Research Paper

Exploring Iraqi EFL Learners' Perceptions of Online Learning

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Abstract

Online learning has enabled students from different geographical areas to engage with academic institutions and other students online and to learn at their own pace while working toward a degree or certificate. Therefore, checking whether online learning meets students` educational expectations is important. The main aim of this descriptive study is to examine the perceptions of EFL (English as a foreign language) students toward online classes in Iraq. In so doing, it focuses on the views of Southern Iraqi students because their conservative environment has limited their access to online learning until recently. The researchers used an adapted questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to investigate EFL learners` perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of online learning and to determine their challenges in online learning. The findings of this study could motivate EFL practitioners to understand the factors that facilitate or impede conducting online courses in the South of Iraq. Also, it can add an insightful understanding of the existing literature on the application of technology and the use of online classes among Southern Iraqi students learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords:
Drawbacks, Iraqi EFL learners, Online Learning, Perceptions, Strengths.

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Introduction

A local pneumonia outbreak was discovered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The resultant epidemic named COVID-19 has made the teaching and learning processes mainly online. By forcing all institutions to switch to online platforms, the epidemic has caused the physical shutdown of schools worldwide. As a result, online learning could have played a more influential role in improving students' learning (Ellis & Bliuc, 2019).

Online learning uses the Internet and other essential technologies to create educational resources, deliver teaching, and manage a program (Fry, 2001). Rob (2016) claims that online learning, mostly used in higher education, was introduced in the 1990s with the creation of the Internet and distance learning. Online learning (also called e-learning) gives those engaged in the teaching process an efficient way to present lessons easily and effectively to students. Online learning requires several tools, such as videos, PDFs, and podcasts, and teachers can use all these tools as part of their lesson plans. Teachers can become more efficient educators by extending the lesson plan beyond traditional textbooks to include online resources.

As far as learning processes are concerned, online learning has empowered students to take control of their learning process, feel motivated to pursue their educational goals, and get ready for their future careers. Technology has inspired students to become problem-solvers, critical thinkers, collaborators, and creators. Furthermore, technology can help students develop lifelong learning ambitions (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). As for the teaching process, online learning can make it easier for language teachers to develop new teaching models and create blended learning environments using the real-time and longitudinal data they get from their students. In this way, teachers can facilitate personalizing student learning (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). Given that, material and curriculum developers are advised to consider students` technological needs (Rob, 2016). In so doing, they can take advantage of ideas like digital curriculum requiring features of security, availability, and convenience (Rob, 2016).

Online learning is especially important for students as it enables them from different geographical areas to engage with an academic institution and other students online and learn at their own pace while working towards a degree or certificate (Halili, 2009). Therefore, it is important to check whether online learning meets students` educational expectations (Kauffman, 2015). Some studies have tackled the opinions of learners about online learning and reported its` obstacles (e.g., Halili, 2009; Hasan, 2007 & Abdul, 2003; Zakharia, 2020), but to the researchers` best knowledge, no study has offered a comprehensive account of the strong and weak points of online learning based on the views of Iraqi EFL learners. Therefore, this study aims at filling this gap in the literature. In so doing, it focuses on the views of southern Iraqi students because this type of learning is new to them; their conservative environment limited their access to online learning until recently. It also investigated their views on the challenges of online learning. The findings of this investigation could motivate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) practitioners to understand the factors that facilitate or impede conducting online lessons in South Iraq. It can also fill in the gap in previous work and, in turn, add an insightful understanding of the existing literature on the application of technology and online classes among Iraqi southern students learning English as a foreign language. In sum, the study is guided by the following questions;

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What are the benefits and drawbacks of online learning from the perspective of Southern Iraqi EFL learners?

What are the main challenges of online learning for Southern Iraqi EFL learners?

