on time to do your job. The problem is that the speed of the Internet is different from one area to another. It's a problem that we can't control.	Some students have limited access to the Internet in some areas or have specified Internet quota.
Teacher #8	Yes. We used many different tools to prevent cheating, but we found that we still have high grades for low-level students in some sections.	Cheating is unavoidable. Students can cheat in online assessments more easily than in classroom-based tests.

Discussion

This study explores teachers' perceptions of the long shift to online learning during COVID-19. It examines the benefits and drawbacks of using online learning as the only teaching way to deliver English lessons in the pandemic time. It looks at teachers' experiences with the benefits and drawbacks that were reported in the literature (Al-Qahtani, 2019; Al Shlowiy, 2021; Coman et al., 2020; Dhull & Sakshi, 2017; Guatam, 2020). This section discusses the findings according to the previous studies and learning theories.

Online platforms and websites are part of Web 0.2 technology, which is marked by an interactive interface that enables communication between teachers and students and among students (Hartshorne & Ajjan, 2009). As an online educational platform, Blackboard has features that allow for synchronous (video/audio conferencing and real-time chat) as well as asynchronous (email and threaded discussion) communication.

Owing to such features of Web 0.2 and the affordances of Blackboard, the participants had a positive attitude to online learning for EFL teaching and learning in the FP at this university. As was stated in the section above (Findings), all the ten teachers expressed the following perceptions of the benefits of online learning and Blackboard for EFL:

- Being a good and useful teaching option during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Motivation of teachers.
- Ease of access and use.
- Interacting between teachers and students.
- Being less teacher-centered.

These benefits are similar to the results of other studies performed in Saudi Arabia. For instance, having a positive attitude to teach EFL in online settings was found in several studies including Almansour and Alahdal (2020), Khafaga (2021), and Khalawi and Halabi (2020). The second benefit that focuses on teachers' motivation to teach online is supported by Al-Qahtani's (2019) study, which showed that teachers were motivated to teach in online settings and develop their teaching approaches. It also supported the third findings of allowing students to learn anywhere and at their convenience. The third and fourth benefits go with the findings of Khalawi and Halabi (2020) and concern convenience, ease of access and use, and interactivity. Khafaga (2021) also confirms that online learning can enhance students' interactions and communication. For the last benefit, it is repeated by the students who believed that online classes made them autonomous learners (Khalawi & Halabi, 2020). Al Shlowiy (2021) indicates that serious students develop the required skills to succeed as autonomous learners in online learning settings.

Technology and Learning Theories

EFL teachers in this study found online learning, especially Blackboard, a useful teaching choice during the coronavirus pandemic. They further stated that for EFL teaching it was easy to access and use. Such ease of use and usefulness reminded us of Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model. Davis (1989) posited that such variables as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness may affect one's attitude towards using technology. Attitude in turn may affect the behavioral intention to use technology eventually leading to its actual use.

In other words, since EFL teachers perceived online learning to be an easy to use and valuable teaching option during the coronavirus pandemic, this affected their attitude towards online learning and Blackboard, which in turn affected their behavioral intention to use them and thus resulted in using online learning and Blackboard to teach EFL. Furthermore, online learning and Blackboard led to interaction between teachers and students and among students as well, which was facilitated by Blackboard's asynchronous threaded discussion and synchronous chat features. This was in line with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning where interaction between teacher-student and among students leads to a scaffolding process that enhances the students learning of EFL.

Although the ten EFL teachers expressed perceptions of the benefits of online learning, they all stated two drawbacks of it. The first one is the teachers suffering from the disruption that is caused by poor Internet connections and technical issues. Many teaching classes were disrupted by slow Internet or some technical glitches of Blackboard. Such a drawback was found in several studies (Almansour & Alahdal, 2020; Khafaga, 2021; Khalawi & Halabi, 2020). Most teachers spent their time fixing these issues and training themselves to cope with them. Al-Qahtani (2019) and Hakim (2020) discuss the teachers' lack of technical skills and their need for training that could help them in overcoming this inconvenience.

It also affected negatively the reporting of students' grades or giving them feedback on assignments. In addition, one teacher felt isolated by the lack of physical interaction with students and other teachers in online learning classes. Another teacher stated that it was time-consuming to adapt teaching materials for online use and yet another reported it was sometimes more difficult to give his students clarifications and feedback in online learning than in face-to-face classes.

The second drawback is students cheating in online assessments. All teachers disapproved of the fact that some students cheated in online assessments. Students were unrestricted to copy their colleagues' answers or to use different resources without stating the reference (Al Shlowiy, 2021). Despite taking measures to prevent cheating, it persisted and showed high marks for low-achieving students. This issue matches what is mentioned in the earlier studies, such as

students cheating when they took online examinations at a university-level (Freihat, 2020) or a secondary school (Al Shlowiy, 2021). Cheating in an online context is expected because learners can find many simple ways to cheat online to obtain high marks, especially for careless students. It is difficult to manage the behavior in online-based exams compared to traditional-based exams (Al Shlowiy, 2021; Coman et al., 2020, Freihat, 2020, & Nugroho et al., 2020).

