Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Hiwa Weisi[1], Ghadeh Kakae [2], Nouroddin Yousofi[3]

[1]Associate Professor of Applied linguistics, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. hiwaweisi@gmail.com
[2]Ph.D. Candidate of Applied Linguistics, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. ghadakakie80@gmail.com
[3]Associate Professor of Applied linguistics, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. nyousofi@yahoo.com

Keywords:
Online Education, Kurdistan Region, EFL Learner's Perceptions, Iraq, Technology, Covid-19

Abstract

Covid-19 significantly threatened the global education system and caused school and university authorities to seek an alternative for continuing education during the pandemic. This study investigated the perceptions of English university students regarding online language education and the factors causing these learners to have positive or negative attitudes toward online instruction in the Kurdistan Region (KR) of Iraq. To achieve these goals, a questionnaire was distributed among 120 university EFL learners to probe their attitudes toward online learning. A series of semi-structured interviews were performed to investigate factors shaping participants' perceptions of English online teaching. Results showed that Kurdistan University EFL students had negative attitudes to online classes, as they believed that online education could not enhance their English language performance. Factors such as low level of engagement, teacher bias, technical problems, and teacher or/and student lack of digital literacy propelled learners to have negative attitudes toward English online instruction in KR. Contrastively, participants found online education pleasant since it saved time, helped them join classes anywhere, and encouraged them to meet their missing friends during the pandemic. This investigation provides some pedagogical implications for improving the quality of online teaching in EFL contexts.

*Corresponding Author: Hiwa Weisi
Associate Professor of Applied linguistics, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

Email: hiwaweisi@gmail.com

18

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Introduction

Covid-19 disease dramatically affected education and closed nearly all educational centers across the globe (Shereen et al., 2020). The authorities sought the best alternative to proceed with the process of teaching and learning during the pandemic. The pandemic contributed to the digitization of education (Boca, 2021) and shifted it from a face-to-face to an online approach (Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021). Online teaching is sometimes viewed as a revolution in education (Boca, 2021; Regmi & Jones, 2020), although it lowers collaboration between learners and instructors considerably (Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021).

In online education, learners acquire knowledge through the use of technological devices over the internet (Mathew & Iloanya, 2016; Regmi & Jones, 2020). Online instruction is divided into two categories: (a) asynchronous and (b) synchronous. In the asynchronous approach, students engage in the learning process anytime and anywhere through the use of technological tools such as email and discussion forums (Hrastinski, 2008; Mathew & Iloanya, 2016). Synchronous learning motivates teachers and learners to interact and make live video conferencing in real time (Hrastinski, 2008; Mathew & Iloanya, 2016).

For the sake of COVID-19, all around the world, most offices administrates and institutes suddenly (for fear of the spread of disease) were blocked down, and those institutes responsible for teaching and instruction, including schools and universities, were no exception in this regard and all of them were closed too. Thus, the urge not to block down the process of education itself made them continue the instruction in some other way. Though many studies have been done on online teaching and education to the best knowledge of the researchers, there is a dearth of research with regard to Emergency Remote Teaching (Henceforth, ERT). Research shows that students find it difficult to adapt to the ERT environment during the pandemic and experience pressure, anxiety, and stress (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Adnan & Anwar, 2021; Muflih et al., 2021; Sarwari et al., 2021; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021). These investigations indicate that factors such as technical problems, Internet low speed, and lack of appropriate technological devices propel the majority of students to prefer face-to-face education (Alqudah et al., 2021), particularly in disadvantaged countries such as Bangladesh (Ramij & Sultana, 2020), Afghanistan (Hashemi, 2021; Sarwari et al., 2021) Pakistan (Rafiq et al., 2020) and Ghana (Adarkwah, 2021). However, studies show that students in rich nations such as Saudi Arabia (Rajab et al., 2020), the United Arab Emirates (Hussein et al., 2020), and Jordan (Muflih et al., 2021) took a positive attitude toward online education. Generally, the relevant literature reports that students appreciate online learning if governments enhance the infrastructure of online education (Rafiq et al., 2020).

Online education has already found its way to post-COVID-19 pandemic education (Boca, 2021). This is because it encourages students to access higher education

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

19

in overseas universities (Boca, 2021). It also allows school students to participate in courses in online classes, particularly from poor urban and rural areas (Adarkwah, 2021). Moreover, online education motivates students to personalize their learning (Boca, 2021) and develop their levels of self-regulatory, self-efficacy, and socio-emotional competencies (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021).

Studies in English language teaching investigate the attitudes or experiences of students toward English online education (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Alodwan, 2021; Al-Shlowiy et al., 2021; Behforouz et al., 2021; Hussein et al., 2020; Sevy-Biloon, 2021). Some studies show that English learners have positive perceptions of the online approach, as they believe that online education is convenient and saves them time (Behforouz et al., 2021; Hussein et al., 2020). On the other hand, some investigations report that English students usually formulate negative attitudes toward online education as it does not develop their language skills (Adarkwah, 2021; Alodwan, 2021; Al-Shlowiy et al., 2021; Hussein et al., 2020).

The local government of the Kurdistan Region (KR) in Iraq implemented quarantine measures to reduce the spread of this virus in the community. The government encouraged citizens to join the stay-at-home campaign and practice social distancing and sanitation protocols. Concerning education, the KR government closed all educational institutions, converted the traditional mode of education to the online format, and forced students to participate in online classes while remaining safe at home. English learners were also obliged to take part in courses presented in the web-based classes. This study investigates the perceptions of KR English students toward online education and probes the factors causing these students to cast a positive or negative attitude toward online education in Kurdistan. The findings may provide valuable information concerning the use of technology along with its strong and weak points in the KR English language context. The findings could also motivate stakeholders to be aware of the merits or demerits of online education in this context. The results may shed light on the factors facilitating or hindering the conduction of online classes in KR English language centres. The following questions lead this investigation:

What are the attitudes of university EFL students toward online education in KR of Iraq?

What factors make university EFL learners formulate negative or positive perceptions toward online education in KR of Iraq?

Literature review

Online Learning

Online learning is an interactive process where teachers and students communicate through the use of electronic media (Castro & Tumibay, 2019). The media function as

devices to complete the communicative processes (Sass, 2020). In language education, an educational platform is an environment that enables students to determine their learning objective by the use of resources of their own choice, including linguistic and semiotic means of making meaning, different life and work experiences, as well as their personal history (Potts, 2018).

