

تحديات التعلم الإلكتروني ورضا طلاب دهوك خلال الجائحة

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Duhok Students' Online Learning Challenges and Satisfaction During the Pandemic

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ملخص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء تصورات الطلاب عن برنامج التعليم الإلكتروني الذي قدمته جامعة دهوك خلال جائحة كورونا في عامي 2020 و 2022. وتركز بشكل أساسي على طلاب كلية اللغات، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. وتهدف إلى استكشاف آرائهم حول مدى فعالية البرنامج، وكيفية تحسينه لرفع مستوى تعلم الطلاب، وأخيرًا، ما هي التحديات التي واجهوها. استخدمت الدراسة منهجية البحث المختلط، حيث اعتمدت على البيانات الكمية والنوعية. وقد تبين أن الطلاب والمعلمين والجهات المعنية الأخرى واجهوا تحديات عديدة في ضمان نجاح تطبيق التعليم الإلكتروني، وهو ما شكل أساس هذه الدراسة. اختار الباحث 44 طالبًا (28 ذكرًا و 16 أنثى) للمشاركة في الدراسة باستخدام أسلوب العينة المتاحة. وشملت الدراسة طلابًا في سنواتهم الدراسية الثانية والثالثة والرابعة خلال العام الدراسي. وقد خاض جميع الطلاب المشاركين في هذه الدراسة تجربة الدراسة عبر الإنترنت لمدة عام على الأقل، ودرس بعضهم

لمدة عام ونصف. من خلال تحليل موضوعي، حدد الباحث خمسة محاور تمثل التحديات الرئيسية التي واجهتها هذه الجامعة الحكومية: ضعف الاتصال بالإنترنت، وقلة إلمام المعلمين بالأمور التقنية، ومقاومة الطلاب، ونقص الأجهزة، وضعف التيار الكهربائي. وكشفت الدراسة أن 48.8% من الطلاب الذين شملتهم العينة يعتقدون أن العملية التعليمية لم تكن ناجحة بالقدر الكافي خلال جائحة كورونا.

ABSTRACT

This research attempts to retrospectively investigate students' perceptions of the online education program provided by the University of Duhok during the coronavirus pandemic during 2020 and 2022. It mainly focuses on the students at the College of Languages, English Department. It aims to explore their insights about how effective the program was, how it can better elevate students' learning, and finally, what students' challenges were. The study has used a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data. It has been found out that students, teachers, and other stakeholders faced numerous challenges in guaranteeing the successful implementation of online learning, which served as the foundation for this study. The researcher chose 44 students (28 males and 16 females) to participate in the study using a convenience sampling approach. The study included students in their second, third, and fourth years of study during the academic year. All of the students in this study experienced online classes for at least one year, and some of them studied for a year and a half. Through a thematic analysis, the researcher identified five themes that were marked as the primary challenges that this public university faced: poor Internet connection, illiteracy of teachers on technological matters, resistance from students, lack of devices, and poor electricity connection. The study revealed that 48.8% of the sampled students believed that the process of education was not that successful during the coronavirus pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In schools and universities, learning is a systematic acquisition of the most recent preferences, values, skills, behaviours, knowledge, and understanding. For a long time, techniques like research, assignments, videos, narratives, training, and discussion have been used to promote students' learning of facts and beliefs (Altun, 2017). Education may be obtained by self-study, when students learn everything on their own or with little direction, or through attendance at classes, which may be virtual or in-person. In Kurdistan region of Iraq, attending classes is more advocated for, especially for K-12 students who haven't yet mastered the



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art of self-study and have wanted immense guidance to learn new concepts.

The whole orientation of education in-class was disrupted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has had devastating effects on all sectors of the worldwide economy since the World Health Organization (WHO) announced it as a pandemic in March, 2020. The first case in Kurdistan/Iraq was reported on March 1st, 2020. The government was forced to impose stricter controls across the region to ensure the safety of its citizens as a result of an increase in the number of confirmed cases and fatalities. Like other countries around the world, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) decided to close all colleges in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19. About 1.7 million children in roughly 6,800 public schools were impacted by the closure (UNICEF, 2020). The number included refugees living in camps with already appalling conditions.

