

**تقصي تفضيلات الطلاب للتعلم الإلكتروني في جامعة
النهرين**

**Exploring Students' Preferences of
E-Learning at Al-Nahrain University.**

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الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم الإلكتروني، الفوائد المتصورة، التفضيلات.

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الملخص

بحثت هذه الدراسة في الفوائد المتصورة والمخاوف المحددة لمنصات التعلم الإلكتروني باللغة الإنجليزية بين طلاب كلية الطب وكلية الصيدلة في جامعة النهرين. هدفت الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية تأثير هذه المنصات على تجارب تعلم الطلاب، مع التركيز على نقاط القوة والضعف. تم جمع البيانات النوعية باستخدام استبيان شبه منظم يحتوي على سؤالين مفتوحين مصممين لتحديد ميزات ومعوقات منصة التعلم الإلكتروني. قدمت الردود من 10 طلاب تم اختيارهم عشوائياً رؤى حول تفضيلاتهم وتحدياتهم. تم استخدام التحليل الموضوعي للكشف عن المواضيع الرئيسية. من بين الفوائد، أبرز الطلاب المرونة والراحة، مما مكنهم من إدارة دراستهم بشكل أكثر فعالية. شملت التحديات مشاكل الاتصال بالإنترنت المتكررة، وانقطاعات الكهرباء، والشعور بنقص التفاعل مع الزملاء والمدرسين. تسلط هذه النتائج الضوء على العوامل التي تؤثر على مشاركة الطلاب ورضاهم عن منصات التعلم الإلكتروني، مما يوفر رؤى قيمة حول إمكاناتها وقبورها في التعليم الطبي. أوصت الدراسة بمعالجة التحديات التقنية ودمج الميزات التفاعلية لتعزيز رضا الطلاب ونتائج التعلم.

Abstract

This study examined the perceived advantages and the perceived concerns of English e-learning platforms among the medical students of the College of Medicine and College of Pharmacy, Al-Nahrain University. The research intended to investigate the role of these platforms in the learning experiences of students with an emphasis on their strengths and weaknesses. The semi-structured questionnaire, which had two open questions, was used to collect qualitative data and determine the characteristics and barriers of the e-learning platform. The answers of 10 randomly chosen students were insightful in terms of their preferences and challenges. Key themes were identified with the help of thematic analysis. Among the advantages, flexibility and convenience were mentioned by students and allowed them to be more productive in their studies. Issues such as regular internet outages, power disruptions and the feeling of not communicating with peers and instructors were some of the challenges. Such results can illuminate the components that affect student

engagement and satisfaction with e-learning platforms with valuable information about their potential and drawbacks in medical education. The research suggested the need to overcome technical difficulties and the inclusion of interactive capabilities to make the students more satisfied and achieve high learning results.

Introduction

E-learning has become a demand of the modern day education system and it gives the students a flexible and a suitable learning opportunity. To have a better understanding of what students know, the research conducted a study to determine the preferences of students to e-learning platforms by asking them two open-ended questions: The study collected the responses of students in the two colleges, which provided an excellent overview of the opinions of students about the strengths and weaknesses of these platforms.. The objectives of this study are as follows 1- To identify the features of e-learning platform that students would like to see. 2-To determine the characteristics of e-learning platforms which students do not like. Thus, two research questions were investigated: 1- What are the favorite features of the e-learning platform among the students? 2- What do students not like about the e-learning platform?

This study also had important background and theoretical framework provided by the previous literature on application of English electronic learning (e-learning) in medical education. The existing research requires an in-depth literature review to place the current study in the context of the existing academic discussion and pinpoint the main issues that can determine the adoption and implementation of English e-learning among medical students.

The use of e-learning in learning systems have attracted considerable attention over the last few years particularly as schools resort to new ways of learning to improve the learning process. The suitability and importance

of e-learning in diverse learning environments has been studied in multiple studies. This section saw the researcher go through significant publications dealing with the current state of e-learning, its benefits and problems. The review will focus on providing an in-depth understanding of the impact of e-learning on educational practices and how this can be improved in the future by generalizing the findings of previous researches.

