

The effect of e-learning on Iraqi EFL University Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

This study intends to look at how IMAM AL-KADHUM College students in Diyala feel about the difficulties of online learning. Data were collected from a sample of 107 students, the majority of whom were junior students (55.1%), using a quantitative survey approach. The Imam Al-Kadhum College IKC in Diyala's English department's morning and evening classes were used to create the sample. The survey's questions centered on the participants' views and motivation for their studies, as well as their experiences with online learning and how it affected their academic achievement. The poll also intended to determine the specific difficulties that students encountered when learning online and the tools and resources that were most beneficial to them. Moreover, the survey examined the level of assistance offered by teachers and other students in the virtual classroom.

The study's conclusions showed that online learning affected students' academic success and satisfaction in both positive and bad ways. While a sizeable majority of participants reported negative effects on their studies, including challenges with technical issues, time management, and resource availability, others considered the flexibility and access to a wider choice of materials to be advantageous. The study also discovered that while some students believed they received appropriate assistance from their teachers and fellow students, others did not. Students reported using a variety of coping mechanisms, such as creating a regular study schedule, asking for assistance from teachers and peers, and using online tools to improve their studies.

Keywords: Effect, Online Learning, University Students, Iraq.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced universities and schools around the world to quickly adapt to online learning. In Iraq, many universities have shifted to online learning to continue education while maintaining social distancing measures. However, the transition to online learning has not been without challenges. One area that has been affected is the education of English as a foreign language (EFL) students. The shift to online learning has brought new challenges to teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The online learning experience can be different from the traditional classroom setting, and it can be difficult for students to engage and stay motivated.

Online learning can be defined as a type of distance education that uses technology to deliver course content and provide opportunities for interaction between students and teachers. The use of technology in online learning has many advantages, such as flexibility and accessibility. However, some challenges come with online learning, such as a lack of interaction with teachers and peers, difficulty in asking questions and receiving feedback, and lack of motivation. For English as a foreign language students, online learning can be particularly challenging.

English is a complex language that requires a lot of practice and interaction to master. Ahmed (2015) Online learning can make it difficult for students to practice their English skills and receive feedback on their progress. Additionally, the use of technology in online learning can be a source of frustration for some students who are not familiar with the tools and platforms used. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of online learning on university students who study to be English teachers in Iraq.

The study will focus on the challenges that these students face and how they cope with them. The study will also explore the strategies that these students use to stay motivated and engaged in the online learning experience. By understanding the challenges and strategies used by these students, the study will provide insights into how online learning can be improved for English as a foreign language students. This study will be of great importance to educators, researchers, and practitioners who are interested in the field of online education in Iraq. It will also be of great interest to policymakers who are responsible for the development of educational policies in Iraq, as it will provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of online learning in Iraq.

Problem Statement

The shift to online learning has brought new challenges to teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Online learning can be different from the traditional classroom setting, and it can be difficult for students to engage and stay motivated. The lack of interaction with teachers and peers can

also make it difficult for students to ask questions and receive feedback. Additionally, the use of technology in online learning can be a source of frustration for some students who are not familiar with the tools and platforms used.

Research Objective

The main objective of this study is:

to investigate the Students' University Attitudes Towards Challenges in Online Learning at Imam Al-Kadhum College in Diyala.

Research question

What are the Students' University Attitudes Towards Challenges in Online Learning at Imam Al-Kadhum College in Diyala?

2. Literature Review

The literature review for the study entitled "The effect of online learning on university students who study to be English teachers in Iraq" will examine previous research on the topic of online learning in the context of teacher education. One major area of research in the field of online learning is the effectiveness of online instruction compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. Studies have found that online learning can be just as effective as traditional instruction, if not more so, in certain contexts (Means et al., 2010; Wang, Chen, & Liang, 2016).

Additionally, online learning can provide opportunities for increased access to education, particularly for students in remote or underserved areas (Bonk & Graham, 2006). However, research has also highlighted some potential drawbacks of online learning, such as a lack of social interaction and decreased motivation (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). These issues may be particularly relevant for teacher education, as the development of effective teaching strategies and the ability to connect with students are essential skills for future teachers. Another area of research relevant to this study is the use of online tools and resources in teacher education. Studies have found that the use of technology in teacher education can enhance student learning and engagement (Chen & Lu, 2011; Chen, Koehler, & Mishra, 2009).