The education system in Iraqi Kurdistan was forced to use resources at its disposal to facilitate virtual learning as people stayed and worked from home as a result of this adoption and adaptation to the new pedagogical paradigms. This was the best option instead of trying to redesign schools to satisfy the government's demands for social segregation.

The benefits and drawbacks of this approach apply to all parties involved in the education industry. On the one hand, the method has the potential to give students a personalized, meaningful learning experience that will keep them connected to their local communities and preserve their local identities, while they use the available technology. Changes for educators, institutions, and students were unavoidable, according to Perienen (2020). This is true since almost all institutions of higher education, particularly universities, were forced to revise their policies to incorporate virtual learning as a last resort in response to the current state of unpredictability.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic made online education so necessary that Kurdish higher education institutions could not continue to operate in a poor manner. During a situation that such a requirement students experienced abrupt transitions, which could prove impossible, particularly in regions where the resources needed aren't readily available. Teachers weren't well-versed with the art of distance learning and ensuring that the syllabus is completed on time. Administrators may need vast training on a way to manage teams remotely and have all tasks completed on time. On their side, the parents and also the society might

not accept the moment transitioning and they might not be well-versed with guidelines to assist their children cope up.

Finally, opposition from students could prevent the government from using virtual learning methods in institutions. The ability of Kurdistan to quickly utilize the available technology, mobilize stakeholders to plan pertinent emergency mechanisms to adapt to any new norms, and provide the pertinent infrastructural adjustments will determine the continuation of learning across all schools, institutions, and universities. This is because of the difficulty that the pandemic presents within the region and beyond, as well as the potential impacts that may be experienced from future pandemics. The effects of COVID-19 on the educational system are felt in all regions, including Iraq and Kurdistan (Azeez & Sirwan, 2022).

The explanation is that there was an abrupt disruption of pedagogical processes across all the educational institutions, both K-12 and institutions of upper learning alike. The foremost affected students are the grade 12 students who were expecting their national exams at the top of the year. Although they were allowed to attend schools normally while others were learning from home, they were psychologically affected, which could greatly impact their test leads to this important season of their life (Yusuf & Jihan, 2020).

Aims of the Study

Based on the above-mentioned issue, this study aims to find out how students feel about the online learning program that the University of Duhok put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on students in the College of Languages' English Department.

Research Questions

The focus of the research questions was on the effectiveness of learning and how satisfied students were with the University of Duhok's online learning resources during the COVID19 epidemic.

- 1.What are students' obstacles during Covid-19?
- 2.How can we elevate students' learning in such cases?

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the first decade of the twenty-first century has had an impact on society, including education, not just in Kurdistan and Iraq but also



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globally. The use of ICT in higher education promotes independent learning, which alters the overall educational perspective. Different socioeconomic, financial, and intellectual factors have promoted online learning, putting pressure on many educators to understand these formats. They include having better access to information, academic advancements through realistic representations, virtual encounters, and re-enactments, reduced e-learning costs where the instructor can reach many learners essentially, increased partner participation and collaboration, synchronous learning, and significantly improved ICT framework (Shahzad et al., 2020).

Instructors and learners alike can select the finest application that best fit their needs based on components such as taken a toll- viability, capacity to adjust to specific domains, re-usability, ability to be personalized, and time flexibility (Gustavsson et al., 2020). On the other hand, universities which are seeking to install ICT infrastructure into their learning systems face huge problems because of limited time and resources. As such, this section of research investigates into past research about the implementation of online learning in schools as groundwork for the discussion of the issues identified during the interviews with the study participants. Various theories relating to the implementation will also be taken into consideration to show the need and relevance of the current study.

2.2 Covid-19 and Online Learning

Zhong et al. (2020) which showed up COVID-19 as common pneumonia mentioned by Huang et al. 2020 in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, when the infection spread to other nations, the World Health Organization named it a widespread (WHO, 2020). The first case of COVID-19 showed up in late February 2020 in Pakistan, the neighbouring nation with China. The government reported the closure of instructive to prevent its spread. Meanwhile, the service of instruction issued information for online learning to compensate for the instructive misfortune. As a result, the instructive teach exchanged from offline to online learning (Dhawan, 2020). Instructors with no earlier involvement of online instruction began online instruction (Wang, Zhang et al., 2020) with this, the world seen the foremost enormous live try of exchanging from in-class to online class instruction for the first time (Jones & Sharma, 2020).