Research shows that online education provides students with the opportunity to learn based on their pace (Karattuthodi et al., 2020; Muflih et al., 2021; Sarwari, 2020). Online learning is self-directed and thus improves students' agency (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Shereen et al., 2020; Zapata-Cuervo, 2021). In other words, online education helps students manage or monitor their learning process,d thereby improving their autonomy in learning the materials presented in the virtual environment (Shereen et al., 2020). The relevant literature further documents that online learning makes students become student-centred in the learning process (Al-Shlowiy et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2020; Sevy-Biloon, 2021). That is, the online environment helps students manage and evaluate their learning process, a behaviour highly appreciated in modern education (Hodges et al., 2020; Sevy-Biloon, 2021).

Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic reported the advantages of online education in academic centres and schools. These investigations show that online learning solves geographical problems (Al-Shlowiy et al., 2021; Behforouz et al., 2021) and effectively saves the educational costs and time of the students (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Alqudah et al., 2021; Hussein et al., 2020; Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Thanh Luy, 2022). Online education can also develop the computer skills of students and make them confident in web-based classes (Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Ramij & Sultana, 2020). Moreover, it provides the opportunity for the learners to make considerable interactions with their teachers and peers in the virtual environment (Fedynich, 2013; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021).

Research also reports on the challenges students experience in online education. Online access is the number one problem for online education (Fedynich, 2013; Ramij & Sultana, 2020). Lack or low level of computer literacy demotivates students from participating in online classes (Fedynich, 2013; Maqableh & Alia, 2021). The relevant studies emphasize that online students must enhance their computer literacy to function appropriately with the technology in online classes (Alodwan, 2021; Alqudah et al., 2021; Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Thanh Luy, 2022). Designing and presenting materials that could meet the needs of the students is still another challenging issue in online classes (Fedynich, 2013; Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Ramij & Sultana, 2020). Lack of face-to-face time is another challenging problem in the current online classes (Al-Shlowiy et al., 2021; Behforouz et al., 2021; Maqableh & Alia, 2021). This issue could be very annoying for students with tactile/kinesthetic learning styles, as these students learn the materials well when they touch, move, and do to facilitate their learning experience (Monk; as cited in Fedynich, 2013). The lack of physical presence is also challenging since students may

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

21

not receive effective feedback on their performance in the class (Hodges et al., 2020). Teachers do not have face-to-face access to the students to understand their emotions and teach based on their emotional needs (Hodges et al., 2020). Al-Shlowiy et al. (2021) further argued that a fully online environment could disrupt the educational quality of online classes. Stress or anxiety is still another downside in online classes (Zapata-Cuervo et al. 2021). For example, Zapata-Cuervo et al. (2021) used three psychological constructs of self-efficacy, motivation, and anxiety to predict the engagement of students in online learning in three different countries (USA, South Korea, and Colombia). The study showed that all students were capable of taking online courses, but American students were more anxious about online learning compared to Korean and Colombian students. Anxiety caused American students to take a negative attitude toward online classes.

Emergency Remote Teaching

Regarding ERT, Bond et al. (2021) maintain that: "The special feature of emergency remote education is that it is an unplanned practice, with no option than to use any kind of offline and/or online resources that may be at hand" (P.1). Based on this definition we can assert that the difference between online education and ERT lies in the availability of materials and early preparation and preplanned of them in the case of online education while we don't have such preplanned procedure in ERT for the sake of its emergency.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM is an information system theory that explains how the users accept and use a specific technology (Davis, 1989). TAM is a framework that allows researchers to understand the cognitive processes within users and how they respond to adopting or integrating a new piece of technology within their lives (Davis, 1989). TAM explains that individuals' performance of a specified behavior is determined by their behavioral intention to perform a certain task (Davis, 1989). PERUSE and PEOU are two specific variables that are the fundamental determinants of user acceptance (Davis, 1989). PEOU refers to the expectations of the potential users associated with the specific technology, considering that such an adoption is easy and not complicated (Davis, 1989). Similar to PERUSE, PEOU is a measure of the TAM and has significant impacts on technology acceptance among technology users. Research shows that the ease in the use of technology increases the PEOU. For example, Pantano (2012) indicated that PEOU influenced the perceptions of users since the new technology was seen as hassle-free. Davis (1989) argues that the existing, finite, and available resources could have positive or negative impacts on the use of new pieces of technology in an organization.

22

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq
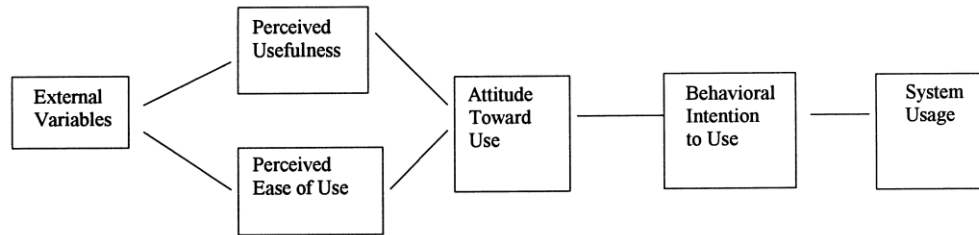
Figure 1: TAM Model (Retried from Lederer et al., 2000)

Based on this model, PERUSE and PEOU predict the technology usage by the users. These two variables show users' beliefs can contribute to their technology acceptance. PERUSE is the degree to which a user is confident that a particular information system (e.g., an educational platform) can increase his or her performance. PEOU is the degree to which a user believes that the application of a specific technology system is convenient and free of effort (Davis, 1989). Two further independent variables in TAM are attitude towards use and behavioral intention to use. Attitude towards use refers to the user's evaluation of the desirability of employing a particular piece of technology. Behavioral intention to use is a measure of the likelihood a person will employ the application (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Actual usage is the dependent variable in TAM. This construct "has typically been a self-reported measure of time or frequency of employing the application (Lederer et al., 2000).

University Students' Perception Toward Online Education

Research has extensively evaluated online education during COVID-19 disease from the perspectives of university students (Karattuthodi et al., 2020; Rafiq et al., 2020; Rajab et al., 2020). For example, Karattuthodi et al. (2020) assessed the quality of online education and its acceptance among Indian pharmacy students during the pandemic. Results showed that the participants did not have a promising perception of online education, as it was distracting, and the students suffered from a lack of appropriate technological devices and poor Internet connection. Similar problems were also reported in Adnan and Anwar (2020), where university students faced challenges such as teacher/student isolation, lack of Wi-Fi facilities, and no effective training on how to use tools. Ramij and Sultana (2020) also indicated that the lack of technological infrastructure, the high cost of the Internet, the financial crisis of the family, and students' mental pressure were the main challenges for online education in Bangladeshi universities. Sarwari et al. (2021) also found that Afghani college students' had negative perceptions of online education merely due to technical problems and the high cost of the Internet in Afghanistan.