Recent researches have pointed out advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. The TechTarget (2025) identified flexibility and cost-efficiency as the key advantages, as students will be able to access materials at any time, and will spend less money on commuting. It however pointed out challenges like the need to have human interaction, technical challenges and the potential of reduced transparency of the content quality. Karimian and Zolfakhari (2024) studied the preferences of virtual learning and education of postgraduate medical students of Shiraz University of medical sciences. They used VARK model and discovered that, the dominant learning style was reading-writing, and students liked e-content and self-managed project-based virtual learning. Kim (2024) conducted a research study on medical students in South Korea to understand their inclination towards e-learning in the same field. Multimedia tools like audio clips and clinical videos were popular among students because of learning multifaceted topics such as cardiovascular systems and neurologic exams. Students also greatly appreciated ease of use and content of high quality. Prabu Kumar et al. (2023) conducted a comparison on the perceptions of e-learning modules in lower-middle-income country among medical students. The study showed that flexibility and accessibility were seen as advantageous to the students but there were issues such as technical issues and absence of face to face interaction with the tutors. According to PMC (2023), the perceived advantages and disadvantages were identified, and accessibility and flexibility were considered positive elements, and the



unrealistic implementation and face-to-face interaction were negative factors influencing communication skills and interaction.

Talent Garden (2023) talked about cost-effectiveness, global connectivity, and enhanced engagement with the use of multimedia tools but mentioned the negative aspects (excessive screen time, self-discipline problems, and the lack of hands-on learning). Kaltura (2023) outlined flexibility and convenience as benefits and technical issues and unreliable infrastructure as the critical constraints to successful learning but emphasized the quality of solid technical support. Finn et al. (2022) investigated the preferences of medical students in a large U.S. medical school in the context of the preclinical education and licensing exams (USMLE Step 1) preparation. The research has stressed the fact that the most successful e-learning modality was the videos, as they were efficient in terms of acquiring knowledge and preparing exams. A study at Hawler Medical University (Alkhateeb et al., 2022) revealed that most students had a negative attitude towards e-learning. The core problems were skewed towards the use of traditional tests and a myriad of challenges such as bad internet connection and lack of computer literacy that limited the applicability of e-learning platforms. In a case of e-learning in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic, PMC (2022) discovered that accessibility is a prime benefit but noted such challenges as technical issues and difficulties in teaching some practical courses as well as the lack of direct interaction with peers and instructors. The research by Shabila et al. (2021) examined the perspectives of students towards e-learning, and the study found that it has a number of benefits, including flexibility, accessibility, low cost, time-saving, and continuity of teaching in the event of disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. But it also presented significant disadvantages in terms of technical challenges, loss of contact with teachers and peers and loss of clinical trainings. Al Rawashdeh et al. (2021) indicated flexibility and

accessibility as the benefits and technical issues and the lack of real-time interaction as drawbacks and stated that the delivery of e-learning platforms should be enhanced with intensive technical assistance and interaction opportunities. Bringman-Rodenbarger and Hortsch (2020) studied the e-learning resource selection as students perceive it in ease, familiarity, and convenience. The researchers found that low-tech solutions like PowerPoint were more frequently used in comparison to the high-tech solutions like mobile applications or interactive web pages and the students did not consider high-tech solutions as much important as accessibility.

Simonds and Brock (2019) investigated the relationship between age and preference of online learning activities in their study and discovered that older learners had a taste and preference towards video lectures because it is clear whereas the young learners had a taste and preference towards interactive activity such as live discussion and group projects. This generation gap restated the need to have mixed methods that would be useful to different learning styles. Maham et al. (2018) carried out a cross-sectional research conducted at King Edward Medical University, Lahore, with undergraduate medical students. The study found that e-learning was helpful to 60 percent of the students, and rated as very helpful. Students were happy to receive the possibility to receive study materials and multimedia (videos and pictures) without difficulties, and this enhanced their learning experience.

Methodology of the study

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain deeper insights into medical students' experiences with English e-learning at Al-Nahrain University. through using a semi-structured questionnaire.

Participants: Ten students at the Colleges of Medicine and Pharmacy at the Al-Nahrain University were particularly selected to participate in a semi-structured questionnaire. This purposive sampling was used to represent diversity of backgrounds and views and this enhanced the richness of the qualitative data.

Data Analysis: Semi-structured interviews were the qualitative data analyzed using thematic analysis to get the experience of the participants using English e-learning platforms. It delved into the experience of the participants on these platforms both positively and negatively,

Analysis of the First Question of the Semi Structured Questionnaire

Semi-structured questionnaire was used where ten medical students of the College of Medicine and the College of Pharmacy were interviewed with their information being focused on the first question of the first question what they liked the most about the English e-learning platform.

Table (1) Students' Perspectives on the Advantages of E-Learning Platforms

No.	Aspect of E-Learning Platform	Number of Mentions	Percentage (%)
1	Flexible Access Students appreciate the ability to access learning materials anytime,	6	60%
2	Comfortable Environment Many find studying at home more comfortable compared to traditional classroom settings.	2	20%
3	Easy Access to Resources	3	30%

	It provides easy access to learning materials, interactive exercises		
4	Flexible Lecture Timing It allow instructors to share knowledge at a comfortable pace, enhancing audio clarity.	1	10%
5	Time Efficiency E-learning is seen as time-efficient, especially for studying theoretical subjects and applying them in clinical settings.	2	20%
6	Balance in Time Management The flexibility in accessing lectures, quizzes, and case studies help students manage their time better.	2	20%
7	Comfort without Time Restrictions The e-learning experience allows students to repeat lectures as needed	2	20%
8	Engaging Features Interactive features like quizzes, videos, and discussion forums enhance the learning experience and make it more engaging.	2	20%
9	Communication The platform facilitates easier communication between students, doctors, and classmates	1	10%
10	Overall Flexibility in accessing materials is consistently highlighted as a major advantage, promoting effective learning.	3	30%

The responses to the first question were summarized in Table (1) among students. This table was qualitative in nature as it presented the factors that were most appreciated by the students. Students expressed preference of flexible access to learning materials, of which 60% pointed out that the ability to have access to lectures, notes, and other learning materials any time made it easier to study at their own pace. This has allowed them to revisit challenging issues, fit their study time to meet specific individual requirements, and understand better without the confines of rigid



classroom schedules. Comfort given by studying at home was considered important by 20 percent of the students who claimed that learning in a comfortable and relaxed environment helped most of them focus more productively and reduced the stress that is mostly attributed to the classroom set-up.

Easy access to resources was a significant strength noted by about 30 percent, with the e-learning platform designed to simply obtain lectures, notes, exercises, and prompt feedback, which assisted in a more structured and purposeful study process.

In terms of flexibility with regard to the time of lecture, 10 percent of the students were happy to have the chance of the instructors to lecture without usual time limits in the physical classrooms. This fluidity often resulted in more comprehensive explanations and more efficient communication, especially when they are conducted with good sound in virtual meetings. Time efficiency was recognized as the most advantageous aspect since 20% of students were more convinced by studying theoretical knowledge at home and applying it later in a hospital or other clinical setting. This path was also time saving and they were able to concentrate more on theory and practice too.

The other 20% of learners highlighted the fact that the e-learning arrangement assisted in managing time balance as they could effectively balance their academic duties with other aspects of their lives. The possibility to access lectures, quizzes, and case studies on demand contributed to the simplification of the process of maintaining a structured schedule and not be constrained by the exact schedule in the classroom.

The concept of comfort with no time constraints also came out in 20 percent of responses, with students enjoying the idea of relishes lectures in order to understand them better, and the concept of not having to waste time getting to college and back. This feature minimized physical and

mental fatigue, and the whole learning experience was more efficient and stress-free. On the dimension of the interactive nature of the platform, 20% of the learners liked the interactive nature of the platform, which featured quizzes, academic videos and discussion seminars. These qualities contributed to the fact that the learning became more dynamic and enjoyable and could retain the motivation and get involved.

Communication although it was only discussed by 10% was also a feature that helped students who used messaging features to stay in touch with professors and classmates. This is one of the factors, which eased the assistance of the academic discourse, even in an isolated place. Lastly, 30% mentioned a general flexibility of the platform which entailed significant advantages, including easy access, time management, and independent studying. This overall feeling of flexibility led to greater satisfaction of the e-learning process and was observed to be a big benefit towards supporting academic success. The student responses that follow are a summary of the responses given by the students concerning the merits of the e-learning platform.

- 1) *I like that it provides flexible access to learning materials anytime, making it easier to study at my own pace.*
- 2) *It's more comfortable to study at home.*
- 3) *It provides easy access to learning materials, interactive exercises, and feedback. It allows flexible learning and easy way to access information.*
- 4) *The only thing I liked is the time of the lecture was more flexible so the doctor can relatively take his time and so give as his knowledge and since it was classroom meeting, so the sound of the doctor was good and audible.*
- 5) *It's easy and more time efficient to study theoretical subjects at home but then apply them later in hospital or clinical settings.*

Analysis of the Second Question of the Semi Structured Questionnaire

The second question of the semi-structured questionnaire explored the challenges and dislikes students faced with the e-learning platform.

Table (2) Students' Perspectives on the disadvantages of E-Learning Platforms

No.	Aspect of E-Learning Platform	Number of Mentions	Percentage (%)
1	Lack of Real-Time Interaction Students express concerns over the absence of live discussions,	4	40%
2	Difficulty Engaging with Teachers and Classmates Many find it harder to engage with peers and instructors	3	30%
3	Limited Clarification Opportunities The absence of real-time discussions makes it difficult to clarify complex topics	3	30%
4	Passive Learning Experience Students dislike that lectures often lack active engagement,	2	20%
5	Theoretical Focus Some lessons are too theoretical and not applicable to real clinical situations,	3	30%
6	Engagement Issues The learning platform relies heavily on reading and quizzes, lacking interactive discussions	3	30%
7	Internet Connectivity Problems Technical issues, particularly related to internet connectivity, disrupt lectures and exams,	3	30%
8	Technical Issues	4	40%

	Slow loading times and technical problems hinder the ability to complete assignments		
9	Limited Direct Communication The lack of immediate communication with instructors hinders clarification and support when needed.	2	20%
10	Overall Frustration with Technical Glitches Students frequently mention technical challenges as a significant drawback of the e-learning experience.	3	30%

The table indicated the challenges that students faced when using the English e-learning platform. Forty percent of the students also lamented that they could not interact in real-time, and that they were not comfortable with the lack of live discussions, as it made them feel isolated, and demotivated. Additionally, 30% struggled to communicate with teachers and classmates, as without a face-to-face communication, cooperative learning and beneficial academic discussion could not be achieved. Also, one-third of the students reported a lack of clarification, with lack of real-time conversations making it hard to clarify complicated issues on the spot. The second issue that was mentioned by 20% was the passive learning experience since students felt lack of engagement during the lessons which could not be any interactive, e.g. visual aids, live feedback. In terms of content 30% was dedicated to theoretical orientation of some lessons that they considered not related to the real world medical practice. Furthermore, a third of them said that they were not engaged, and the platform was not as dynamic and interactive as it could be to take part in the learning process, as it depends on reading materials and quizzes. In addition, 30 percent of students also indicated that they had internet connection problems, whereby, the connections were interrupted during lectures, exams and quizzes and following up of the course work was difficult.



In addition, a quarter of the students faced technical problems, such as sluggish loading and crashes on the platform, which limited their capacity to accomplish assignments or attend classes without challenges. A smaller proportion of students (20) also noted that there was a lack of direct contact with instructors, and it was difficult to get immediate clarification and help. Finally, 30% were generally unhappy with technical glitches because frequent system failures and disruptions were a source of outrageous pressure and frustration during their studies. Below is an overview of student responses related to the disadvantages of the e-learning platform.

- 1) *The lack of real-time interaction, which can lead to feelings of isolation and reduced motivation.*
- 2) *It is harder to engage with teachers and classmates.*
- 3) *Absence of real-time discussions with instructors makes it harder to clarify complex topics. Technical issues and lack of practical application of clinical scenarios.*
- 4) *I didn't like that there was no active learning and I couldn't see the doctor while explaining the lecture so you might feel drowsy sometimes listening only to voice without any active interactions by hand or facial expressions.*
- 5) *I find that some lessons are too theoretical and not directly applicable to real clinical situations. The lack of live interaction with patients and doctors, and limited opportunities for practicing medical conversations can make learning less effective.*

Results and discussion

The findings of the semi-structured questionnaire revealed that the e-learning platform was of great benefit in terms of flexibility and access; but technical and interactive weaknesses were a major issue that had to be dealt with in order to achieve maximum benefit in medical education. The students identified a number of benefits of e-learning at the time they were using the e-learning platform which was in line with the results of numerous studies. Sixty percent of the respondents valued the flexibility in accessing learning resources, which enabled them to study at their own pace and learn complex subjects. This was in line with TechTarget (2025), which emphasized flexibility and cost-efficiency as the main benefits of e-learning, which enabled students to read materials at any time and saved them money on commuting. Equally, 30 percent enjoyed the convenience of having the resources such as lecture notes, quizzes, and exercises at their fingertips to study at their convenience; Karimian and Zolfakhari (2024) noted this and discovered that virtual education through self-directed project-based approaches was more popular among students. Moreover, 20 percent of students liked such interactive features as quizzes and videos, which resonated with Kim (2024), who emphasized the importance of multimedia materials, including clinical videos and audio clips, in learning complicated topics. Moreover, 20% of students cited efficiency of time as an advantage, as did PMC (2023), which communicated that e-learning provided flexibility of location and convenience of access to study resources. The findings of the second question of the semi-structured questionnaire showed that even though students liked the flexibility and easy access to learning materials provided by the English e-learning platform, there were critical challenges that limited its overall effectiveness. Although it has merits, students also recorded significant demerits of e-learning. The most frequent problem, reported by 40% of the



respondents, was a lack of real-time interaction, which conformed to PMC (2023), which reported decreased face-to-face interaction as a problem that influenced communication skills and engagement. Similarly, 30% noted that they had problems with interacting with teachers and classmates because of a lack of collaboration opportunities, which was repeated by Talent Garden (2023), which highlighted the problems of self-discipline and passive learning as disadvantages. Another major problem to 40 percent of students was technical problems such as slow loading of platforms and crashes. This was in line with other works by Kaltura (2023) which emphasized the importance of having sound infrastructure to counter any interruptions during e-learning sessions. In addition, 30% experienced issues with internet connection, which is aligned with the study conducted by PMC (2022), which also cited technical glitches as one of the barriers to successful learning. Consequently, e-learning systems offered a number of benefits such as flexibility and accessibility, which allowed students to learn at their own pace and access materials effectively. The interactive features such as quizzes and videos enhanced the level of engagement, and studying the theoretical material at home saved time and provided the opportunity to concentrate more deeply on the theory and practice. However, there were some challenges, which included the absence of real-time communication, the inability to interact with instructors, the inability to clarify certain issues, and technical issues, such as slow loading, and the inability to connect to the Internet. Such difficulties resulted in isolation, lack of cooperation, and disturbed learning. In the eyes of the researcher, e-learning turned out to be an essential resource to students, offering a new solution in a difficult period, like the pandemic. Although useful, significant barriers such as lack of face-to-face communication with peers and instructors emerged. Students encountered unique challenges in clinical lessons, which were the most

important in terms of skills acquisition due to the practical experience and direct interaction with a patient. These difficulties were further aggravated by limited chances of active learning in the virtual classrooms. Consequently, students tended to lose track of course content or find other ways of filling these gaps.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the perceptions and experiences of medical students on English e-learning systems in the College of Medicine and the College of Pharmacy, Al-Nahrain University, Iraq. The results were that students liked the flexibility and convenience that e-learning provided and was able to manage their studies better. However, significant obstacles were identified, such as frequent problems with internet connections, power outages, and a sense of not interacting with classmates and teachers. These obstacles highlighted the importance of better technical infrastructure and more interactive features to maximize the e-learning experience. Moreover, the paper has highlighted the significance of the combination of e-learning with the use of traditional face-to-face in order to overcome the drawbacks of complete online learning.



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