

## E- Learning from University Students' Perspectives

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### Abstract

The use of technology has indeed contributed to supporting and improving education, making learning approachable and obtainable to a large number of students, especially during the epidemic lockdown of schools where people are forced to stay at home. Therefore, universities shift to online mode of teaching which is conducted through e-learning system. However, the success of e-learning approach in Iraqi universities depends mainly on the attitudes of students towards online learning and their acceptance of it. Thus, this paper investigates the perspectives of university students, males and females, on the use of e-learning by their instructors at Basra university during COVID-19 pandemic. Using SPSS software for the analysis of the collected data, the equations of Weighted Mean and Percentile Weight, the results of the study demonstrate that university students view that though e-learning is beneficial and flexible. That is, they have to struggle to stay in touch with their virtual classes and teachers. Some of them do not even have access to laptops or smart phones, while some others have poor or non-existent Wi-Fi connections. This is due to the lack of strong and effective internet networks, in addition to the lack of sufficient experience on how to use the internet and manage e-learning platforms. To overcome these obstacles, there should be more forward planning on the part of the educational institutions and policy makers. They should improve the quality of internet connectivity and provide facilities as well as good communication services to students.

**Keywords:** E-Learning, Barriers; Covid-19 Pandemic; Distance Learning; Online Education

### Introduction

A great deal of research has been done on the critical challenges which face the employing of e-learning system in teaching during Covid-19 pandemic and teachers' as well as students' views about it. Within the category of scholars who examine the students' perceptions of online learning, Othman, Abu Odeh, Al Halalmeh & Almarshad (2018) study the influence of e-learning on the motivation of college students from the viewpoint of instructors and identify the barriers to e-learning. They report that teachers must be trained and acquainted with e-learning before using it. They also find that e-learning increases the motivation of students and brings them a feeling of satisfaction. Daniels, Sarte & Cruz (2019, p.3) adopt "a semi-structured questionnaire based on Debattista's comprehensive rubric." They collect data about the students' expectations, opinions and feedback on e-learning in addition to the challenges they face when using this mode of teaching. The statistical results reveal that the expectations of students who study in public schools are higher than those who study in private ones. They also show that the female students have more interest in e-learning than male students.

Likewise, Radha, Mahalakshmi, Sathish & Saravanakumar (2020, p.1088-89) conduct research on (175) national and international students who study at different schools and universities throughout the world. They apply "the stratified sampling method" to explore the viewpoints of students about e-learning. They observe that the popularity of e-learning increased among students and about (82.29) of them find it interesting especially during the outbreak of coronavirus. Also, Khan, Vivek, Nabi, Khojah and Tahir (2021) undertake study on (184) students from four different universities in India. They implement a quantitative approach to survey students' opinions as regard the usage of e-learning system in education. The results of the study show that students have positive attitudes to e-learning, thereby they display the advantages of this type of learning style.

Some other studies deal with the difficulties and obstacles which encounter students and instructors adopting online-teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using an interview method and the thematic analysis technique, Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh & Althunibat (2020, p.5261) examine the chief challenges that encounter the use of e-learning during Covid-19 pandemic and the elements which facilitate implementing it in a number of Jordanian universities. The findings of the study demonstrate that the challenges which encounter e-learning include change management, technical and financial issues. Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh & Althunibat (2020, p.5272-5275) conclude that "technological and cultural factors, the quality of e-learning system, self-efficacy and trust" are the elements which affect the use of e-learning. Similarly, Samuel (2021) explores the problems of employing e-learning in Nigeria during coronavirus and suggests creative ways to improve e-learning and solve problems facing it. Applying a "survey-based questionnaire", Mahyoob (2020, p.351) investigates the challenges and difficulties experienced by students studying English language at one of the Saudi universities. The study exposes that online learning contains "technical, academic, and communicational" problems. Additionally, students find that e-learning is inconvenient and it does not contribute to improving their performance in English.

To compare between e-learning and traditional teaching besides finding out which method is preferred by both students and teachers, Mohideen (2021) carries out a study on (71) students who attend classes in English and (20) teachers at Sultan Azlan Shah University. The results of the survey reveal that most students think that e-learning is better than traditional mode of teaching. On the other hand, teachers opine that online teaching is inefficient and limited in that it does not allow teamwork, interaction or direct contact between students. However, the study indicates that e-teaching is more adaptable, convenient and economical than face-to-face learning. Mohideen (2021) recommends a blended learning to reach a compromise between what each of teachers and students prefer. Other researches that have been conducted to detect the problems and challenges of e-learning in higher education is by Maatuk, Elberkawi, Aljawarneh, Rashaideh and Alharbi (2022, p.34). They do research on a number of students and teaching staff at IT Collage at university of Benghazi. They use questionnaire device to display students and teachers' opinions as regards implementing online learning in teaching. The study concludes that students approve of the use of e-learning; however, they assert that they face difficulties and problems when using it, such as "the low-quality of internet" and the burden of study. Instructors also find online education useful for it improves the students' technical abilities, but it is costly and unreliable.