Muflih et al. (2021) report that students might accept online education if the required facilities or infrastructures are at their disposal. This study explored the attitudes and preparedness of medical students toward online classes in Jordan. These scholars attributed the students' positive attitude to the provision of technological resources for

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception
Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

23

online learning and good Internet access. Muflih et al. argued that factors such as easy collaboration among the students, professors' quick answers to questions of students, and the improvement of students' technology literacy could affect the students' acceptance of online learning. Similar findings were also reported by Rajab et al. (2020), in which Saudi university students had positive attitudes toward online education as they enjoyed high-speed Internet and high-quality devices for online learning.

Generally, the reviewed studies show that students find online education somehow helpful, but the major problem is with the technical issues. Almost all of these studies call for governments and authorities to invest in the basic infrastructures necessary for online education. It is also implied that lack of technology literacy is a significant missing ring in online education (Muflih et al., 2021). Lack of training on how to work with devices is also a main hindrance to the acceptance of online learning approaches in educational centers. For example, Maqableh and Alia (2021) showed that although Jordanian students attested to the effectiveness and safety of online education, they were not ready for online education due to a lack of knowledge of how to work properly with technological devices. Therefore, the students suffered from psychological issues such as stress and anxiety that distracted them from the learning process. Such a result was also evident in Rajab et al. (2020), where Saudi university students suffered from anxiety and stress merely due to a lack of computer literacy, not technological devices or technical challenges. Lack of technology literacy and technical problems could create stress and anxiety among online learners (Flores et al., 2021; Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Sarwari et al., 2021). In a study in Romania, Boca reported that many students found online classes beneficial but stressful, which was mainly caused by the student's lack of ability to function appropriately with the educational platforms.

English Students' Attitudes to Online Education

English language researchers have also probed the attitudes of students to online education during Covid-19 disease. For example, Hussein et al. (2020) qualitatively investigated the perceptions of Emirates University EFL learners toward online education. The participants were requested to write semi-guided essays during the week preceding the final exams of the second semester. Researchers analyzed a sample of these essays to find the factors formulating the perception of students toward English online teaching. Results showed that students considered online education cost-and, time-effective, safe, and convenient. However, they took a negative attitude since it was distracting and imposed heavy workload on the students. Alodwan (2021) also reported that online education was generally effective for Jordanian EFL students since it saved money, time, and efforts. English online learning motivated Jordanian EFL students to control their learning process by listening to the recorded lecturers. However, online learning decreased interaction between students and teachers, make students cheat on exams, and faced them with technical challenges.

24

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Sevy-Biloon (2021) reported that Ecuadorian EFL believed that online learning was distracting and did not encourage them to interact with teachers or students. The study, however, showed that students from wealthy families preferred online learning since they claimed that it was comfortable and easier to concentrate on the main points. They also stated that they improved their English by listening repeatedly to the recorded sessions. Al-Shlowiy et al. (2021) also investigated the perceptions of teachers and university students in Saudi Arabia's EFL context. Results showed that both students and teachers claimed that online teaching forces students to experience negative emotional consequences such as missing friends and regular teaching. The teacher also understood the concerns of the students in that the language students might lose marks, fail and get lower graduate point averages. However, the students did not understand the teachers' further concerns. For example, teachers claimed that students were required to be technologically literate and know how to improve their functions appropriately. The teachers were also concerned about the cheating students could make in the virtual environment, a point the students quite completely denied. Behforouz et al. (2021) explored the perception and motivation of Omani EFL learners about online education over the pandemic. Students found online learning interesting and helpful since they believed that this approach improved the skills and knowledge of these students in the English language. The students also reported that online education made them confident to interact with their teachers and classmates.

The findings of these limited studies indicate that EFL learners generally take positive perceptions since many of them found it helpful for the learning process during lockdown (Al- Behforouz et al., 2021; Sevy-Biloon, 2021; Shlowiy, 2021). These studies also show that participants find online classes useful since it is convenient and saves their time and money (Alodwan, 2021; Shlowiy, 2021). The big problem is the logistic or technical problems, which largely annoy the EFL students (Alodwan, 2021; Behforouz et al., 2021; Sevy-Biloon, 2021; Shlowiy, 2021). The challenges such as the low speed or the disconnection of the Internet, lack of technological devices due to a family budget crisis, insufficient technology literacy, and the lack of training to function appropriately are all the disadvantaged aspects of online teaching that make English online classes boring.

Two investigations (i.e., Alodwan, 2021; Hussein et al., 2020) qualitatively probe factors that cause students to form positive or negative perceptions toward English online classes. The other investigations (i.e., Behforouz et al., 2021; Sevy-Biloon, 2021; Shlowiy, 2021) took a quantitative design to describe the perceptions of the participants toward English online education. This is in contrast with the current theme in applied linguistics and SLA research that appreciates verbal data generated by the use of a mixed-method approach (Winke et al., 2013). In other words, the use of a mixed method approach could allow the researchers in English language studies to capture a comprehensive picture concerning the phenomenon under investigation (Hashemi &

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

25

Babaii, 2013; Winke et al., 2013). Therefore, the current study follows a mixed method approach to investigate factors directing EFL students to take positive or negative attitudes to the English online education in KR of Iraq during the COVID-19 disease. More specifically, researchers first distributed an online questionnaire among EFL learners to collect quantitative data. In order to supplement the quantitative information, researchers hold a series of online individual interviews to seek factors affecting their perceptions toward online education. These two data sets could enable researchers to gain a comprehensive picture concerning the perceptions and behavior of EFL learners participating in English online classes in KR of Iraq. The findings might add invaluable insights to the relevant literature about EFL students' attitudes toward online education during natural crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

This study used a sequential mixed method approach (Creswell et al., 2003) for data collection and analysis to answer the research questions. To explore participants' perceptions of online education, the researchers used a web-based questionnaire to collect the quantitative data. Then, statistical procedures were used to summarize and analyze the quantitative data. The researcher conducted individual interviews to obtain qualitative information to support the quantitative data. A thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to discover factors directing participants to take a negative/positive perception toward online education.

Participant

The population of this study was English university students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in KR Iraq. At the undergraduate level, participants were majoring in Teaching English, English Literature, Translation, and Linguistics. Their age range was between 18 to 32. As this attitude was considered the case for conducting the research, Researchers employed a convenient sampling procedure to invite students to participate in this study. Researchers shared invitations with students through WhatsApp and Facebook social media. Researchers received 173 responses from the students, informing them they were ready to participate in the study. After checking their background, researchers selected a sample of 143 learners to participate in our investigation. All the selected students were native Kurdish speakers who had never been to English-speaking countries. They claimed that they started learning English in KR.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was adapted from Muflih et al. (2021). It had two main parts. The first section included four items about demographic characteristics, including age, education

degree, gender, and previous online learning experience. The second part included 16 questions about the perceptions of respondents toward online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers digitized questionnaire' items in the Google Form software. This platform permitted us to digitize the questionnaire and share the link with the participants. In order to pilot the questionnaire, it was distributed among 65 students with similar characteristics to the target population. After a short while, we received 57 filled-out questionnaires. We analyzed the responses to 50 questionnaires to estimate the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire. The estimation results amounted to 0.764, which was an appropriate reliability index.