Online learning refers to learning experienced in synchronous or asynchronous environments using the internet, where students interact with instructors and follow students from anywhere (Singh & Thurman,

2019). Based on this definition, many arguments are given in support of online learning. Some of these include being accessible, affordable, and flexible. The learners can attend online classes from anywhere. It is economical, and the learners can schedule learning as per their convenience (Dhawan, 2020). In the wake of COVID-19, online learning is no longer an option for educational institutions; instead, there is no other option without it. The educational institutions accepted the need for digitizing their operations and initiated arrangements for digital learning (Dhawan, 2020). One can anticipate a significant shift in instruction and learning styles due to the intensive use of technological tools and platforms. During this transformation, Carey (2020) reported that ensuring the quality of instruction and learning is not essential; instead, switching to online learning by educational institutions needs appreciation.

However, a massive transformation to online learning without ensuring quality will be ineffective. Almost more than half of the enrolled students in online programs quite due to dissatisfaction with the education quality (Betts, 2009). For this reason, Roach and Lemasters (2006) emphasized that there will always be a need to explore students' satisfaction with online learning. While the educational institutions switched to online instruction, the instructors and learners both resisted due to technological complexities. Ahmed and Mohamad (2011) conducted a study in Pakistan to investigate the transition from formal to virtual learning, a developing country with the sixth-largest world population. Reaching online to a large body of students was a big challenge for educational institutions. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan (a statutory authority regulating the working of universities) issued directions to all the universities to start online classes. The universities asked the instructors to use any platforms such as WhatsApp, Google classroom, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or any other to teach online. Online learning is useful for students having the necessary resources and technological skills (Brown, 2019). However, it is challenging for others with limited technical knowledge and a lack of resources (Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020). Online sessions bring a variety of technical problems such as login issues, low audio, video quality, and downloading errors (Dhawan, 2020). Students feel depressed when they face such technical problems (Kim et al., 2005). In contrast, students do not face such technical problems in formal classroom settings.

Dhawan (2020) also mentioned online learning unsnagging due to a lack of personal attention and interaction. Agarwal and Kaushik (2020)



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investigated medical students' perception of online learning during the 2020 lockdown. They used the Zoom platform for online instruction for 12 days. The participants expressed their satisfaction with online education and viewed it relevant to their learning needs. Most students reported online sessions exciting and interactive.

2.3 Online Learning Challenge

During the COVID-19 pandemic, having remote access to educational materials became crucial. Despite much criticism, these programs were largely welcomed by stakeholders across the sector, as the principles of home-based learning and virtual instruction were ultimately regarded as excellent approaches. Local governments used a variety of tactics to limit disruptions to students' education, the most well-known of which was the distribution of educational materials via radio and television broadcasts as well as publicly available online resources like YouTube. Additionally, the government established the "Ewana" platform to give pupils access to academic records and necessary learning resources (UNICEF, 2020).

To ensure that every student could access the platform, the government encouraged the major communications firms to offer the service for free to students. Nonetheless, while the government was still adopting these and other measures to ensure that no learner was left behind in classroom matters, the fact remains that access to these services is spotted and that many students could not benefit from the privileges offered, in rural and urban areas alike. Both the economic and social costs were experienced in the whole region, but disproportionately, with marginalized learners experiencing the most devastating impacts. This was particularly the case for the female students from the marginalized communities and refugee camps such as Makhmour as well as those with disabilities. This was not unique to Kurdistan but throughout the whole world where marginalized students were noted to be affected disproportionately in many developed, undeveloped, and developing countries (Mehall, 2020). Learning through the mediation of education technology, therefore remains unreachable for many children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods because of the connectivity issues. In addition to the issue of internet connection, the country also faces a huge issue with electricity.

In addition, the hard-economic condition due to COVID-19 made students live harder as it required to be online on the right time, attend live sessions via ZOOM based on the weekly schedule and buy advanced devices to watch and review academic materials such as a laptop and cell phone. On the other side, implementing e-learning required a suitable

facility like smart devices for lecturer especially for mathematic modules and good internet line so as not to be interrupted during classes.

2.4 Exploring the Critical Challenges That Influence Online Learning

Existing infrastructure problems were greatly made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in rural places. Access to digital learning resources was severely restricted in these areas due to a 700 megawatt drop in electricity generation (Faidhi, 2020). Additionally, a large number of rural students did not have access to electronic devices, which posed significant obstacles to their involvement in remote learning. Parents voiced worries about their children's online safety and the possible abuse of unsupervised internet access for non-academic purposes, even in households with the required gadgets (Azeez & Sirwan, 2022). Even while a lot of governments encouraged free internet access to facilitate distance learning, this was frequently not fully implemented. As a result, even when students had access to energy and digital equipment, their involvement was still limited by expensive internet connectivity expenses. K-12 pupils from underprivileged households were disproportionately affected by these issues, which put them at a competitive disadvantage in tests and assessments when compared to their more privileged counterparts (Yusuf & Jihan, 2020).

Sheridan et al. (2020) stated another issue that faced children in rural areas-the issue of parental illiteracy, where they could not help their children adapt to the new technologies. In such instances, the children could not be motivated to keep on learning and attend classes because some may not see the value of it. It is not possible to completely replace online learning with face-to-face learning, but the two can be used as supplements to each other. Furthermore, another problem is that some colleges in the region use a Learning Management System (LMS). "A Learning Management System is a computer program that manages, documents, tracks, reports, and distributes e-learning education courses and training programs." (Ellis, 2009).

2.5 Students' Satisfaction with Online Learning

Walk (2020) conducted a study on higher education faculties worldwide abruptly stopped in-class discussions to prepare for the widespread COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020b). These closures have forced institutions to adopt online preparation tools that are independent of students' and teachers' abilities to use mechanical resources (World Bank, 2020). Even though, online instruction isn't an unused educational strategy and has been utilized completely in different areas for long times,



there's still a need for competence in coordinating online learning stages in higher education teaching (UNESCO, 2016). The around the world scholarly calendar was diving into a state of confusion by the widespread coronavirus. Numerous instructors and students have gone domestic and self-quarantined at the same time (UNESCO, 2020a). As an arrangement to this issue, a few scholarly pioneers are now supporting online education (UNESCO, 2020).

2.6 Teacher Quality in Online Learning

Speculation, it is vital the part of college instructors in these scenarios, and their execution in online educating and learning forms, ought to be based on the integration and execution of their competences in ICT, as well as the improvement of their quality as instructors within the procedures they right now utilize to confront separate classes, being characterized as competences with down to earth and information aptitudes that the same educator creates through the techniques utilized in non-face-to-face classes which these permit the cooperation of understudies, recognizing as one of the foremost imperative the utilize of unused innovations called advanced competence. The management of the strategies used by teachers for the evaluation of learning in non-face-to-face classes, these must be adequate since they are considered in the last decade as strategic resources for training and learning management. In this regard. The above shows that the client with this type of competence is understood as the consequence of the integration of resources such as knowledge, skills and attitudes, among others, expressed in their work performed at work. Meanwhile, Latin American countries such as Mexico, Brazil and Chile are the most outstanding for their higher education models; this is due to the management of didactic strategies used in non-prudential classes which, perhaps, allow students to learn effectively. Although the first two countries seem to have greater influence on the rest of the continent, Chile is the first to reformulate the university system in the 1980s and orient it according to the policies of privatization and accreditation of educational quality. The new sociocultural scenario has promoted changes in the organization of universities, as well as in the training of their teachers, which brought new challenges to university study premises (Jiménez-Bucarey et al, 2021).

This transitory process makes it necessary to propose a critical review of university teaching. The quality of university teaching is understood as an educational practice, i.e., a continuous training process composed of intentional and reflective actions, given within the relationship between

the teacher and the student. Through, it is intended to fulfil the formative purposes with quality that enable students for the professional field of the labour and social world. It is, at the same time, a social practice, since teachers and their activity are immersed in a particular social, political and cultural context that will inevitably influence the way they develop their profession (R. Diloram et al, 2019).

methodology

This chapter presents the information about the participants involved in this study, and a description of the questionnaire used in this study and the process of collecting data by the researcher.

3.1 Participants

The number of students involved in this study is (44) students. The participants were from the English Department at the College of Languages/University of Duhok. The study involves students from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th years of their study in their academic year 2021-2022 via an online shared link. Besides, the study involves both male and female students.

All the students participated in this study have taken and experienced online classes during COVID-19 pandemic for at least one year and some for one year and a half.

3.1.1 General Information about the Students

This part presents general information about the students participated in this study, it presents their genders and their years of education in the following tables.

Table 3.1: Students' Gender

Gender	Male	Female
Number	28	16
Percentage	63.6%	36.4%

This table shows that the number of male students participated in this study are 28 (63.6%). While the number of female students are 16 (36.4%)

Table 3.2: Students' Level

Years of study	Second year	Third year	Fourth year
Number	11	14	19
Percentage	25%	32.6%	43.2%





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As it is shown in the table above that 19 (43.2%) of the participants are from fourth year, 14 (32.6%) are from third year and 11 (25%) are second year students.

3.2 Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire that consisted of two sections. The researcher used the "Microsoft Forms PRO" application to analyze his data. The first section of the questionnaire was about general information about the students such as: their years of study and their genders. While the second section was about students' evaluation of online education, which was divided into two parts. The first part students' responses to six Likert scale questionnaire, while the second part included close-ended questions to answer the research questions.

3.3 Data collection procedures

Data collection is the method of gathering and analyzing data on specific variables systematically, in such a way that the information can be addressed, conclusions drawn and findings analyzed.

The researcher generated an online link and shared it with students from the English Department at the College of Languages, University of Duhok, in March 2022. Furthermore, participant consent was obtained via email because institutional lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic made physical signatures impossible. Students' evaluations and questionnaire responses were accepted. The study aimed to collect quantitative and qualitative data by distributing the questionnaire to 44 participants via the provided link.

The data was collected using mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative methods, and a questionnaire was utilized to evaluate the learning quality and students' satisfaction of the online education services provided by the University of Duhok during COVID19 pandemic. The data was divided and arranged based on the information provided by the students, with common themes identified and analyzed.

Data analysis

This chapter presents the results obtained from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected throughout the study in the order of research questions. The first research question is about the elevation of students learning. The second research question focused on the students' obstacles during covid-19.



4.1 Research Question #1: How Can We Elevate Students Learning?

Part One:

This part reports students' responses to the questionnaire they were given. The questions and the responses of students are presented in the following tables.

Table 4.1: Students' Responses (Question 1)

Question 1. What kind of technology did you use during coronavirus?				
	Phone	Laptop	iPod	Computer
Frequency	31	10	1	2
Percentage	69.7%	23.3%	2.3%	4.7%

As it is shown in the table above, students used different devices during COVID-19 pandemic. However, the majority of the students 31 (69.7%) used their phones to enter the zoom meeting, while less than half of the students used other devices.

Table 4.2: Students' Responses (Question 2)

Question 2. How was your progression during COVID-19?				
	Very good	Quite good	Not that good	Not good at all
Frequency	5	20	15	4
Percentage	11.6%	45.4%	33.7%	9.3%

As it is shown in the table above that 20 (45.4%) of the students believe that the progress of learning during COVID-19 was quite good. While 15 students which represent (33.7%) of the participants believe that the progress of learning was not that good.

Table 4.3: Students' Responses (Question 3)

Question 3. Were you happy with your results?				
	Very happy	Quite happy	Not that happy	Not happy at all
Frequency	8	13	17	6
Percentage	19.5%	29.3%	36.6%	14.6%

This table shows that 17 students which represent (36.6%) of the participants believe that they were not happy with their results. However, 13 students or (29.3%) of the students stated that they were quite happy.



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Table 4.4: Students' Responses (Question 4)

Question 4. How successful is the process of education during coronavirus?

	Very successful	Quite successful	Not that successful	Not successful at all
Frequency	6	7	21	10
Percentage	14%	16.3%	48.8%	20.9%

As it is reported above that 21 students who represent (48.8%) believe that the process of education was not that successful during coronavirus.