Implications

The findings lead to discussing some implications of the best practices in Saudi EFL contexts. The study presents suggestions for EFL teachers, learners, and policymakers to use online learning technologies, platforms, resources, and applications. These suggestions guide the EFL teachers to maximize the benefits and minimize the drawbacks of online learning.

First, training and re-training of teachers and students in the online learning platform, other websites, and mobile applications that are useful for online teaching and learning. Second, equipping both teachers and students with laptops and reliable Internet connection along with providing necessary technical support in case of technical glitches. Third, choosing the best teachers to pre-record the EFL educational videos and upload them on Blackboard thus freeing the live sessions for questions and more interaction on the part of students. In other words, teachers called for converting the live sessions into flipped online classes. Fourth, providing teachers with all online materials ready to use before the semester starts, as it was time-consuming for some teachers to adapt materials for online teaching and learning. Fifth, preparing suitable teaching materials and supportive online resources to promote students' learning autonomy. Sixth, having both summative tests and ongoing formative quizzes on campus to combat cheating online while taking the necessary safety measures for both students and teachers.

Conclusion

Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of online learning depending on the perceptions of Saudi EFL teachers was the focus of this qualitative study. It investigated the participants' words, thoughts, and experiences about the situation of the sudden shift into online education during coronavirus. It

aimed to answer both research questions: (a) What are teachers' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of online learning for EFL in a Saudi university during coronavirus variants?; and (b) What are teachers' suggestions to enhance such benefits and to alleviate drawbacks?

The accumulation of rich qualitative data from ten EFL teachers enabled to formulate two main categories of concepts, that is, benefits and drawbacks. However, these findings cannot be generalized to a larger population because of their qualitative nature that focused on gaining deep insights about the perceptions of a specific number of EFL male teachers and their experience of online teaching in a Saudi university during the COVID-19 variants. It was not a longitudinal study that lasted a full academic year. It lasted only eight weeks. Because perceptions may change over time, it is recommended to conduct the study in a longitudinal nature. This is to seek participants' perceptions over a whole academic year and expose them to the experience of online studies more deeply.

Moreover, their perceptions were not quantitatively measured. It is advisable to plan a quantitative study with a large sample of teachers for comparing purposes. As for future research, it is suggested to replicate this study in various universities in non-English-speaking countries to find out if perceptions of EFL teachers are consistent or different. In addition, it would be advisable to conduct a study of female EFL teachers in Saudi universities in order to compare the results of both studies. Finally, another option is to conduct similar studies with EFL teachers of secondary and intermediate schools.

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Wahrnehmungen der EaF-Lehrer hinsichtlich der langzeitigen Umstellung auf Online-Lernen an einer saudischen Universität in der Corona-Zeit

Zusammenfassung

Die Entdeckung der neuen Varianten des Coronavirus Ende 2020 veranlasste viele Länder dazu, Universitäten und Schulen weiterhin auszusetzen. Eine komplette Umstellung auf Online-Lernen schien angesichts der mutierten Corona-Varianten die einzige Möglichkeit zu sein, den Unterricht fortzusetzen. Eine Langzeiterfahrung mit dem Online-Lernen lässt nachvollziehen, wie Lehrkräfte die schwere Zeit der Pandemie erlebt haben. Das Ziel der durchgeführten Studie war es zu untersuchen, wie die EaF-Lehrer an einer saudischen Universität das Online-Lernen in der Corona-Zeit wahrgenommen hatten. In den Fokus der Untersuchung rückten insbesondere ihre Wahrnehmungen hinsichtlich der abrupten Umstellung auf Online-Lernen. Der Schwerpunkt lag dabei auf den Vor- und Nachteilen bzw. Vorschlägen vonseiten der Lehrkräfte. Mithilfe eines Fragebogens und der durchgeführten Interviews wurden qualitative Daten zur Beantwortung der Forschungsfragen erhoben. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung zeigten fünf Vorteile und zwei Nachteile des Online-Lernens für den Englischunterricht an der betreffenden saudischen Universität. Zu den ersteren gehören: eine gute und nützliche Alternative für den Unterricht während des Coronavirus, Motivation der Lehrkräfte, ein einfacher Zugang und Nutzung, Interaktion zwischen Lehrkräften und Studierenden sowie die Tatsache, dass der Unterricht weniger lehrerzentriert gestalten werden kann. Die Nachteile sind hingegen: Unterbrechung durch schlechte Internetverbindung bzw. technische Probleme sowie das Betrügen bei den Klausuren. Die Studienteilnehmer machten einige Vorschläge, um die Vorteile zu verbessern und die Nachteile zu überwinden.