Researchers conducted online semi-structured interviews with 15 participants to probe factors shaping their perceptions of online education. The researchers formulated eight research questions for the interview sessions. These questions were consulted with four researchers to receive their insightful feedback. The questions asked students to talk about the reasons causing them to take a negative or positive orientation toward online classes. All the questions were inferential, motivating interviewees to provide detailed information about their experiences in English online classes. Researchers interrupted the discussion stream wherever necessary and requested the participant to clarify the ambiguous points. In other words, the researcher did her best to interact with the interviewees to elicit further information.

Data Collection Procedure

The link to the piloted questionnaire was distributed among 143 students who had already been qualified as suitable participants for the study. These participants were requested to click the link, complete the questionnaire online and submit their responses. Within two weeks, researchers received 123 individual questionnaires filled out by the participants. Researchers then invited 15 English students to participate in the interviews. These students participated in the quantitative phase of the study and were all native Kurdish speakers. Researchers asked volunteers to answer interview questions. We made web-based contact with the participants via WhatsApp and recorded the conversation with a Call Recorder App called Cube ACR. The interviews were in Kurdish so that participants could express themselves confidently and fluently (Muflih et al., 2021). Cube ACR automatically recorded the conversations for later analysis.

Data analysis

SPSS (version 26) was used to perform the required statistical procedures. Researchers calculated the interval of each point to make the interpretation of each Mean value meaningful and rank the level of participants' attitudes toward online education. More specifically, we calculated the interval length of the Likert by (5 -1 = 4), then divided by 5 as this value was the greatest value of the scale (4 ÷ 5 = 0.8) (Table 1).

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception
Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

27

Table 1

Interval Level of five-point Likert Scale

Level	Scale	Interval length	Lower limit	Upper limit	Interval
Strongly agree	1	0.8	1	1.8	[1 - 1.8)
Agree	2	0.8	1.8	2.6	[1.8 - 2.6)
Neutral	3	0.8	2.6	3.4	[2.6 - 3.4)
Disagree	4	0.8	3.4	4.2	[3.4 - 4.2)
Strongly disagree	5	0.8	4.2	5	[4.2 - 5]

The questionnaire was a 5-point Likert interval scale, and its points were coded as one representing "strongly agree", 2 representing "agree", 3 indicating "no idea", 4 representing "disagree", and 5 representing "strongly disagree". Therefore, the five-point Likert scale is considered as an interval scale. The Mean value is the key in this interval scale. Based on Table 1, the Mean values included in the intervals [1 -1.8) and [1.8 – 2.6) mean that the participants agreed with the statement. However, if the mean amounts are included in the intervals of [3.4 – 4.2) and [4.2-5], it means that participants were against the statements. If the means scores are put in the interval [2.6 – 3.4), it is implied that the participants did not have any idea knows.

The specification of the interval scale was very significant in this research project since it allowed researchers to understand the participants' attitudes.
For data analysis, researchers first transcribe audio podcasts word for word and then translated them into the English language. Regarding a thematic approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to investigate the common and salient themes in the transcriptions. The researchers used this thematic approach for three reasons. First, many scholars (Alobeytha et al., 2018; Muflih et al., 2021) have frequently used it. Second, it is a suitable approach to analyze any study requiring deep interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Third, it is an appropriate method for analyzing data in qualitative research in language education (Alobeytha et al., 2018).

Results

Distribution of Attitudes Toward Online Education

Table 2 shows that many participants agreed that face-to-face language education helps them learn English language efficiently, as it allows them to interact with teachers and classmates.

28

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Table 2

Frequent distribution, Mean, and Standard Deviations of Participants attitudes

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviations
	Frequency (%)						
I prefer face-to-face interaction with my instructors and classmates for more efficient English learning	51(42.5)	44(36.7)	10(8.3)	8(6.8)	7(5.8)	1.97	1.14
I like the on-campus approach since it allows me to communicate well with my teachers and classmates in English.	38(31.7)	58(48.3)	8(6.7)	10(8.3)	6(5)	2.07	1.08
Online English learning leads to increased learning burdens on students.	22(18.3)	53(44.2)	13(10.8)	22(18.3)	10(8.3)	2.54	1.2
My language institute/school provides technical support for online English learning.	9(7.5)	45(37.5)	43(35.8)	19(15.8)	4(3.3)	2.7	9.4

The participants' responses to the item (2) show that the on-campus approach to language teaching motivated Kurdistan EFL students to communicate with their peers and instructors. The low Mean values of items 1 (*M*: 1.97, *SD*: 1.14) and 2 (*M*: 2.07, *SD*: 1.08) confirm that these participants had a negative attitude toward online education since they beliehat online teaching could not enhance their English language proficiency. Moreover, these respondents (62.5%) claimed that online learning was demanding and increased burdens on the students (*M*: 2.54, *SD*: 1.2). The students also believe that very few universities provided technical support for online instruction in Kurdistan EFL context (M: 2.7, SD, 9.4).

Based on Table 3, although the participants (66.5%) claimed that it was easy to join online classes (*M*: 2.46, SD: 1.13), more than half of the respondents (52.5%) did not find these classes as helpful for improving English language (*M*: 3.22, *SD*: 1.17). Whereas 42.5% of participants experienced a high-quality learning experience, over half of the other students did not have such an idea, so they did not consider online classes as appropriate environments for teamwork (60%).

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception
Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

29

Table 3

Frequent distribution, Mean, and Standard Deviations of Participants attitudes							
Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviations
	Frequency (%)						
I can easily access the Internet to log in to online English classrooms.	21(17.5)	58(48.3)	13(10.8)	19(15.8)	9(7.5)	2.46	1.13
My English language can be improved more in online courses than in the classroom.	16(13.3)	29(24.2)	12(10)	39(32.5)	24(20)	3.22	1.17
In general, my institute provides a high-quality online learning experience	12(10)	39(32.5)	34(28.3)	26(21.7)	9(7.5)	2.84	1.1
I can easily work within a group in online courses.	16(13.3)	10(12)	24 (20)	23(19.2)	47(40.8)	2.9	1.13

Table 4 shows that over half of the participants (66.4%) agreed they were motivated to ask teachers questions since they provided immediate answers (*M*: 2.44, *SD*: 1.07). They also believe that "Online learning helps students to organize their time efficiently and to their homework and assignments" (item 12). This shows that students generally took a positive attitude toward online language education as it helped them receive feedback from their professors and efficiently use time in performing their assignments (*M*: 2.53, *SD*: 1.15).