However, there is also a need for teacher education programs to provide training and support for the effective use of technology (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Research on online learning in the context of teacher education in developing countries is limited. However, studies have highlighted the potential for online learning to improve access to teacher education in these contexts (Harrison & Koehler, 2011; Lockyer, Bennett, & Agostinho, 2014). In

summary, the literature suggests that online learning can be an effective and efficient mode of instruction in teacher education, but it also highlights the need for teacher education programs to address the potential drawbacks of online learning and provide training and support for the effective use of technology. The current study aims to add to this literature by investigating the effect of online learning on Iraqi university students who are studying to be English teachers (Ahmed ,2017).

Finally, Ahmed, s (2015) In this essay, the findings of a survey of 238 EFL undergraduate students at a public institution in Malaysia are analyzed. The focus of the study was on respondents' attitudes toward learning English and potential barriers to that learning. A 19-item questionnaire was created and given to 238 students to gather data. The purpose of this study was to look into (1) Learners' attitudes toward using English in various contexts, (2) Potential factors that may have influenced how learning English affected students, and (3) English learning perspectives among Malaysian non-major English learners. The findings of the qualitative study demonstrate that there is a very favorable attitude toward learning the English language and using it in a variety of contexts. The information also showed indicated the majority of pupils found it intimidating or unpleasant to follow instructions in class. Regarding usage domains and learning skills focus, students from various fields had varying attitudes about learning the English language, demonstrating the inadequacy of a single curriculum or teaching approach. From this perspective, several recommendations have been made regarding the curriculum, teaching methods, teaching resources, and the position of English in Malaysia.

3- The Tool (Methodology)

3-1 The Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the challenges that university students who study to be English teachers in Iraq face in the online learning environment, and how they cope with these challenges. This information will be used to help improve online learning experiences for future English teacher students in Iraq. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. How long have you been studying to be an English teacher in Iraq?
Rationale: This question will help to identify the level of experience that participants have in their English teacher studies.
2. How has online learning impacted your studies?
Rationale: This question will help to identify the participants' perceptions of the impact of online learning on their studies.
3. Do you feel that online learning has been beneficial to your studies?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the participants' perceptions of the benefits of online learning in their studies.

4. What challenges have you faced while studying online?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the specific challenges that participants face in the online learning environment.

5. Do you think that online learning has helped or hindered your academic performance?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the participants' perceptions of the impact of online learning on their academic performance.

6. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of online learning for English teachers in Iraq?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the participants' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of online learning for English teachers in Iraq.

7. Are there any particular aspects of online learning that you find challenging?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the specific aspects of online learning that participants find challenging.

8. Do you think that the quality of education is better or worse when studying online compared to traditional classroom-based teaching methods?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the participants' perceptions of the quality of education in the online learning environment compared to traditional classroom-based teaching methods.

9. Are there any particular resources or tools that have been particularly helpful in your studies while using online learning methods?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the specific resources or tools that participants have found helpful in their online learning experience.

10. Do you feel that the support provided by instructors and other students has been adequate while studying online?

Rationale: This question will help to identify the participants' perceptions of the adequacy of the support provided by instructors and other students in the online learning environment.

4- Results and Discussion

4-1 Results

The study aimed to identify the challenges that university students who are studying to become English teachers in Iraq face in the online learning environment and how they cope with these challenges. The study used a questionnaire to collect data from 107 students in the 3rd and 4th year of the Department of English at Imam Al-Kadhumi College (IKC). The respondents

included 55.1% junior students and 44.9% senior students, with 63.6% female and 36.4% male participants. The majority of the students were morning study students (52.3%), and 47.7% were evening students.

Grade

107 responses

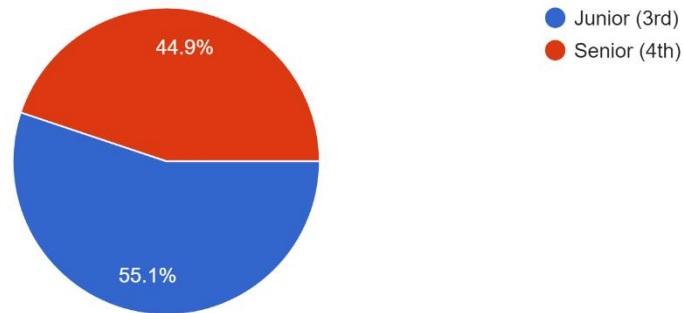


Figure No.1: Respondents' distribution according to grade

Study

107 responses

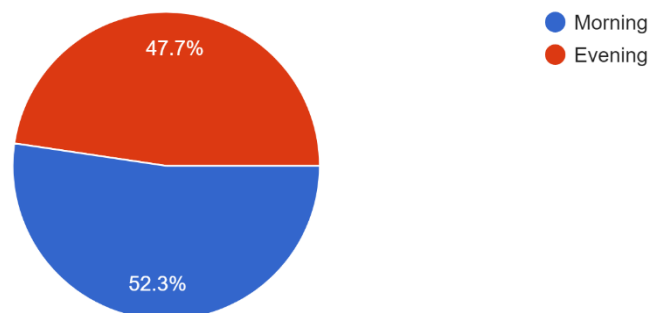


Figure No.2: Respondents' distribution according to study (morning/ evening)

In response to Q1, 45.8% of the respondents had been studying to be an English teacher in Iraq for four years, 35.5% had been studying for three years, and 18.7% had been studying for more than four years.