Literature review

Numerous studies on online learning have been undertaken all around the world. Prior to the COVID-19 epidemic, some research claimed that online learning policies had generated new learning possibilities and advantages, as seen by students (Kongchan, 2012; Manowong, 2016; Westberry, 2009). According to these research studies, online learning can help students self-regulate, improve cognition, reflection, and information processing levels, and level the playing field among participants. Furthermore, the study's findings imply that online learning offers a lot of potential benefits, including content flexibility, space, medium, access, and connection building (You & Kang, 2014).

Researchers have increasingly investigated the drawbacks and benefits of online learning in EFL situations. Al-Samiri (2021), for example, evaluated 40 papers published during the COVID-19 epidemic to illustrate the problems and benefits of online teaching of English as a foreign language in the Saudi context. She found that online classes might assist shy and struggling learners in becoming more active agents in the classroom. Yet, online classrooms are regarded as a "less-than-optimal learning environment" (p.150), lowering learners' motivation when encountering technological challenges. Furthermore, she added that while technology is convenient in terms of saving time and effort, online education is interrupted and affected by other factors surrounding the learners, such as family members at home distracting them from learning and the learners' anxiety toward online learning being noticeable. In a similar vein, Rahman (2020) investigated EFL learners' perceptions of online learning in the Indonesian setting. He found that online learning was seen as less facilitating, and the learners encountered technical challenges such as internet access while studying. The researcher eventually argued that studying in person (face-to-face) is preferable to receiving instruction online. Akhter (2020) explored the problems Saudi EFL university students encountered during the COVID-19 epidemic. The researcher asked 100 people to participate in an online poll and stated that most students had difficulty listening during online sessions due to physical and other impediments. The researcher also urged that instructors be educated and taught the necessary information and abilities in order to maximize their online learning activities.

According to Rahman (2020), 68 percent of participants in a poll of 50 English instructors across the United Kingdom stated that learners become less engaged in online learning. According to Aljohani (2020), the Saudi population was sad and suffering from stress disorder as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. Adnan and Anwar (2020) researched Pakistani students' perspectives on online learning in higher education. The findings demonstrated that online learning cannot provide the expected outcomes in undeveloped nations such as Pakistan, where the great majority of pupils are unable to use the Internet owing to technical and financial constraints. Similarly, Barzani and Jamil (2021) researched 200 Kurdish EFL university students. According to their findings, the majority of students have a negative view of online education. However, Almahasees et al. (2021) revealed that both teachers and students saw benefits from online learning in terms of self-learning, low prices, ease, and flexibility. They also believe that the problems are

transitioning to online education, particularly for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, a lack of contact and motivation, technical and Internet concerns, data privacy and security, etc. From the standpoint of lecturers, Simamora et al. (2020) found that online learning apps in Indonesia are advantageous for some instructors to offer course content without face-to-face contact, despite challenges such as insufficient internet connectivity. Some scholars questioned the viability and challenges of fully-fledged online classrooms. For example, Adnan and Anwar (2020) argued that online learning does not produce the desired effects in nations such as Pakistan because students and teachers do not have reliable internet connectivity and lack both necessary training and financial resources. Similarly, Aminullah et al. (2019) discovered that while some instructors had good views about online learning, others experienced several challenges, such as a lack of institutional support, online learning equipment, and proper training. Nambiar (2020) ran an online poll for 407 students and 70 professors from various colleges and institutions in Bangalore and argued that there is a need for quality and timely contact between students and professors and the provision of technological assistance. The research stressed the importance of developing an organized and user-friendly environment for online instruction. Finally, the researcher stated that providing teachers with proper technological training about methods of delivering online classrooms is critical. Farrah and AlBakry (2020) noted that students face some problems while transferring to online learning. Therefore, they made some recommendations to improve the implementation of online learning in the educational process, such as improving technological infrastructure and providing both instructors and students with the tools needed to facilitate the learning and teaching process in an online environment.