The literature review of the previous studies exposes that the switch from a class-based teaching to e-learning results in various problems for educational institutions. Most researchers who have written about the use of e-learning in teaching during coronavirus fall into two groups. The first group has addressed the viewpoints of students of e-learning while the second one deals with barriers which prevent both teachers and students from using online learning effectively. The present study will add new contribution to the current literature on e-learning usage in teaching.

It explores the attitudes of university students towards e-learning and the difficulties which they experience when studying via this approach in Basra university in Iraq.

### **The Significance of E-Learning in Education**

Currently, e-learning is counted as a boon for contemporary education where teaching becomes a student-centered while teachers act as facilitators only. Students are now able to learn many activities, increase their knowledge, improve their skills and organize as well as direct their own learning through e-learning technology. Chitra and Raj (2018) supports this view saying that E-learning motivates students to work independently of their teachers and lead themselves in teaching process. Not to mention that e-learning improves teachers' technological skills and stimulates them to do extensive research on learning materials rather than depending on textbook's contents only. Besides, technology is integrated into classroom where instructors desert traditional method in teaching and present their lectures in different settings (Nataliya, 2014, p.29). Further, e-learning does not necessitate the attendance of teachers and students in one place. It encourages students to think creatively, cooperate, communicate with each other and express themselves clearly (Yucel, 2006). By way of e-learning, teachers can assess their students and hold a forum for the exchange of views and ideas (Aini, Budiarto, Putra & Rahardja, 2020).

Moreover, during Covid-19, e-learning makes learning materials accessible to more students. It gives them a chance to follow their teaching freely and to interact with their teachers and classmates easily (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh & Althunibat, 2020). In a similar vein, Alabbad (2016) asserts that e-learning encourage communication as it gives diffident learners the opportunity to voice their views and to participate actively in the teaching process without hindrance. Referring to the benefits of online learning, Dhull and Arora (2017, p.32-33) argue that this mode of teaching contributes to eradicating impediments to education caused by distance. It also allows the student to specify and identify their way of learning, topic content, purpose, and how to do research, thereby develop their cognitive processes and learn self-reliance.

Sadiku et al (2018, p.74) indicate that "online learning allows student to pursue an internationally recognized degree without the need to attend classes on campus." According to Radha, Mahalakshmi, Sathish & Saravanakumar (2020), students view e-learning as comfortable, satisfying and helpful specially during Coronavirus disease. It is more efficient, convenient and reliable than traditional teaching. In addition, e-learning makes teaching process helpful as well as enjoyable whereby games and "3D virtual lab" and "virtual environment" are geared to the needs of students (Daniels, Sarte & Cruz, 2019, p.1). Samuel (2021) maintains that e-learning does not only convert learning materials to students technologically but it also enables instructors to follow their students' educational advance and achievement. Mohideen (2021, p.908) declares that online learning makes teaching flexible and an easy process in that it permits teachers to share study contents with their students using different formats such as "pre-recorded videos and audio-visual materials" which students can access whenever they want. (Maatuk et al, 2022) says most learners confirm that e-learning is valuable for it is accessible, cost-effective, effortless and available at any time and place.

### **Methods**

After reviewing the previous literature and studies in the field of online learning and to achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers adopt a statistical scale of the pros and cons of e-learning. The scale consists of (26) items, i.e., (13) positive and (13) negative items in addition to (5) alternatives, namely (it always applies to me, it often applies to me, it sometimes applies to me, it rarely applies to me, it doesn't apply to me.) To attain the Reliability of the questionnaire items, the scale, in its initial form, is presented to a group of experts in the fields

of Educational Guidance and Psychological and Educational Sciences. The Stability of research is extracted via the method of half-segmentation.

Using the equations of Weighted Mean and Percentile Weight, the results of the study show that negative items, including: "e-learning makes me worried in the exam because of the cut-off the internet"; "I can't follow what is going on during the lecture because of the low speed of the Internet" ; "I feel that e-learning does not take into account the individual differences among students" ; " I see that e-learning reduces the direct interaction between me and my teacher" and "E-learning focuses on hearing and sight only while neglects other senses" have topped the scale. Alternatively, other positive items have fallen in the scale. Thus, the researchers select to discuss only the aforementioned items which get the first five orders in the scale.

### **Research Design**

This section includes a comprehensive description to determine and how to select the population, samples, instruments, and statistical analysis of the validity and reliability of the instruments.

### **Research Population**

The population of the current study includes third- and fourth-year students of both Arabic and English departments in the college of human sciences in Basra university. The total of the population is 777 respondents for the academic session 2021-2022.

### **The Sample**

The sample of this study has been chosen randomly from third- and fourth-year students of both Arabic and English departments in the college of human sciences in Basra university. The sample includes 100 respondents and Table 1 has shown the distribution based on the department:

**Table 1:** Number of Respondents based on the departments

<b>Department</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Arabic Language	34
English Language	66
Total	100

### **Instruments**

To achieve the goals of this study, the researchers conducted a scale for the cons and pros of e-learning according to the following steps:

#### **Formulation of scale items for the cons and pros of e-learning**

After further reviewing of the previous studies, which are related to the topic of the study, the researchers have formulated 28 items distributed for two fields and for each field 14 items. The items have been formulated in a style of declarative statements, and for each item there are five scales with (always, mostly, usually, seldom, never). The scale ranges from 1-5. These items of the scale have been revised by referring to theoretical framework and previous studies in addition to the useful insights, which are the results of extensive discussion with the experts and professional instructors in the educational aspect to formulate these items. The formulation of the items has been taken into consideration to be clear for one interpretation as well as reflecting one idea only.

## **Instructions of the Scale**

The researchers have been careful regarding the instructions of the scale to be accurate and clear as they asked the respondents to answer the questions truly and honestly for the scientific research. In this research, no need to mention the names of those respondents, and also no one will see the answer just the researchers for the confidentiality of the responses.

## **Face Validity**

It aims to test the items of the scale that intends to be measure. Ebel mentions that the best way to assure the validation of the test or scale is to introduce its items to groups of experts to determine their validity for which they were placed (Allen&, Yen,1979:96). Hence, it can be said that face validity has been achieved for the scale by introducing it among group of panels of experts, who are specialized in psychology and psychological counseling.

## **Reliability**

The measuring tool in any research should be reliable. The researchers used the scale among sample of 100 students in both Arabic and English departments in college of education for human sciences in Basra university. The researchers used split-half reliability to find out the reliable of the items by depending on individual group items and pair group items. The reliability of the scale was 0.86 and it is reliable.

## **Findings**

The findings of the study reveal that most of the university students are not satisfied with the online mode of learning due to a host of factors. The negative perceptions of students are attributed to a number of causes. One common reason is the incapacity to access or use the online learning and teaching tools. The lack of a good internet connection speed makes more students could not open online exams on their mobile phones because of some format or extension are not supported by their devices. There are also some other issues that the learners faced; such as, the lack of digital skills in using Blackboard platforms, the need for all online learning equipment, tools, systems, lack of real English language practice with the teachers and their classmates, etc. The findings of the current paper corroborate the findings of previous research on the same issues about online learning during COVID-19, and the results showed that students are not happy with distance education and many obstacles have been encountered (Bataineh, Atoum, Alsmadi & Shikhali 2020; Rajab et al., 2020).

In the beginning, most of the learners came online for the first time. They lacked the experience and confidence to learn online using a new medium. After some time, most learners could overcome most of the technical issues related to online learning platforms. But the English language learning challenges are still problematic in online learning during the pandemic. These findings add to the growing body of literature on the significant challenges and problems that encountered EFL learners during the sudden change to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessary steps are needed to facilitate the online education process and to overcome these reported issues.

## **Result and Discussions**

This section includes highlighting the results that are achieved based on the objectives of the research. The researchers used the scale of cons and pros of e-learning as a tool to get to know the perspectives of students in relation to the Likert scale. The researchers depended on median rate and percentage weight as statistical tools to determine the achieved and unachieved items in the scale as shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Grades of pros and cons scale of e-learning in descending order based on median and percentage weight

percentage weight	Median	Sequenced in the scale	Ranking	items
%89	4,46	23	First	E-learning causes me exam anxiety as a result of net interruption
%81	4,9	3	Second	I can't follow up what's going on during the lecture for low internet speed
%80	4,0	17	Third	I feel that e-learning does not take into account individual differences among students
%78	3,94	19	Forth	I see that e-learning reduces direct interaction between me and my instructor.
%78	3,93	15	Fifth	E-learning focuses on hearing and sight senses and neglects other senses
%77	3,86	2	Sixth	I see that e-learning is just a way to complete the curriculum.
%76	3,73	7	Seventh	E-learning takes a lot of my time and effort
%74	3,70	9	Eighth	E-learning does not give me an opportunity to interact socially during the learning process
%74	3.74	21	Nineth	Lack of use of library when studying at online classroom
%73	3,65	4	Tenth	E-learning helps me isolate to sit in front of a computer for a long time.
%69	3,47	1	Eleventh	I have difficulties understanding the lecture through Class Room
%68	3,41	11	Twelfth	I find it difficult to express my opinions and ideas in writing
%67	3,29	13	Thirteenth	I see that e-learning focuses only on the knowledge aspect.
%64	3,23	10	Fourteenth	E-learning enables me to communicate with the teacher anywhere and anytime
%62	3,10	24	Fifteenth	I can learn online from accessing the course easily.
%59	2,96	22	Sixteenth	E-learning provides me with an opportunity to ask questions and inquiries
%56	2,80	20	Seventeenth	I feel that the content presented electronically for scientific material is comprehensive and adequate
%55	2,78	18	Eighteenth	E-learning gives me an opportunity to freely present my opinions
%53	2,67	16	Nineteenth	E-Learning develops my informatics skills
%53	2,66	14	Twentieth	I feel like e-learning is raising my level of achievement.
%51	2,58	25	Twenty-first	E-learning motivates me to acquire the most skills and educational achievement
%51	2,59	8	Twenty-second	E-learning made me do a good in computer.
%49	2,45	12	Twenty third	E-learning contributes to activating my active learning
%47	2,38	26	Twenty forth	E-learning helps me to create and innovate
%46	2,21	5	Twenty fifth	My studies through classroom evolve my intellectual skills
%41	2,8	6	Twenty sixth	I see that e-learning achieves quality standards in university education

The above table shows that the averages were between 2.8-4.46, and percentage weights were between 41%-89%. After presenting the items with the obtained percentages from each item of the scale, it has been shown there were groups of negative items in the scale. To discuss the results of the research, the researchers chose the top five of the items, and Table 4 showed that item 23 had the first place among the others in which was about “E-learning causes me exam anxiety as a result of net interruption”. That item had 4.46 median and 89% percentage, and this refers to university students have anxiety in the exam and can not concentrate due to the interruption of the net that causes uncomfortable. Item 3 has the second place in which it was about “I can't follow up what's going on during the lecture for low internet speed”. That item has 4.9 median and 81% percentage weight, and it means that there is an extreme fear of doing the exam through e-learning, which implies that the network is unstable.

Item 7 has the third place, and it was about “I feel that e-learning does not take into account individual differences among students”, and it has 4.0 median and 80% percentage weight. Meaning that university students consider that e-learning does not taking into account the individual differences among students. The reason for this is due to distance learning that unable to use the technique of educational communication during lecture in comparing with face-to-face learning. Face to-face learning or presence learning concentrates on communication language between students and instructors, which leads to full knowledge from the instructor in individual differences among his/her students. Item 19 has the third place, which its content was about “I see that e-learning reduces direct interaction between me and my instructor, and it has 3.94 median and 78% percentage weight. It means that e-learning lacks the communication between the students and instructor as negatively reflects their performance in the exam. Item 15 has the fifth place, which was about “E-learning focuses on hearing and sight senses and neglects other senses”, and it has 3.93 medial and 78% percentage weight. Meaning that online learning concentrates only on two senses and neglect the others like educational aids that depends on laboratory experiments. The items that have the last fifth places, Table 4 shows that item 6 has the twentieth-six place, which was about “I see that e-learning achieves quality standards in university education”, and it has 2.8 median and 41% percentage weight. Besides, item 5 has the twentieth fifth place in which it was about “My studies through classroom evolve my intellectual skills”, and it has 2.21 median and 46% percentage weight. Also, item 26 has twentieth fourth place that was about “E-learning helps me to create and innovate” with 2.38 median and 47% percentage weight. While item 12 has twentieth third place, which was about “E-learning contributes to activating my active learning”, and it has 2.45 median and 49% percentage weight. Lastly, item 8 has twentieth second place that was about “E-learning made me do a good in computer”, and it has 2.59 median and 51% percentage weight. University students do not prefer online learning as showed from the items that had the last places. Based on these items that showed the positive side of e-learning; however, they got weak median and percentage weights, which demonstrate the failure of online learning. Meaning that, online learning from the perspectives of university students has a lot of obstacles that prevent the students with their fully grasp of the study materials. This is due to the lack of infrastructure as well as training of educational and administrative staff.

## **Conclusion**

This study explores the perspectives of Basra university students towards e-learning system used during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study exposes that students have negative attitudes towards e-learning. They find it disadvantageous for it prevents them from face- to-face communication with their teachers and fellow students. They feel anxiety when using it, particularly during examination as they do not have an easy access to study materials because of the low speed or the total cut-off of the Internet. Further, students view that online learning does not take into account individual differences between students, not to mention that it concentrates of the senses of sight and hearing only, disregarding the other senses.

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