How long have you been studying to be an English teacher in Iraq ?

107 responses

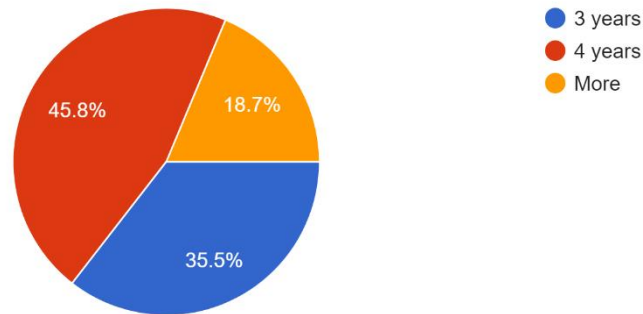


Figure No3: Question 1

In response to Q2, 46.7% of the students said that online learning had impacted their studies in a bad way, 28% said it had impacted their studies in a good way, and 25.2% were not sure.

How has online learning impacted your studies?

107 responses

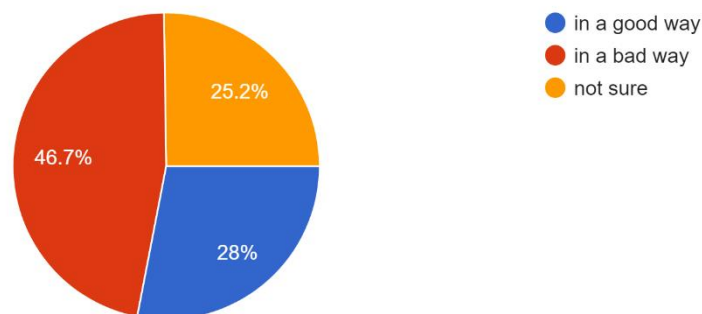


Figure No. 4: Question 2

Q3 showed that 35.8% of the respondents felt that online learning was not beneficial to their studies, 34% said it may be beneficial, and 30.2% said it was beneficial.

Do you feel that online learning has been beneficial to your studies?

106 responses

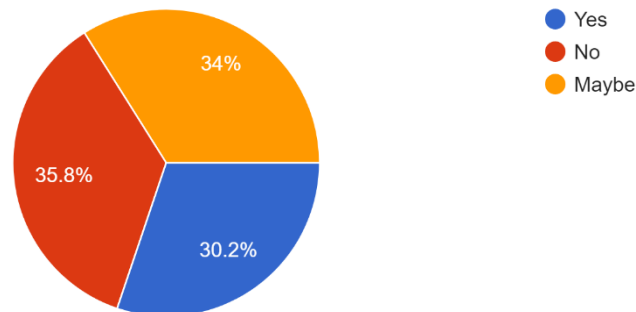


Figure No. 5: Question 3

Q4 identified the challenges faced by students while studying online, which included technical issues (such as poor internet connection or computer problems), difficulty staying focused and motivated without in-person interactions with teachers and classmates, time management difficulties, limited access to resources, challenges in communicating with teachers and classmates, difficulty adapting to the online learning format, concerns about the quality of education, lack of social interaction and feelings of isolation or loneliness, and health and wellbeing concerns (such as eye strain or a sedentary lifestyle associated with prolonged computer use).

In response to Q5, 32.7% of the respondents felt that online learning hindered their academic performance, while 30.8% said it helped and 36.4% were neutral.

Do you think that online learning has helped or hindered your academic performance?