Table 4.5: Students' Responses (Question 5)

Question 5. How effective is online learning?

	Very effective	Quite effective	Not that effective	Not effective at all
Frequency	10	8	14	12
Percentage	23.8%	19%	30.3%	26.9%

The table above shows that 14 students who represent (30.3%) of the participants believe that online learning is not that effective. While 10 students or (23.8%) of the students believe that online learning was very effective.

Table 4.6: Students' Responses (Question 6)

Question 6. How satisfied are students with studies?

	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Not that satisfied	Not satisfied at all
Frequency	7	11	16	10
Percentage	16.3%	25.2%	36.1%	22.4%

The table above shows that 16 of the students (36.1%) of the participants were satisfied with studies, while 7 students who represent (16.3%) of the total number of students participated in the study were very satisfied with studies.

Part Two:

The researcher tried to collect students' answers on this question, "*how can we elevate students' learning?*" The students gave different opinions; one of them stated that, "*We can do it by quitting online lectures and attending lectures in schools and colleges.*", another student said that "*By*

going to campus", a further one said, "By studying in the campus", and someone else stated that, "Just by going to campus and little bit of mercy from teachers ". some of the students were disagree with the teacher's behaviour during the online learning, one of them said, " Teachers should build a rapport ", some others were interested in increasing the activities in online learning, one of them stated " Through daily activities ", "By doing practice and asking question" and " By changing learning system to make it successful"

Another student stated that, *"we can elevate students learning by motivating the students and make the lectures interesting. Also; by providing students with the material according to their needs and level. Students learning during COVID-19 can be elevated by providing the needed instruments for students to have an effective learning process."* From the student's answers we can see how online learning can affect students' mind. Most of the students wanted to study in college instead of online learning.

Reflection

The results show that the online learning method used during the COVID-19 epidemic did not fully satisfy students. The total responses show that discontent exceeded happiness, despite the fact that some individuals had good opinions about their educational experience. Most of the students believed that they weren't pleased with their results. However, a number of them stated that they were quite happy. The majority of the students believed that the method of education wasn't that successful during coronavirus. Most of the students believed that online learning isn't that effective. While a number of them believed that online learning was very effective. The majority of the students were satisfied with studies, while a number of them were very satisfied with studies. From the results of this questionnaire, we can say that an online class eliminates the human connection that a face-to-face, in the hall teaching environment provides. An online instructor cannot gauge the mood, involvement and engagement level of their students the way s/he can in a traditional lecture-based classroom.

4.2. Research Question #2: What Was the Students' Obstacles During Covid-19?

1. Poor internet

Many of the participants according to the open ended questions agrees that poor or lack of internet connection may be a huge challenge for the implementation of online education at public universities in Kurdistan





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during the coronavirus pandemic. One thing that appeared to disturb participants the foremost was poor quality of the web lines even in big cities. Besides, students couldn't afford the high prices internet that some companies set. Some families stated that they couldn't buy internet facilities due to the lack of funds.

Poor quality internet or a scarcity of it thereof, has immense negative impact on the implementation of online learning during the coronavirus pandemic. The foremost affected were those living within the rural areas which are remote where signals are weak and thus participating in school work was hard. Online sessions, therefore, were faced with interruptions due to the poor internet. From the definition of online learning as an internet-based learning (Rapantar et al., 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Singh & Thurman, 2019; Stewart et al., 2011), it implies that an absence of a powerful and/or stable connection to the net could be a major obstacle with relevancy online education. One of the students claimed that, " *My network was weak.*"

2.Lack of Technological Devices

All of the participants agreed that Kurdish communities lack access to modern technology. The majority of them thought it had been one of the biggest obstacles to online learning. Due to the pandemic's effects on the region's economic situation, the common income of the majority of families fell, which made family life more challenging as a result of the drop in individual salaries. Global and regional GDP fell, many individuals and families lost their jobs, and those who still had jobs their pay has been reduced.