According to Ahmadi and Reza (2018), employing proper technology for language instruction inspires learners to learn language skills successfully. It may also provide various benefits for educators and learners in terms of overcoming learning challenges meaningfully and maintaining constant contact and connection to grasp the course. Furthermore, they demonstrated that digital education enabled learners to enhance creativity, critical thinking abilities, autonomous learning, knowledge development, and teamwork. Tanveer's (2011) analysis of the learning preferences of 175 students participating in advanced Business English Curriculum sessions indicated that most students preferred face-to-face contact to computerized learning. They stated that technical issues, a lack of authenticity in the scenario, and an inadequate atmosphere for expressing their emotions and sentiments were among the negative elements leading to the ineffectiveness of computerized learning.

A review of the related literature reveals the dearth of empirical research on Southern Iraqi EFL students` perceptions of the benefits/drawbacks of online learning. This study aims to investigate their views on the challenges of online learning. As a result, it could deliver a vivid picture of students in online learning in Iraq, presenting how they perceive online learning based on their current experiences on a deeper level.

Methodology

Participants

The study's sample encompassed 45 EFL learners studying at private and public schools in southern Iraq. Their age ranged from 11 to 18. Participants came from different socioeconomic

backgrounds. The study focused on the intermediate level because they constitute a major group of learners studying English through online classes. The participants were chosen from learners who had taken part in online EFL classes for at least two terms so that they could easily comment on its advantages and disadvantages. They were selected based on a convenience sampling procedure. Convenience sampling, as specified by Mackey and Gass (2005), is a non-random sampling process defined as the collection of individuals who happen to be available for the sample.

This study observed ethical guidelines; participants were informed of the research aims and consented to participate. They were informed of the likelihood of publication and were offered anonymity and the opportunity to question, comment on, and withdraw from the research.

Instruments

The instruments employed in this study are as follows:

Questionnaire

To answer the first research question, a questionnaire adapted from Muflih et al. (2021) was used to analyze EFL learners` perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of online learning.

Interviews

To answer the second research question, a semi-structured interview regarding the online EFL learning challenges in South Iraq was used to delve deeper into the participants' responses. Peräkylä (2005) admits that interviews can help researchers "reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, such as people's subjective experience and attitudes" (p. 869). Besides, an experiment accompanied by an interview provides thick descriptions and in-depth insights into the complexity of the issue in question. It contributes to the generalizability of the research findings (Peräkylä, 2005). The interview was conducted with about 10 participants who had already received the questionnaire. Three questions were posed in Arabic. Before conducting the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the interview. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the protection of their identities. Each student's interview lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes, depending on the amount of detail each student provided. All of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The participants were asked to answer the following questions:

Q1: What did you like about online learning?

Q2: What did you dislike about online learning?

Q3: What are the main challenges of online learning?

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher first explained the study's objectives to EFL learners to gain permission. Following that, the researcher informed the participants who had agreed to engage in the study about the study's goals and protocol. The researcher then administered the questionnaire to the participating EFL learners and asked them to complete it. After completing the questionnaire, 10 EFL learners were recruited to participate in interviews revolving around their perception of online learning.

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Design

This study followed a complementarity mixed-methods design (Creswell et al., 2003). According to Dornyei (2007), the mixed methods study has great potential for research in the social sciences. Complementarity mixed-methods design mixes qualitative and quantitative phases of research to achieve complementarity and expand the explanatory power and depth of inquiry. The researcher used an adapted questionnaire and a series of individual interviews to understand the EFL students` attitudes toward applying web-based platforms in teaching EFL in Iraq. The former data collection tool provided the researcher with quantitative data, and the latter data collection device revealed the factors forming any positive/negative images in students' minds concerning the employment of web-based online classes in Iraq. A mixed-methods research design was chosen as it is suggested that the qualitative data often augments and explains numerical data, thus strengthening the research findings (Creswell et al., 2003).