107 responses

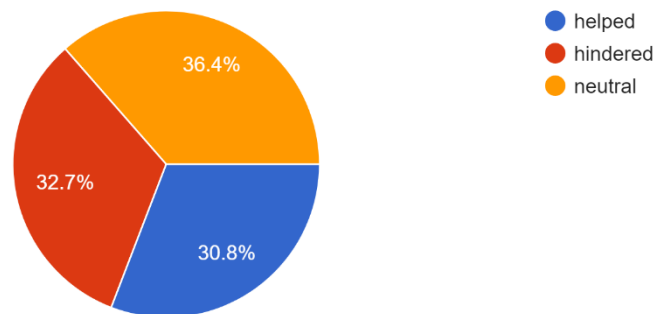


Figure No. 6: Question 5

Q6 identified the advantages and disadvantages of online learning for English teachers in Iraq. Advantages included flexibility in terms of scheduling and pace of learning, access to a wider range of resources, collaboration with other teachers and professionals from around the world, ability to provide more personalized instruction and feedback to students, and reduced costs associated with travel and accommodation. The expected disadvantages were the lack of face-to-face interaction with students, limited opportunities for hands-on practice and experiential learning, difficulty in monitoring and assessing student progress and engagement, dependence on technology, and potential for isolation and lack of peer support or mentoring.

In response to Q7, 66.4% of the students found some aspects of online learning difficult or challenging, while 29% found them challenging a lot of the time, and only 4.7% never found them difficult.

Are there any particular aspects of online learning that you find difficult or challenging?

107 responses

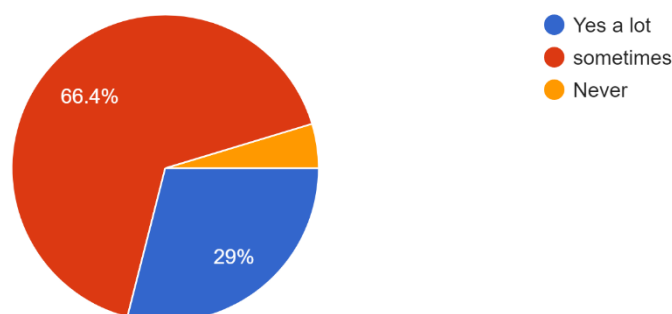


Figure No. 7: Question 7

In response to Q8, 49.5% of the respondents felt that the quality of education was worse when studying online compared to traditional classroom-based teaching methods, while 28% said it was the same and 22.4% said it was better.

Do you think that the quality of education is better or worse when studying online compared to traditional classroom-based teaching methods?

107 responses

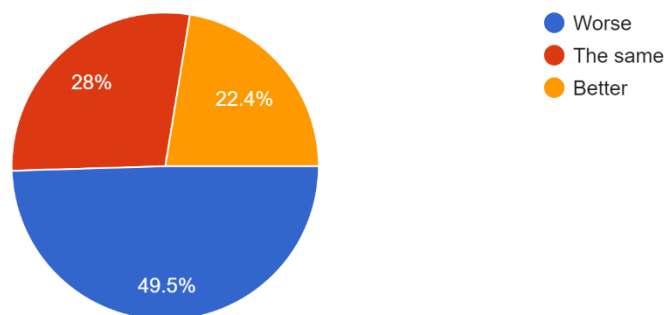


Figure No. 8: Question 8

Q9 revealed that 51.4% of the students found particular resources or tools helpful in their studies while using online learning methods, while 32.7% were unsure, and 15.9% did not find any resources helpful.

Are there any particular resources or tools that have been particularly helpful in your studies while using online learning methods?

107 responses

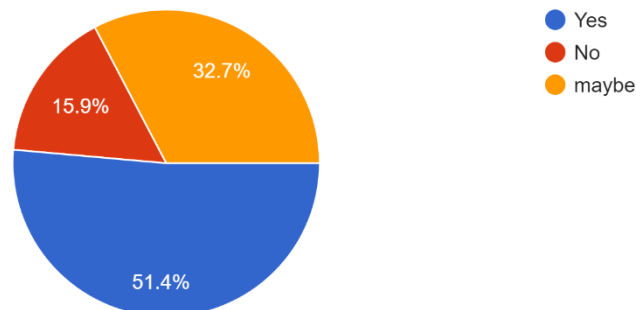


Figure No. 9: Question 9

Finally, in response to Q10, 57% of the students felt that the support provided by instructors and other students was sometimes adequate, 31.8% felt it was always adequate, and 11.2% felt it was never adequate.

4-2 Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the challenges that university students who study to be English teachers in Iraq face in the online learning environment, and how they cope with these challenges. The questionnaire was administered to 107 students, with a majority being junior students (55.1%) and females (63.6%).

In response to Q1, almost half of the participants (45.8%) have been studying to be an English teacher in Iraq for four years. This suggests that they have considerable experience with both traditional and online learning methods.