30

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Table 1

Frequent distribution, Mean, and Standard Deviations of Participants attitudes

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Frequency (%)						
I can ask my teachers questions and receive a quick response in online courses	17(14.2)	63(52.2)	17(14.2)	19(15.8)	7 (5.8)	2.44	1.07
Online learning helps students to organize their time efficiently and do their homework and assignments.	20(16.7)	55(45.8)	11(9.2)	30(25)	4 (3.3)	2.53	1.13
Online learning helps me achieve my plans.	23(19.2)	35(29.2)	22(18.3)	31(25.8)	9 (7.5)	2.73	1.24
I feel comfortable actively communicating with my teachers and classmates online.	20 (16)	54 (45)	15(12.5)	24 (20)	7 (5.8)	2.53	1.15

Table 4 shows that participants did not consider online learning an effective place to achieve their expected goals (*M*: 2.73, *SD*: 1.24). However, over half of the respondents (61%) found it an easy and comfortable way to communication with teachers and their classmates (*M*: 2.53, *SD*: 1.15).

Table 5 indicates that Kurdistan University EFL students did not consider online classes as good places for discussion for solving a problem (*M*: 3.08, *SD*:1.26). They also stated that online courses could not help them learn the presented materials well.

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

31

Table 5

Frequent distribution, Mean, and Standard Deviations of Participants attitudes

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviations
	Frequency (%)						
Online learning helps in brainstorming in a better way in contrast to the face-to-face approach.	15(12.5)	29(24.4)	25(20.8)	34(28.3)	17 (14.2)	3.08	1.26
I feel that taking my courses online helps me study and master them.	19(15.8)	49(40.8)	15(12.5)	27(22.5)	10 (8.3)	2.67	1.2
I would prefer online learning to continue being used and to become the new norm	16(13.3)	33(27.5)	16(13.3)	28(23.3)	27 (22.5)	3.14	1.39
I can enrol in all of my online courses without facing any obstacles.	22(18.3)	39(32.5)	23(19.2)	28(23.3)	8 (6.7)	2.68	1.2

Table 5 also shows that participants did not know how to consider virtual learning as a new and alternative approach to learning the English language (*M:* 3.14, *SD*: 1.39). The table also shows a moderate perception of the registration of online courses (*M*: 2.68, *SD*: 1.2), and around half of the participants agreed that they could enroll in online courses without serious obstacles (50.5%).

Generally, the quantitative data analysis shows that Kurdistan University EFL students negatively viewed online education since they believed that the online approach could not enhance their English language ability. In other words, they did not view online teaching as an efficient alternative for following their English language goals in the future. However, they indicated a positive perception of online education as it made them confident to communicate with their professors and classmates during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis of interview data showed that factors such as *Low level of engagement, Teacher bias, Technical problems, and Teachers' and students' Lack of digital literacy* made Kurdistan University EFL learners have negative attitudes toward

32

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

online education during the pandemic. It should be mentioned that an open coding for the themes obtained was utilized.

Low Level of Engagement

Previous studies show that online education can potentially increase students' engagement in the virtual environment (Fedynich, 2013; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021). However, some studies find it challenging to encourage students to be active participants in online classes (Alqudah et al., 2021; Al-Shlowiy et al., 2021; Behforouz et al., 2021; Thanh Luy, 2022). On the other hand, research shows that students tend to interact and engage in learning if they observe the teacher's expressions or body language in online classes (Kebritchi et al., 2017). In our study, the participants claimed that they did not prefer to engage in the learning process as they could not see and thus interact with their teachers and classmates:

We could not see their [teachers] face. I think this course presentation mode was ineffective since we could not see their faces, expressions, and body language. If the education flowed in audio and visual format, it could be high quality. (Student 5)

Applying new teaching techniques could significantly improve students' engagement in the learning process (Alodwan, 2021; Zapata-Cuervo et al., 2021). The analysis of the interview data showed that teachers' lack of ability to create and use new adaptive techniques made students not concentrate on the courses and, thereby, become disengaged with the learning process:

The professors did not use any specific technique to improve the quality of the education. They just wanted to hold classes. That's all! They just wanted to present the course and expect students to listen to the lecture. (Student 1)

Teaching online is not good! Because some teachers don't present lessons well for the students. They usually summarize the course and present it online. That's all. (Student 6)

Teacher Bias

Teachers must avoid bias in the classroom and make efforts to support the learning process (Fedynich, 2013; Karattuthodi et al., 2020). However, our findings show that online education can potentially direct teachers to become biased toward some students, as they cannot make good judgments concerning their students' performances. In our research, some interviewed students believed that teachers could not judge their performances fairly. To these volunteers, most students cheated and represented themselves as good students. In contrast, most hardworking students were silent, not confident in expressing their ideas, or might not have good communication devices in online classes. This phenomenon (i.e., teacher bias) caused these learners to take a negative attitude toward online education:

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

33

In face-to-face education, teachers can see the students' reactions in classes and notice whether the students have understood the materials. (Student 4)

Technical Problems

Research shows that technical issues (e.g., Internet disconnection) have a negative effect on English students' perception of online education during the Covid-19 pandemic (Boca, 2021; Flores et al., 2021; Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Sarwari et al., 2021).

The analysis of interview data showed that Kurdistan University EFL learners challenged many technical problems in online courses. These problems were frequent disconnection of the Internet and electricity, low Internet speed, lack of good technological devices, etc. These challenges annoyed the students and made them formulate a negative perception of online learning. The participants claimed that electricity disconnection made teachers hold classes at other times, usually in the evening – a moment students were annoyed considerably:

"The university set the exact time for teaching, but the professors had to hold classrooms at other times because of electricity disconnection. This is important because I was frequently bothered with online classes. After all, sometimes we were obliged to participate in online classes even at night" (Student 4).

Participants said this problem made the teachers creative and used different techniques to fulfil their responsibilities. For example, most of these teachers created video clips explaining the main points of the cancelled courses. Teachers then shared the clips with students via social platforms:

Our university used Google Classroom. However, the problem was with the power disconnection, and therefore, the professors produced [short] videos about the lessons and sent them to the groups in Telegram or WhatsApp. (Student 7)

Teachers also created electronic materials such as PowerPoint to support the weak points of online education. They helped students not lag behind their learning process just because of internet or electricity disconnection:

Since the Internet became unavailable, lecturers usually provided students with supplementary materials such as pamphlets, electronic books, podcasts or relevant slides in social media to support the weak points of their online education. (Student 5)

The lack of high-quality technological tools was another technical problem, causing students to experience a disadvantageous online learning process. Many students claimed they could not purchase good-quality laptops, phones, mic, earphones, etc., to communicate well in online classes.