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistics to answer the first research question concerning the benefits and drawbacks of online learning from the perspective of Southern Iraqi EFL learners. The participants' responses to interview questions were analyzed qualitatively and through thematic analysis. Firstly, their responses were transcribed, summarized, and categorized. After double-checking the transcriptions to check for any mismatch with the audio recordings, the transcriptions were once more reviewed and coded using keywords from the interview questions. Such a categorization led to identifying the recurrent patterns in the learners' responses. Drawing on frequency counts and descriptive statistics, the recurrent themes and patterns in the transcriptions were grouped, and their frequencies were counted. The themes and patterns were placed into a thematic table according to the interview questions. Subsequently, all the patterns were carefully categorized to summarize the key themes in the interview data.

Results

To answer the first research question investigating the benefits and drawbacks of online learning from the perspective of Southern Iraqi EFL learners, data obtained from the questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistics.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I think the reference materials (videos, PowerPoint files, articles) and assignments posted by my teacher online help me improve my learning and understand the contents/ topics of the lesson better.	100	2.66	.95

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2. I think online learning is convenient, especially when submitting assignments.	100	4.19	.69
3. I think online activities and discussions can motivate me to learn more about the lesson.	100	2.83	1.00
4. I think online instruction saves effort and time.	100	4.15	.74
5. I think online instruction helps me practice my language skills	100	2.82	.98
6. I think online instruction helps me acquire new English vocabulary.	100	3.23	1.19
7. I think online instruction makes my reading experience more interesting	100	2.34	1.18
8. I think online instruction increases the effectiveness of learning	100	3.00	1.01
9. online instruction facilitates teacher and student interaction and communication.	100	3.16	1.15
10. I prefer reading my courses in paper rather than online.	100	2.23	1.03
11. I think it is difficult to use online learning because of the slow-speed internet.	100	1.62	.48
Valid N (listwise)	100		

Table 1 depicts the mean and standard deviation of learners' scores for each questionnaire item. As revealed in the Table, items two and four had the highest mean of 4.19 and 4.15, indicating that learners strongly agree that online learning is convenient to use, especially when submitting assignments, and online instruction saves effort and time. Items six, nine, and eight, with the means of 3.23, 3.16, and 3.00, respectively, reveal that learners were neutral and agreed that online instruction helps them acquire new English vocabulary, facilitates interaction and communication between teachers and students, and increases learning effectiveness.

Table 2
The Percentage of Learners' Responses

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	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I think the reference materials (videos, PowerPoint files, articles) and assignments posted by my teacher online help me improve my learning and understand the contents/ topics of the lesson better.	10.00	36.00	34.00	18.0	2.00
2. I think online learning is convenient, especially when submitting assignments.	--	--	16.00	49.00	35.00
3. I think online activities and discussions can motivate me to learn more about the lesson.	8.00	32.00	33.00	23.00	4.00
4. I think online instruction saves effort and time.	--	1.00	18.00	46.00	35.00
5. I think online instruction helps me practice my language skills	7.00	34.00	33.00	22.00	4.00
6. I think online instruction helps me acquire new English vocabulary.	6.00	26.00	25.00	25.00	18.00
7. I think online instruction makes my reading experience more interesting.	29.00	35.00	11.00	23.00	2.00
8. I think online instruction increases the effectiveness of learning.	4.00	30.00	25.00	36.00	5.00
9. online instruction facilitates teacher and student interaction and communication.	5.00	32.00	17.00	34.00	12.00
10. I prefer reading my courses in paper rather than online.	27.00	40.00	16.00	17.00	--
11. I think it is difficult to use online learning because of the slow-speed internet.	11.00	13.00	11.0	42.0	23.0

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Table 4.2 shows that most EFL learners in the study disagreed with item one (disagree = 36.0, % undecided = 34.0 %), stating that materials and assignments posted by their teachers online help them improve their learning and better understand the contents/ topics of the lesson. The majority of learners (agree= 49.0 %, strongly agree 35.0 %) thought that online learning is convenient to use, especially when submitting assignments. Additionally, most of them (disagree = 32.0%, undecided = 33.0 %) disagreed and were neutral about the motivating role of online activities and discussions to learn more about the lesson. The results also showed that 81% of learners agreed and strongly agreed that online instruction saved their effort and time. 67% of learners disagreed and were undecided about the efficacy of online instruction in helping them practice language skills. Almost 43% of learners acknowledged that online instruction helped them acquire new English vocabulary. 64% of learners disagreed and were undecided that online instruction made their reading experience more interesting. Regarding item 8, nearly half of the learners (41 %) believed online instruction increased learning effectiveness. 46 percent of learners admitted that online instruction facilitated interaction and communication between teachers and students. 67 percent strongly disagreed with paper reading courses instead of reading them online. For the last item, 65 percent of learners agreed and strongly agreed that it was difficult to use online learning because of the slow-speed internet.

To answer the qualitative research question concerning the main challenges of online learning, learners' responses to the interview questions were transcribed verbatim, which was done by the researcher himself in order to achieve closeness to the data. The transcriptions were checked for any missing parts. Once the data were compiled and organized, the researcher started the cyclical process of reading, analyzing, and coding the data to organize it into meaningful pictures depicting the students' views. The researcher read interview transcripts to search for themes in their perceptions. Then, learners' responses were sorted into broad categories representing the overarching themes common across interviews.

Through thematic analysis, learners' responses to the interview questions were categorized in order to extract major recurrent themes supplied by the learners regarding the main challenges of online learning. The in-depth analysis of the interview data indicated that most learners believed that online learning offered flexibility, helped less active students become more active, reduced pressure and stress, and saved money and time. Moreover, the participants of this study believed that online learning carried some disadvantages: decreased direct interactions did not allow direct teachers' feedback, increased possibility of cheating, internet interruption, weak Wi-Fi signals, and inadequate technological skills.
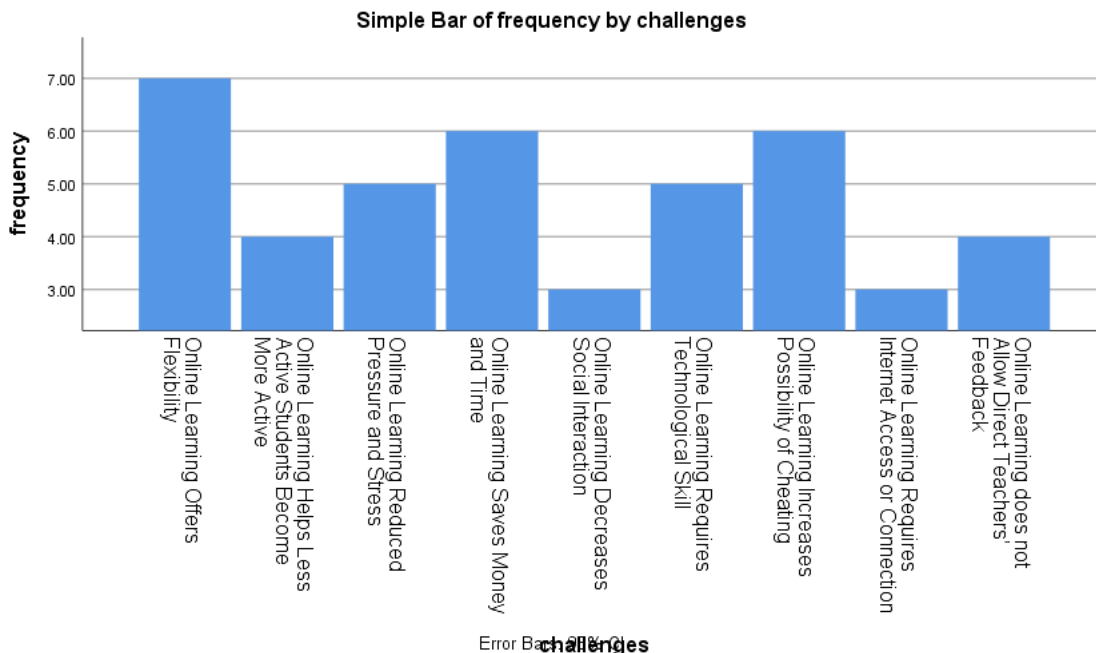
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Figure 1. *Learners' Perception of Challenges of Online Learning*

Online Learning Offers Flexibility

According to the interviewees, the biggest advantage of online learning was flexibility .The term "flexibility" refers to the ease with which students can access information at any time and location .They acknowledged that online learning provided time and location flexibility .They stated in the interview:

One of the benefits is the ability to access online learning from anywhere, at any time, and in any circumstance .We simply need a device and an internet connection .Online learning is not constrained by place or time .As a result, it is more adaptable.

The advantage of online learning is that it is more flexible in terms of time and location, as it can be performed at any time and from any location.

The advantage of online learning is that we can learn from any location, not just the classroom . We can learn as long as we have a connection.

Online Learning Helps Less Active Students Become More Active

Learners also stated that online learning allowed less active pupils to become more active. Less active students are pupils who do not actively participate in class activities. It might also reflect pupils afraid to speak up even if they know what to say.

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In terms of personality, we discovered some less-active pupils in the class. Students who participate less often have a better probability of improving in online learning than in class. If they were shy or insecure in class, their demeanor improved.

Online Learning Reduced Pressure and Stress

The respondents have highlighted the presence of a reduced stress level due to adopting online learning. They indicated that online learning provided a stress-free learning environment where they could freely speak without fearing being judged or mocked by their classmates.

The online learning helped me to speak and express my attitudes in discussions, and I am not afraid of being mocked by my friends.

Online Learning Saves Money and Time

Respondents emphasized the benefits of time and cost-effectiveness. The fundamental advantage of online learning over traditional learning modes is the ability to learn at any time and from any location. Due to the removal of travel requirements, this results in significant savings in expenses. This has resulted in total cost savings for the students.

Online learning saves us time that would otherwise be wasted going to class and coming back. Now we can be with our family more.

In online learning, we do not pay for taxis and we do not waste our time on being stuck in traffic.

Online Learning Decreases Social Interaction

Participants of this study believed in a decline in social contact due to online learning. They contended that, compared to classroom activities, the interaction environment in online learning was limited since the activities were carried out digitally. They stated that the disadvantage of online learning was that it did not allow for face-to-face interaction between students and professors.

Online learning reduced student contact. Because the involvement was restricted, it appeared passive.

In my opinion, online learning diminishes the frequency with which students and teachers meet, reducing social connection.

Online Learning Requires Technological Skill

The second disadvantage observed by participants in implementing online learning was that it requires a reasonable level of technological proficiency. According to the findings of this study, teachers must provide students with appropriate information and abilities concerning the program or the application used for online learning. To ensure a successful online learning implementation, teachers should explain the program to students at the start of the course, demonstrate how to use

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it, and offer recommendations about what the students must do so that the students get comfortable and are not confused.

The point that we should get familiar with the new app and how to deal with it was a problem.

Sometimes, we do not know how to use the virtual platform and get confused.

Online Learning Increases Possibility of Cheating

Our study participants felt that with online learning, students could freely obtain materials by surfing some websites and then easily copy and paste their surfing findings into an online learning forum or an online evaluation without paraphrasing or citing the original work.

Online learning allows students to cheat since they can quickly browse other sites, discover the solution or comparable resources, and copy-paste the answer into the discussion thread.

Perhaps some students who were too lazy to ponder just copied and pasted the solution from their pals or searched for online resources, then posted the answer based on their findings.

Online Learning Requires Internet Access or Connection

Internet access has become one of the most important aspects of online learning. It acts as a conduit for connecting the computer to one of the online learning tools or websites. However, the internet connection becomes a technical issue, as stated by the study participants. They mentioned their dissatisfaction with the wonky internet connection during the interview. They responded that it was a significant problem when they enrolled in online learning.

Internet interruptions have plagued me on several occasions. Many of my attendance issues were caused by connectivity problems.

Wi-Fi bundles can not always give adequate signal strength, which causes certain learning defects.

When engaged in online learning, I experienced occasional disconnections and microphone issues.

Online Learning does not Allow Direct Teachers Feedback

Another disadvantage of online learning that participants observed was the absence of feedback from the instructor. They complained that they did not receive detailed feedback when the course was provided online. Furthermore, they noted that the feedback from face-to-face learning was easier and clearer than from online learning.

We did not receive detailed feedback from our instructor in online learning since the feedback was simply written, but I liked detailed feedback in face-to-face classes.

Discussion

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The current study sought to explore the viewpoints of Southern Iraqi EFL learners on the benefits and drawbacks of online learning, as well as the problems of online EFL learning for them. The data revealed that most learners thought online learning was convenient and saved them effort and time. This conclusion is comparable to that of Bowers and Kumar (2015), who discovered that learners might save money on commuting by using online learning. They stated that studying from home allows students to attend classes easily without worrying about everyday traffic and transportation expenditures. Yulia (2020) argued that online learning can assist students in acquiring an education without leaving their homes. Thus, one could claim that online learning contributes to learning without incurring additional expenditures because students may attend their sessions from the comfort of their own homes. Furthermore, students believed online education helped them learn new English words, enhanced contact and communication between instructors and students, and boosted learning efficacy.

The participants made several compelling comments on the flexibility of online learning. For example, online learning was not constrained by place or time. Second, online learning allows students to learn from anywhere, not just the classroom. Finally, in order to access online learning, a good internet connection was required. Smart and Cappel (2006) claim that online learning gives flexibility and convenience since it allows students to access the lesson at any time and from any location, and students may finish the course units at their speed.

Learners also said that online learning assists less active pupils in becoming more active. This conclusion is consistent with Soliman (2014), who claims that online learning helps introverted students connect electronically through forums and chats, which leads to improved communicative proficiency. Furthermore, Tanveer's (2011) study participants stated that online learning allows them to be autonomous, provides a variety of activities, fosters intrinsic drive to learn, and helps introverted individuals to engage more effectively. Those chances were obtained because online learning allows for many types of communication, allowing students to communicate with their classmates without meeting in person and without fear of being harassed if they make a mistake. The study shows that, to some extent, online learning gives students and teachers limited access to engage because it is done electronically. This conclusion supports You and Kang's (2014) study, which found that one of the most significant drawbacks of online learning implementation is the lack of direct connection between students and professors and among colleague students. According to the findings, the atmosphere was different even if students and teachers could virtually communicate face-to-face through video call programs such as Skype and Tanggo. It was still constrained by delayed responses and indistinct voices depending on the connection.

Compared to face-to-face learning, teachers' feedback was certainly confined to writing. Furthermore, in certain apps or websites, input was limited to a specific number of characters. Some pupils may be confused by the scant written response. To avoid misunderstanding, students may need to clarify what the criticism or modification means to their teacher. It may be tough for certain pupils not used to receiving virtual feedback. The study discovered that online learning increased the likelihood of cheating. Arkorful and Abaidoo (2014) further suggest that because online learning is supplied through a "proxy," it produces a loss of control or regulation in negative behaviors such as cheating. According to the findings of this study, to reduce the possibility of

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cheating, teachers should establish a clear policy about this problem from the start of the online learning implementation. Furthermore, the teacher should verify the student's work to avoid such issues in online learning. Teachers and students are also recommended to agree on a punishment for cheating students.