In response to Q2, almost half of the participants (46.7%) reported that online learning impacted their studies in a bad way, while only 28% found it to be good. This result is consistent with previous research that has shown that online learning can be challenging for students, particularly in developing countries like Iraq, where access to technology and reliable internet is limited.

The majority of participants (66.4%) found particular aspects of online learning to be challenging, with technical issues, difficulty staying focused and motivated, and time management difficulties being the most commonly reported challenges. These results are in line with previous research, which has identified

these challenges as major issues faced by students in online learning environments.

Despite these challenges, many participants still found some aspects of online learning to be helpful. Q3 showed that 30.2% of participants felt that online learning has been beneficial to their studies, and Q5 showed that almost one-third of participants felt that online learning helped their academic performance.

Regarding the quality of education, the majority of participants (49.5%) reported that online learning is worse than traditional classroom-based teaching methods. The quality of education is a critical concern for students, and this result suggests that the quality of online learning needs to be improved to meet the expectations of students.

Q9 asked whether participants found particular resources or tools helpful while using online learning methods, and 51.4% of participants answered positively. This finding suggests that providing students with access to high-quality learning resources and tools is important in improving the quality of online learning in Iraq.

In response to Q10, the majority of participants (57%) reported that they sometimes receive adequate support from their instructors and other students while studying online. The lack of social interaction and feelings of isolation or loneliness may have contributed to this result.

Finally, Q6 investigated the advantages and disadvantages of online learning for English teachers in Iraq. Participants identified several advantages, including flexibility, access to a wider range of resources, and reduced costs. However, they also recognized several disadvantages, such as the lack of face-to-face interaction with students, limited opportunities for hands-on practice, and difficulty in monitoring and assessing student progress.

The current study found that online learning poses several challenges for university students who study to be English teachers in Iraq. Technical issues, difficulty staying focused and motivated, and time management difficulties were identified as major challenges. Despite these challenges, some participants still found some aspects of online learning to be helpful. The quality of education and support provided by instructors and other students were also identified as concerns. The results suggest that improving the quality of online learning and providing students with access to high-quality learning resources and tools are crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of online learning in Iraq.

5- Conclusions and Recommendations

5-1 Conclusions

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore the challenges that university students who study to be English teachers in Iraq face in the online learning environment and how they cope with these challenges. The findings of this study indicate that online learning has had a mixed impact on the participants' studies, with almost half reporting negative effects, a third reporting positive effects, and the remaining participants unsure. Many participants reported facing various challenges in online learning, including technical issues, difficulty staying focused, and managing time, among others. The participants also generally felt that the quality of education is worse in online learning compared to traditional classroom-based teaching methods, and the support provided by instructors and other students is sometimes inadequate.

Despite the challenges, participants highlighted several advantages of online learning, such as flexibility, access to a wider range of resources, and reduced costs. These findings suggest that while online learning presents some significant challenges, it also provides some unique opportunities for English teachers in Iraq.

Overall, this study contributes to a growing body of literature on online learning in higher education, particularly in developing countries like Iraq. The study's findings have important implications for policymakers, higher education administrators, and English language instructors. To improve the quality of online learning, policymakers and administrators need to invest in infrastructure, such as reliable internet connections and provide training for instructors and students on how to navigate online platforms and tools effectively. Additionally, English language instructors need to develop new pedagogical strategies and assessment methods that are more suited to the online learning environment.

5-2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Institutions should provide additional training and support for both students and instructors on how to effectively navigate and utilize online learning tools and platforms.
2. Educational institutions should establish effective communication channels to address technical issues and provide timely support to students.
3. Instructors should be encouraged to provide more opportunities for students to interact with one another and with the instructor in a virtual setting to help mitigate the feelings of isolation and loneliness that some students reported.

4. Educational institutions should provide resources and support to help students manage their time and avoid distractions while studying online.
5. Institutions should consider implementing a blended learning approach that combines online learning with in-person classroom instruction to address the limitations of online learning and to provide students with opportunities for hands-on practice and experiential learning.
6. Institutions should make more resources and materials available online to help students access the resources they need to succeed in their studies.
7. Educational institutions should consider conducting regular assessments of the quality of education delivered through online learning to ensure that it is comparable to that delivered through traditional classroom-based teaching methods.
8. Instructors and educational institutions should make an effort to establish a sense of community and foster a supportive environment that can help students cope with the challenges associated with online learning.
9. The Ministry of Education in Iraq should provide adequate funding and support to educational institutions to ensure that they have the necessary infrastructure and resources to deliver high-quality online learning programs.
10. Future studies should investigate the impact of online learning on other majors and student populations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with online learning in higher education in Iraq.

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