Schlüsselwörter: Vor- und Nachteile, COVID-19, Online-Lernen, saudischer EaF-Kontext, Wahrnehmungen der Lehrer

Questionnaire

EFL teachers' perceptions of e-learning during the coronavirus pandemic variants questionnaire	استبيان عن اراء مدرسي اللغة الانجليزية كلغه اجنبية حول التعليم الاليكترونى فى زمن كورونا المتحور
Availability of digital devices, Internet and Platform	توفر الاجهزة الرقمية والانترنت والمنصة
<p>1. Do you have a computer/smart phone and a reliable access to the Internet?</p> <p>2. Does your university have a platform for e-learning? What is the platform's name?</p> <p>3. Did you use e-learning to teach (as an additional resource) before the coronavirus pandemic start?</p> <p>4. Do you use social media, websites and mobile applications along with your university e-learning platform?</p>	<p>هل لديك جهاز كمبيوتر / هاتف ذكي واتصال موثوق إلى الإنترنت؟</p> <p>هل تمتلك جامعتك منصة للتعليم الإلكتروني؟ ما هو اسم المنصة؟</p> <p>هل استخدمت التعلم الإلكتروني للتدريس (كمصدر إضافي) قبل ظهور فيروس كورونا؟</p> <p>هل تستخدم مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي والمواقع الإلكترونية وتطبيقات الهاتف المحمول إلى جانب منصة التعلم الإلكتروني في جامعتك؟</p>
Benefits of e-learning	فوائد التعليم الاليكترونى
<p>5. Is e-learning a good option to teach during coronavirus pandemic? Explain how?</p> <p>6. Do you feel motivated to use e-learning to teach? Explain how?</p> <p>7. Do you feel e-learning is easy to use for teaching EFL? Explain how?</p> <p>8. Do you think e-learning facilitates interaction with your students? Explain how?</p> <p>9. Do you think e-learning makes your classes less teacher-centered and makes you more of an advisor or guide? Explain how?</p>	<p>هل التعلم الإلكتروني خيار جيد للتدريس أثناء فيروس كورونا؟ اشرح كيف؟</p> <p>هل تشعر بالتحفيز لاستخدام التعلم الإلكتروني في التدريس؟ اشرح كيف؟</p> <p>هل تشعر أن التعلم الإلكتروني سهل الاستخدام لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟ اشرح كيف</p> <p>هل تعتقد أن التعلم الإلكتروني يسهل التفاعل مع طلابك؟ اشرح كيف؟</p> <p>هل تعتقد أن التعلم الإلكتروني يجعل فصولك أقل اعتماداً على المعلم ويجعلك كمرشد؟ اشرح كيف؟</p>
Drawbacks of e-learning	مساوئ التعليم الاليكترونى
<p>10. Do you feel disrupted by slow or no Internet connectivity? Explain how?</p> <p>11. Do you feel isolated because of lack of physical interaction with your students and other teachers? Explain how?</p> <p>12. Is it time consuming to adapt materials for online teaching? Explain how?</p> <p>13. Is it difficult to control students' cheating in online assessment? Explain how?</p> <p>14. Is it more difficult to give your students clarifications and explanations in e-learning than in traditional face to face classes? Explain how?</p>	<p>هل تشعر بالتعطيل بسبب بطء الاتصال بالإنترنت أو انعدامه؟ اشرح كيف؟</p> <p>هل تشعر بالعزلة بسبب قلة التفاعل الجسدي مع طلابك والمدرسين الآخرين؟ اشرح كيف؟</p> <p>هل يستغرق تكيف المواد للتدريس عبر الإنترنت وقتاً طويلاً؟ اشرح كيف؟</p> <p>هل من الصعب التحكم في غش الطلاب في التقييم عبر الإنترنت؟ اشرح كيف؟</p> <p>هل من الصعب إعطاء الطلاب توضيحات وشروحات في التعلم الإلكتروني مقارنة بالفصول التقليدية وجهاً لوجه؟ اشرح كيف؟</p>
Open-ended question	سؤال مفتوح
15. What are your suggestions to enhance e-learning benefits and alleviate its drawbacks?	ما هي اقتراحاتكم لتعزيز فوائد التعلم الإلكتروني والتخفيف من عيوبه؟

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Semi-structured interview	مقابلة شخصية
1. What are the benefits of e-learning from your point of view?	ما هي مميزات التعليم الإلكتروني من وجهة نظرك؟
2. What are your suggestions for enhancing the benefits of e-learning?	ما هي مقترحاتك لدعم مميزات التعليم الإلكتروني؟
3. What are the drawbacks of e-learning from your point of view?	ما هي مساوئ التعليم الإلكتروني من وجهة نظرك؟
4. What are your suggestions for minimizing the drawbacks of e-learning?	ما هي مقترحاتك لتقليل مساوئ التعليم الإلكتروني؟
5. Will you use e-learning after coronavirus ends? Explain reasons.	هل ستستخدم التعليم الإلكتروني بعد انتهاء كورونا؟ اشرح الأسباب