34

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Some students could not buy the good quality devices. I also did not have a powerful laptop or any other high-quality devices. I could not buy a good mic or high-quality earphones. (Student 1)

Some participants stated that even the teachers did not tend to supply good quality devices, and therefore, the students could not receive high-quality voices or videos from their teachers.

The professors did not pay attention to buying good quality devices such as a mic. They did not prefer to buy good and high electronic equipment. (Student 3)

The mic of the professors was not of good quality, and therefore, their voices were terracing. Therefore, it made me demotivated to take part in online classes. (Student 9)

Some students reported that the Internet's low speed and its high demotivated them to participate in online English classes. These participants claimed that the Internet cost and speed caused them to dislike English online education.

The number one challenge is the Internet connection. It was always disconnected. I usually suffered from Internet disconnection in nearly all classes. All the students did not have access to a high-speed internet connection. (Student 6)

Research suggests that governments or policy-makers could develop the infrastructures necessary for online education (Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Ramij & Sultana, 2020). The analysis of interview data indicates that Kurdistan educational authorities did not prefer to seriously work to enhance the quality of online education:

I have to say that professors made efforts to teach in a good way as much as they could. However, the government did nothing, and some problems always existed, such as the problem of logging into the classroom or the Interment disconnections (Student 3).

Low Level of Digital Literacy

The anal interview data analysis showed thatches and learners did not have adequate skills to deal with challenges in online classes or work properly with the platform. The findings show that the low level of lecturers' computer literacy caused students to formulate negative attitudes toward online classes:

I think professors need to improve their skills in how to work properly with Google Classroom. The platform has many options but lecturers cannot use them effectively. (Student 4)

The online class was not really a class. It was difficult to share your idea by typing. Particularly during examinations, we were supposed to type the answers to the essay-type questions. The essay-type questions were challenging since we needed further time for typing, and, this put us under pressure and stress (Student 9).

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception
Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

35

Some teachers' digital literacy was at suso low some of them gained help from the students about how to work with the platform. Some students, hence, recommended teachers receive training on how to use the platform:

The problem was that some professors could not function well with the platform. I think teach Teachers how to work with or make good use of the software in online education. Some professors even sometimes asked the students how to function with different options in the software. (Student 8)

Factors Shaping Positive Attitude

The analysis of interview data indicated that many students had positive attitudes to English online teaching, as they found it a new helpful learning experience that helped them save time and participate in classes anytime and anywhere. They believed online teaching was an appropriate alternative to face-to-face education during natural crises (such as the Covid-19 pandemic) that allowed them to communicate with their peers and professors.

New Learning Experience

Kurdistan EFL university students considered online instruction as a new, helpful learning experience. They believed that online education allowed them to review and use videos recorded in the learning management system to enhance their language skills.

I enjoyed online education since I could review the recorded classes, enjoy these recorded materials, and download them whenever I desired. (Student 2)

We could not learn the content of the lessons very well because the sound quality was not good. However, it helped me learn a lot of vocabulary by reviewing the class videos recorded in the system. (Student 13)

Some students believed that online language learning was interesting since some of their teachers creatively used interesting techniques (such as making video clips) to improve the quality of learning or mitigate the weak points of online language teaching.

Saving Time and Place

Research shows that online education saves participants' time and allows learners to join the class in any situation (Al Shlowiy et al., 2021; Thanh Luy, 2022). Analysis of data showed that Kurdistan University EFL learners took a positive attitude toward online education as online learning saved their time and motivated them to join classes anywhere:

I am interested in online education, provided it can go the right way. I mean there are facilities. This allows me to save time and do my other staff. (Student 6)

36

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Its advantage was that the students could easily participate in the class from anywhere. It also saved me time, and I did not waste time attending university. (Student 11)

Alternative Approach to Natural Crisis

Teachers (Hashemi, 2021; Thanh Luy, 2022) and students (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Muflih et al., 2021; Sarwari et al., 2021) see online approach as an appropriate alternative to physical classes during a natural disaster such as Covid-19 pandemic. This shows that online education can meet the needs of students, providing that teachers receive formal training on how to function appropriately in online classes (Adnan & Anwar, 2021; Thanh Luy, 2022). Our finding, however, shows that Kurdistan EFL university students found online education as beneficial for communication with professors and classmates not learning English language during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Our university used Google Classroom to present online language courses. Really, I feel it was a good means to communicate with the students, especially during Covid-19. It was not so much good for students to learn the English language. (Student 2)

I think online education is good when accessing the teachers and classes is challenging. For example, when we are hit by a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, online education can solve problems and allow students to communicate with their teachers and have fun with their classmates. (Student 4)

It was a good experience for all of us. Honestly, it was difficult to manage online learning, particularly during lockdown, but it helped us continue our connection with the university, professors, and friends. (Student 7)

Only very limited participants claimed that online education could be used as an alternative for teaching English courses during a catastrophe such as the Covid-19 pandemic:

It was a good experience for all of us and added many ways of communication as well. The main advantage [of online learning] was that it helped us participate in classes during the Covid-19 disease and kept the teaching and learning process at that time. (Student 14)

Discussion

The quantitative analysis of the data indicated that Kurdistan EFL students generally had negative perceptions toward online language teaching. This was because they believed that online education could not improve their language ability. In other words, they predict that online education could not motivate them to follow their learning goals in English. This finding is in line with Adarkwah (2021), Ramij and Sultana (2020), and Sarwari et al. (2020) investigations, where Ghanaian, Bangladeshi, and Afghani EFL

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

37

university students, respectively, did not find online education as an efficient environment for improving language proficiency. This result also supports findings in Karattuthodi et al. (2020), Hussein et al. (2020), Maqableh and Alia (2017), Ramij and Sultana (2020), Sevy-Biloon (2021), and Zapata-Cuervo et al. (2021). All these contextualized investigations indicated that online students considered online education not contributing to controlling or managing their learning processes. In contrast, a few studies (e.g., Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Rajab et al., 2020) showed that learners find online courses helpful for learning.