This could provide yet another justification for why individuals couldn't afford the aforementioned technologies. Many experts agree that the lack of technology tools may be a significant barrier to the adoption of online learning. While most of the families within the region doesn't have any access internet, many have smartphones, but about half doesn't have any laptops. The price got high and the electronic devices were expensive, one of the students stated that, "*I had some financial problems*"

3.Electricity

The respondents agreed that electricity was one of the main obstacles that the students and educators were facing during the implementation of online learning process in Kurdistan. One of them said: " *I have Network but we have electricity problems.*"

Inadequacy of electricity in Kurdistan and Iraq in general has been a persistent problem for a long period. People experience much power outages especially during summer. Generally, electricity connection is better in the region's larger cities than the small towns and villages, making it hard for the schools located in remote places to adopt online learning strategies. For the people suffering from electricity outage at home, especially in rural villages, online learning can be regarded exclusive rather than inclusive as it is the aim of contemporary student-centered approaches. Electricity, like the internet and electronic devices is a major infrastructure and contributor of online education.

4.Location Flexibility

All the respondents agreed with the fact that most learners were not having conducive learning environments while studying at home. One of the students said, *"I did not have a private room of my own."* another student reply that, *"There were no comfortable place in our house for studying."* It was challenging for students to have a decent environment and private rooms, particularly families with three or four students, because many families in Kurdistan haven't got enough rooms in the houses for their students to have a private study room. In this case, a lack of proper location to do studies when the school and libraries are closed is a major factor that cannot be underestimated. Another problem is the family's difficult financial status, which has made it difficult for parents to buy necessities for their children. The strong bond between families has also prompted them to visit each other's abundance, which has an effect on the students and the tranquillity of the neighbourhood. COVID-19 pandemic caused a lot of social and health-related issues which affected family structures and the way of life for most of the people all over the world. Stressors at home included loss having a family member fall sick, losing a family member to COVID-19, loss of jobs, lock downs among others. These situations could hugely affect emotional and cognitive status of the learners which negatively affects their learning ability. One of the students claimed that, *"I got infected by Covid 19 during my exam"* However, some of the students had health issues; they stated that, *"It was difficult to continue studying on the phone because there was a huge pain in my eyes"*

5.Lack of Teachers' Experience in Managing Online Classes and Evaluating Students

The participants noted that a considerable number of educators could not control online classes and did not know how to carry out the evaluation



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process. They pointed out; one of them stated that; "Teachers were not committing the instructions." Teachers and students should show commitment and positive attitude towards online learning systems. Failure of the users-in this case teachers and students-to understand the functionality of a system across multiple devices, therefore, presents a vital challenge that hindered holistic integration of online learning. The management of online classes was by a great extent influenced by the fact that it was abrupt and teachers and students did not have enough time to prepare. Additionally, many learners were not satisfied with the online evaluations. Furthermore, due to a lack of technological knowledge, teachers are not imaginative in implementing attractive online classes.

conclusion

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of key research findings presented in Chapter 4, with reference to each of the research questions. The results of the study are compared with the findings of some previous research studies in the literature. In the current research, the investigator was interested in exploring the challenges associated with online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. To accomplish this, the researcher interviewed some students about their live experiences in distance learning which was introduced in Kurdistan region after the closure of all the public universities. The academic year was in progress when the schools were closed in 2020 and thus, the students had to stay in session despite the challenges that were apparent. Finally, this section provides limitations and suggestions for further studies.

5.1 Discussion of Results

When considered collectively, the results show that while emergency online learning allowed for educational continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was unable to offer learning opportunities that were on par with traditional classroom instruction. Although they encountered many obstacles that diminished the efficacy of online learning, students generally valued the chance to continue their education.

While the qualitative results provide an explanation for these impressions, the quantitative results demonstrate that students' overall satisfaction with online learning was comparatively poor. Successful online education is hampered by a number of factors, including limited access to digital devices, erratic internet connections, power outages, poor learning settings, financial hardships, and inadequate teacher preparation.

However, students also suggested a number of useful methods for enhancing learning, such as boosting student-teacher interaction, raising classroom engagement, enhancing teachers' technological proficiency,

supplying sufficient learning materials, and guaranteeing fair access to digital infrastructure. According to these suggestions, students are aware of the potential of online education provided it is accompanied by suitable technology, efficient teaching methods, and adequate institutional funding.

Overall, the results point to the need for online learning to go beyond merely using digital platforms to mimic traditional classroom instruction. Universities should instead create all-encompassing online learning systems that incorporate dependable technology infrastructure, ongoing teacher preparation, student support services, and interactive pedagogical approaches. These upgrades would raise the standard of online learning and better equip universities to handle emergencies that call for distance learning in the future.

5.2 Findings

- Some of the challenges the students experienced include low bandwidth in the region, lack of electricity, and not having the required devices and software.
- Besides, the researcher found out that some learners and educators did not have enough information about how to run learning systems, in addition to experiencing time and location inflexibility.
- Most of the students believed that the progress of learning during COVID-19 wasn't quite good.
- While a number of students believe that the progress of learning wasn't that good.
- The majority of the students believed that the method of education wasn't that successful during coronavirus.
- Most of the students believed that online learning isn't that effective.
- While a number of them believed that online learning was very effective.
- The majority of the students weren't satisfied with studies, while a number of them were quite satisfied with studies.
- Many of the interviewees agreed that poor or lack of internet connection may be a huge challenge for the implementation of online education in public universities in Kurdistan during the coronavirus pandemic.
- All of the participants agreed that Kurdish communities lack access to modern technology. The majority of them thought it had been one of the biggest obstacles to online learning.



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- The respondents concurred that one of the major challenges educators and students in Kurdistan faced when implementing online learning was a lack of electricity.
- All the respondents agreed with the fact that most learners were not having conducive learning environments while studying at home.
- The participants reported that many educators were unable to manage online classes and were unsure on how to conduct the evaluation procedure.

Considering that we are in the middle of the digital age, Kurdistan's higher education institutions have adopted technology quite slowly. The lack of locally developed platforms that are user-friendly and can accommodate all learners, even English learners who may not fully understand some phrases used in exotic platforms, is a concern for developers and designers in the area. Another group that has contributed to this issue is the policymakers who have over time failed to see the need for mandatory integration of e-learning in the region. There should be policies allowing for smooth, easy, but quick transition from analog to digital. There need to be training programs for teachers and students in support of e-learning. Overall, the findings of the current study provide new suggestions for the decision-makers in the education sector to boost ICT usage in delivery of knowledge so that the implementation can be as smooth as possible during the post-pandemic era. The study also concludes that to ensure a success in the implementation of online learning in the region, the government and public universities administrations need to address the above challenges. This makes it imperative that governments and schools work together to create radical solutions to ensure that education as a basic human right has been given to all students in the same manner. Finally, the result showed that teachers are not creative in designing appealing online classes due to a lack of technological competence, therefore online learning is a big step to implement a successful learning.

This research attempts to introduce the core of the challenges and factors that influence the implementation of online learning systems during the COVID-19 pandemic in public universities. Because conducting such research will benefit the education sector, the government may want to improve the online learning process, and make universities work hard to solve problems and pay more attention to developing technology in all educational premises.



5.3 Limitations of the Study

Like in many studies, this study has also some limitations. The first limitation is related to the number of the participants. Forty-four students may seem small in number, and thus the outcomes may not be generalized to larger groups of students in other universities in Duhok or in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

Secondly, the participants belong to only one department at university in Duhok. There could have been more students and instructors involved both in quantitative and qualitative data collection stages from other universities in KRI to understand the state of students online learning better.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

As reported by the limitations above, a number of suggestions can be made for further studies. First, the same study can be replicated with greater number of participants so that the findings could be statistically more significant. Also, the number of participants can be higher in future studies so that the qualitative data would be richer.

Second, the future studies can involve participants from different contexts, i.e. other universities in the same city or various universities from different parts of the country. This may enrich the data elicited from the participants to have a wider picture of the issue under focus (i.e. the online learning process during COVID-19), by comparing the similarities and differences between different contexts and understand the dynamics beyond them.

Third, further studies can investigate the instructors' knowledge about online classes as well, along with their students. This may enable the researcher to understand the relationship between how students can benefit from the instructors' practices in online class.

Final word: This study, despite its limitations, can still be considered significant because it aimed to investigate the students online learning during COVID-19 for the first time in the research context. It is hoped that more studies will follow it to make deeper and wider investigations.

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