Furthermore, the current study's findings indicated that participants experience technical and training challenges, making them hesitant to get the best technology when studying online. These findings are consistent with those of Al-Samiri (2021), Rahman (2020), Al-Nofaie (2020), Bin Dahmash (2020), and Ali and Magalhaes (2008). Previous research has shown that these concerns may be avoided using different technical options or improving teaching platforms. For example, Tanjung and Utomo (2020) stated that online platforms must be improved regularly. Otherwise, teachers should choose other platforms. Furthermore, Akhter (2020) stated that instructors must be trained to enhance their online learning activities.

According to the participants' experiences, despite the obvious benefits of online learning, it faced various technological challenges when used in educational learning contexts. This reaction is consistent with the findings of (Altunay, 2019) research, which found that most students struggle with technological issues and internet connectivity, prohibiting them from attending lessons online and thus having difficulty learning English language skills. According to Volery and Lord's (2000) study, while participating in online learning was gratifying, most of his respondents did not fully engage owing to technical challenges, leading to frustrations in attempting to join and utilize network services.

Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, participants' attitudes regarding online learning ranged from extremely favorable to hesitant about relying largely on it. Moreover, online learning is convenient, particularly when submitting assignments, and online education saves effort and time. Furthermore, students believed online education helped them learn new English words, enhanced contact and communication between instructors and students, and boosted learning efficacy. According to an in-depth study of the interview data, most learners believe that online learning provides flexibility, helps less active students become more active, reduces stress, and saves money and time. Despite the benefits to students of incorporating online learning into teaching and learning, certain problems require quick consideration. They included fewer direct encounters, a lack of direct instructor feedback, an increased likelihood of cheating, internet disruption, inadequate Wi-Fi connections, and a lack of basic technological abilities. The current study sought to shed light on significant issues that impede the successful implementation of online learning in underdeveloped countries such as Iraq.

This study verified previous research findings on attitudes toward online learning in poor nations and filled a vacuum in the Iraqi context. It also implies that instructors use creative teaching strategies to assist students in developing language competency and increasing productivity in successful online learning settings. This research makes several significant recommendations for online learning users, including learners, teachers, and policymakers, in terms of e-learning implementation. For example, some students may be unfamiliar with online learning due to their diverse social backgrounds and degrees of digital literacy. As a result, teachers must demonstrate or provide guidelines to pupils on how to use this information. Second,

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using several learning methods, such as online and face-to-face, is strongly advised. Students can improve their oral communication and nonverbal communication skills by doing so. Third, teachers should review what they addressed in class more thoroughly during the online learning session to ensure a better grasp. The teacher might then give an explanation or correction if there was any misunderstanding about the content. Furthermore, instructors are advised to construct their online learning with various resources, activities, and sites to reduce monotony and give a meaningful learning experience. Finally, teachers must examine and offer constructive feedback on students' work to avoid cheating. Policymakers must offer adequate assistance to instructors and students to improve the efficacy of online learning environments. This study also stressed that policymakers should take a more active role in encouraging the introduction of online learning for learning. One method is to provide facilities that aid in implementing online learning, particularly more up-to-date computer software and a fast internet connection. Although most participants agreed that online learning improved teaching and learning, they also acknowledged its complicated implementation. A better knowledge of the environment of online learning readiness and perception can allow policymakers to better handle the requirements of their students. Finally, while online learning has many potentials and advantages, its full potential and advantages cannot be fully gained by students unless the online learning problems are considered.

This study focused on Iraqi EFL learners' views on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning. Studies like this should be replicated with different groups of learners in different cultural contexts, age levels, and language levels. Furthermore, other methodologies such as reflective diaries and case studies should be used in addition to questionnaires to examine the learners' views and to provide complementary and more in-depth information on their attitudes towards online learning. The opinions of Iraqi EFL learners were the focus of this study. More study on teacher attitudes and comparison of learners' and teachers' attitudes can be another line of research.

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