Based on TAM theory (Davis, 1989), the negative attitude of Kurdistan EFL learners toward online education shows that these students did not perceive online education as useful for improving their performances in English language. This is because they believed that some factors, such as *technical problems* (frequent Internet or electricity disconnection, low-quality or lack of good educational platforms) and low levels of *computer literacy* among teachers and students make it challenging for them to benefit from online education. Moreover, they claimed that online education was ineffective in engaging students in the learning language process and considerably fostered *teacher bias*. They claimed that this unfavorable phenomenon caused Kurdistan university English teachers to make unfair judgements concerning students' progress in English language performance. All these factors (i.e., low level of engagement, technical issues, teacher bias, and lack of computer literacy) directed Kurdistan university EFL learners to predict that online English language program is not a useful alternative for teaching and learning English language. Therefore, they generally have a negative perception of courses presented online. Relevant literature reports studies in which English students do not consider online education useful for developing their English language skills, merely due to *technical problems* (AlShlowiy et al., 2021; Alodwan, 2021; Hussein et al., 2020), *low level of digital literacy* (AlShlowiy et al., 2021), *heavy workload* (Hussein et al. (2020), and *lack of concentration* (AlShlowiy et al., 2021). Similarly, studies on non-English students' perceptions toward online courses show that *technical problems* (Adarkwah et al., 2021; Karattuthodi et al., 2020; Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Sarwari et al., 2021), *distraction* (Karattuthodi et al. (2020; Sarwari et al., 2021), and *lack of computer literacy* (Boca, 2021; Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Rafiq et al., 2020) are main factors that cause students to predict that online education is not influential for pursuing their learning objectives at the university level.

However, the perceptions of Kurdistan EFL learners are in contrast with the attitudes of students taking online courses in affluent countries such as Saudi Arabia (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Rajab et al., 2020), United Arab of Emirates (Hussein et al., 2020), and Jordan (Muflih et al., 2021), despite some minor technical problems. One study (i.e., Sevy-Biloon, 2021) also reported that some Ecuadorian EFL students from wealthy families preferred online education since it was not distracting and they could easily concentrate on the points in online courses. It is implied from these or similar

38

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

studies that online education is not essentially disadvantageous in itself, and it is technical or logistical problems that direct students to take negative perceptions toward online instruction (Muflih et al., 2021; Sevy-Biloon, 2021).

Participants also take a positive approach to English online education due to some of its advantages. The qualitative analysis of interview data showed that Kurdistan EFL students found online education a pleasant learning experience that saved their time and enabled them to take part in online courses from anywhere, even at work. This finding was reported in almost all of the reviewed investigations (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Allo, 2020; Alqudah et al., 2021; AlShlowiy et al., 2021; Behforouz al. al., 2021; Boca, 2021; Fidalgo et al., 2020; Hussein et al., 2020; Karattuthodi et al., 2020; Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Muflih et al., 2021; Rafiq et al., 2020; Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Sevy-Biloon, 2021; Thanh Luy, 2022).

Fedynich (2013) argues that online teaching could help students have immediate access to the teachers and their classmates, and thus lower the negative consequences of natural crises on teaching and learning processes (Muflih et al., 2021; Shank & Sitze, 2004). Unlike this suggestion, Kurdistan EFL learners claimed that online classes were sound places for lowering the negative emotional consequences, such as missing classmates during the Covid-19 pandemic, and they rarely claimed that it was an appropriate alternative for mitigating the adverse effects of Covid-19 on education. This finding was also illustrated in Hashemi (2012) and Sarwari et al. (2020), in which Afghani EFL university students claimed that online classes were good places to connect with their missing friends. These limited investigations show that EFL students do not enjoy learning English in online classes probably due to a lack of high-speed Internet, easy access to online classes, or a lack of advanced technological devices (Adarkwah, 2021; Alqudah et al., 2021; Hashemi, 2021; Rafiq et al., 2020; Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Sarwari, et al., 2021). Therefore, the findings of our studies, in line with the contextualized investigations, support the idea that online education could develop the performances of the students if the governments allocate particular budgets to upgrade the required technological infrastructures and improve the quality of facilities at their disposal (Muflih et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The present study investigated the perceptions of Kurdistan university EFL students toward online education in the Kurdistan Region (KR) of Iraq. It also discovered the factors forcing the students to formulate negative or positive attitudes toward online learning in the KR EFL context. Quantitative and qualitative research designs were used to provide answers to the posed research questions. Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) was used to analyze the factors causing participants to take a positive or negative attitude toward online instruction. The results showed that Kurdistan university EFL students generally had negative attitudes toward online classes since they believed

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

39

that this form of education could not be considered as an alternative for pursuing their goals of learning English as a foreign language. The research's qualitative phase showed that low engagement levels, *teacher bias, technical problems, and teacher or/and student lack of digital literacy* propelled learners to formulate a negative attitude about online language teaching. Contrastively, some participants found this form of education advantageous since they discovered it as a pleasant learning experience, saving time and helping them to join classes from anywhere. They also considered online education appropriate for meeting their missing friends during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The results showed that Kurdistan University EFL learners had generally negative attitudes toward online learning and were somehow supportive of the face-to-face approach to teaching-learning. Kurdistan EFL learners did not find online education helpful for improving their language skills. This was mainly because of technical problems such as unstable or slow Internet connection, electricity disconnection, or lack of advanced technological devices. This finding calls for the concerned authorities, including the government, to pay to improve Internet connection quality throughout the Kurdistan Region. They also could free a certain amount of data consumption daily to attend online classes. The government can even identify poor families and provide the students with good-quality devices. The language teaching centers in Kurdistan can also provide teachers with high-quality facilities.

Engagement was also another main factor causing students to have negative perceptions of online English language teaching in KR. The universities of language centers may use appropriate educational platforms, train teachers on how to use effective techniques to engage the students in online classes or hold workshops making teachers aware of the weak or strong points of their online teaching performances. Teachers can consult literature and read other research findings that are similar to his/her context of English language teaching. Still, the authorities in Kurdistan can hold a videoconference with teachers or experts in countries where teachers are experienced in teaching English online.

The participants claimed that teachers usually overlooked the hard-working students and could not make appropriate evaluations concerning their language performances. In other words, they were biased toward some fake-good students. The language centers can arrange trading programs to assess the students' performance and make a fair judgement about their progress in different aspects of skills of English language learning.

Another problem was teachers and students' lack of computer literacy, which caused participants to negatively perceive English language online Education in KR of Iraq. To mitigate this challenge, the authorities could provide the teachers and students with video tutorials on taking online classes and using various educational platform options. The teachers may also participate in training programs on making or presenting electronic materials in online classes.

40

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

References

Adnan, M., & Anwar, K. (2020). Online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: students' perspectives. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology*, *2*(1), 2-8.

Adedoyin, O. B., & Soykan, E. (2020). Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: The challenges and opportunities. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-13.

Adarkwah, M.A. (2021). "I'm not against online teaching, but what about us?" ICT in Ghana post Covid-19. *Education and Information Technologies, 26*, 1665-1685.

Ajzen, I. & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Alodwan, T. (2021). Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspectives of English as foreign language students. *Educational Research and Reviews, 16*(7), 279-288.

Alobeytha F.L., Mohamed A.H., & Rahman, F.A. (2018). The identity of the trafficked child in young adult literature: Patricia McCormick' sold. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling 3(*9), 1-9.

Alfadda, H.A. & Mahdi, H.S. (2021). Measuring students' use of Zoom application in language course based on the technology acceptance model (TAM). *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 50*, 883-900.

Alqudah, I., Barakat, M., Muflih, S.M., & Alqudah, A. (2021). Undergraduates' perceptions and attitudes towards online learning at Jordanian universities during Covid-19. *Interactive Learning Environments*, DOI: 10.1080/10494820.2021.2018617

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

41

Al-Shlowiy, A., Al-Hoorie, A.H. & Alharbi, M. (2021). Discrepancy between language learners and teachers concerns about emergency remote teaching. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 1-11.

Behforouz, B., Al Gaithi, A., & Fekri, N. (2021). Omani EFL learner perceptions and motivation toward online learning. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 18*(4), 1-14.

Boca, G.D. (2021). Factors influencing students' behavior and attitude towards online education during COVID-19. *Sustainability, 13*, 1-21.

Bond1, M., Bedenlier, S. Marín, V. and Händel, M. (2021). Emergency remote teaching in higher education: mapping the frst global online semester. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*. 18(50). doi.org/10.1186/s41239-021-00282-x

Braun V. & Clarke V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, 77-101.

Castro, M.D. & Tumibay, G.M. (2019). A literature review: Efficacy of online learning   courses for higher education institution using meta-analysis. *Education and   Information Technologies, 26* (2), 1367-1385.

Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). An expanded typology for classifying mixed methods research into designs. In A. Tashakkoriy and C. Teddlie, *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, (pp.209-   240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly, 13*(3), 319-340.

Fedynich, V.L. (2013). Teaching beyond the classroom walls: The pros and cons of cyber learning. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies, 13*, 1-7.

Flores, M.A., Barros, A., Veiga Simão, A.M., Pereira, D., Flores, P., Fernandes, E., Costa, L., & Ferreira, P.C. (2021). Portuguese higher education students' adaptation to online teaching and learning in times of the COVID-19 pandemic: personal and contextual factors. *Higher Education*, retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-021-   00748-x

Hashemi, A. (2021). Online teaching experiences in higher education institutions of Afghanistan during the COVID-19 outbreak: Challenges and opportunities. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 8*(1), 1-22.

Hashemi, M. R., Babaii, E. (2013). Mixed methods research: Toward new research designs in applied linguistics. *Modern Language Journal, 97*, 828-852.

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Hodges, C., Moore, S. L., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *Educause Review*. Retrieved from: https://er.educause.edu/articles/

Hrastinski, S. (2008). Asynchronous and synchronous e-learning. *Educause Quarterly*, 4, 51-55.

Hussein, H., Daoud, S., Alrabaiah, H. & Badawi, R. (2020). Exploring undergraduate students' attitudes towards emergency online learning during Covid-19: A case from the UAE. *Children and Youth Services Review, 119*, 1-7.

Karattuthodi, M.S., Chandran, S., Thorakkattil, S.A., Chandrasekhar, D., Poonkuzhi, N.P., Ahmed Ageeli, M.M. & Madathil, H. (2020). Pharmacy student's challenges in virtual learning system during the second Covid-19 wave in southern India. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open 5*, 1-9.

Lederer, A.L., Maupin, D.J., Sena, M.P., & Zhuang, Y. (2000). The technology acceptance model and the World Wide Web. *Decision Support Systems 29*, 269-282.

Maqableh, M. & Alia, M. (2021). Evaluation online learning of undergraduate students under lockdown amidst Covid-19 Pandemic: The online learning experience and students' satisfaction. *Children and Youth Services Review, 128*, 1-11.

Mathew, I. R., & Iloanya, E. J. (2016). Open and distance learning: benefits and challenges of technology usage for online teaching and learning in Africa. *Pan Commonwealth Forum*, *11*(2), 1-11.

Muflih, S., Abuhammad, S., Al-Azzam, S, Alzoubi, K.H., Muflih, M. & Karasneh, R. (2021). Online learning for undergraduate health professional education during Covid-19: Jordanian medical students' attitudes and perceptions. *Heliyon, 7*, 1-9.

Potts, J.A. (2018). Profoundly gifted students' perceptions of virtual classrooms. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 63*(1), 58-80.

Rafiq, F., Hussain, & Abbas, Q. (2020). Analyzing students' attitude towards e-learning: A case study in higher education in Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review, 4*(1), 367-380.

Ramij, M.G., & Sultana, A. (2020). Preparedness of online classes in developing countries amid Covid-19 outbreak: A perspective from Bangladesh. Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3638718

Sarwari, K., Kakar, A.F., Golzar, J., & Miri, M.A. (2022). Distance learning during Covid-19 in Afghanistan: Challenges and opportunities. *E-Learning and Digital Media,* 1-9.

Sass, E. (2020). American educational history: A hypertext timeline. *American Educational History Timeline*. https://www.eds-resources.com/educationhistorytimeline.html

Sevy-Biloon, J. (2021). Virtual or face-to-face classes: Ecuadorian university students' perceptions during the pandemic. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal, 4*(1), 15-24.

Shank, P. & Sitze, A. (2004). *Making sense of online learning*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Shereen, M. A., Khan, S., Kazmi, A., Bashir, N., & Siddique, R. (2020). COVID-19 infection: Origin, transmission, and characteristics of human coronaviruses. *Journal of Advanced Research*, *24*(7), 91–98.

Thanh Luy, D.T. (2022). Remote Teaching amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Vietnam: Primary school EFL teachers' practices and perceptions. *AsiaCALL Online Journal, 3*(1), 1-22.

Winke, P., Sydorenko, T., & Gass, S. (2013). Factors influencing the use of captions by foreign language learners: An eye-tracking study. *The Modern Language Journal,* *97*(1), 254-275.

Zapata-Cuervo, N., Montes-Guerra, M.I., Shin, H.H., Jeong, M. & Cho, M. (2021). Students' psychological perceptions toward online learning engagement and outcomes during the Covid-19 pandemic: A comparative analysis of students in three different countries. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 1-16.

44

Hiwa Weisi, Ghadeh Kakae, Nouroddin Yousofi, Investigating EFL Learners Perception Towards Online Learning: The Case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq