

Learning EFL Online During COVID -19 Pandemic Lockdown: Barriers and Needs in the Palestinian context

Husam Qaddumi¹

حسام قدومي

Languages Department, Al Istiqlal University, Jericho, Palestine

Corresponding author:

Aida Bakeer²

عايدة باكير

Al-Quds Open University, Nablus, Palestine

Khaled Masuod²

خالد مسعود

Languages Department, Al Istiqlal University, Jericho, Palestine

Abstract

The present study examines the most common challenges and needs that learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) face through learning online during the pandemic of COVID-19. We compare learners' barriers and needs concerning their gender and place of residence. In addition, it investigates learners' attitudes as related to online barriers and needs. The sample consisted of 1180 students in state schools. The researchers used a five-point Likert questionnaire for research questions and SPSS was used to examine the data. Generally, the level of barriers to EFL learning was moderate while the level of needs was high. Gender was not significant as related to online needs and barriers. Results show online English language learning had a positive impact on students' attitudes toward learning online that provided continuity of the learning process. There was a statistical relationship between the need to learn effectively online in education and barriers facing online learning. Learners facing a high degree of barriers to learning effectively online had more needs when going to use online learning. Moreover, a statistical correlation between challenges, needs, and attitudes towards technology and online learning was discovered.

Keywords: Barriers; COVID-19; needs; online learning

دراسة المعوقات والاحتياجات في السياق الفلسطيني اثناء تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية عبر الانترنت في ظل جائحة كورونا

تبحث الدراسة الحالية في أكثر التحديات (المعوقات) والاحتياجات شيوعاً التي يواجهها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) من خلال التعلم عبر الإنترنت اثناء جائحة COVID-19. نقارن الدراسة التحديات التي يواجهها المتعلمين واحتياجاتهم فيما يتعلق بالنوع الاجتماعي ومكان إقامتهم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، فإن الدراسة تبحث في مواقف المتعلمين فيما يتعلق بالتحديات والاحتياجات عبر الإنترنت. تكونت العينة من 1180 طالب وطالبة في مدارس الدولة. استخدم الباحثون استبيان ليكرت الخماسي. استخدم الباحثون برنامج SPSS لتحليل البيانات. وبشكل عام، كان مستوى التحديات أمام تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية متوسطاً بينما كان مستوى الاحتياجات مرتفعاً. لم يكن هناك فروق ذات دلالة احصائية تعزى لمتغير الجنس فيما يتعلق بالاحتياجات والعوائق في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية عبر الإنترنت. أظهر النتائج أن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية عبر الإنترنت كان له تأثير إيجابي على مواقف الطلاب تجاه التعلم عبر الإنترنت والذي وفر استمرارية عملية التعلم. كانت هناك علاقة إحصائية بين الحاجة إلى تعلم اللغة الفعال عبر الإنترنت في التعليم والتحديات التي تواجه تعلم اللغة الانجليزية عبر الإنترنت. كان لدى المتعلمين الذين يواجهون درجة عالية من العوائق أمام التعلم الفعال عبر الإنترنت المزيد من الاحتياجات عند استخدام التعلم عبر الإنترنت. علاوة على ذلك ، تم اكتشاف علاقة إحصائية بين التحديات والاحتياجات والمواقف تجاه التكنولوجيا والتعلم عبر الإنترنت.

كلمات مفتاحية: المعوقات ، كوفيد -19 ، الاحتياجات، تعليم اللغة عبر الانترنت، فلسطين.

Introduction and theoretical framework

Historically, the pandemic COVID-19 had an enormous impact on the educational process (UNESCO, 2020). Since March 2020, worldwide educational institutions including Palestine have been experiencing this change in education from traditional to online teaching and learning (Affouneh, Salha, & Khlaif, 2020; Ahmad, & Zabadi, 2020). With the outbreak of COVID-19, countries imposed school and university lockdowns (UNESCO, 2020). This widespread phenomenon has necessitated lockdowns in different aspects of life, such as educational institutions and physical distancing (UNESCO, 2020). This has been seen as a huge challenge to the education systems (Daniel, 2020). According to UNESCO, a huge number of learners in many countries have been affected by the closure of educational institutions. The lockdown of schools and campuses has impacted a massive number of students, estimated to be 1.5 billion in approximately 165 nations. Consequently, schools and universities in some way or another have changed the mode of instruction to online learning (Osman, 2020). Universities and government schools have provided alternatives to keep learners in touch and continue their education from home, physically distancing using various communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Classrooms, and Google Meet. Some universities which use the blended learning mode implemented Learning Management Systems such as the Moodle. Baker (2020) stated that the pandemic has profoundly changed education for the better. The sector has remained consistent and resistant to change throughout history. Students can now access Google's huge knowledge, which is far more than that of any single teacher, with just a few finger clicks. A recent analysis by the European Commission bears out this observation on the impact of the pandemic and the inherent opportunities for innovation if digital approaches and resources are used in meaningful ways. This is summarized in the recently published Digital Education Action Plan for Europe.

The COVID-19 outbreak has created a large-scale and very sudden use of ICT used in learning practices (Alsoufi, et al., 2020; Bao, 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Sahin & Shelley, 2020; Yang, 2020).

Students and teachers implementation of the Microsoft Teams in Palestine

Many challenges exist for developing countries to implement e-learning, including technological and infrastructural constraints, a lack of suitable ICT equipment and internet connectivity, a lack of finance, and, in some circumstances, reluctance to change (Almaiah et al., 2020; Subedi et al., 2020). As a result, e-learning in underdeveloped nations must be properly constructed to account for and overcome these obstacles (Hoq, 2020). Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, schools all across the world including Palestine were forced to close (Engzell et al., 2021; Onyema, 2020). School closures in Palestine pushed the educational system to fast convert from traditional face-to-face teaching methods to remote instruction, which many teachers, parents, and students had never experienced. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoE&HE) in Palestine hosted a five-day training session called "Distance Learning Design Course" in September 2020, with the goal of equipping teachers with e-learning capabilities. Teachers were introduced to the major digital platform, the Microsoft Teams application in the Office 365 package, as a means of digitally connecting all MoE&HE teachers, staff, and students during the training. Each person has their own account, which they can access and utilise for educational purposes. The Technology and Supervision Department of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education was entrusted with offering Microsoft Teams training to TVET supervisors, who were then responsible for educating Information Technology teachers in secondary schools. Following their training, the IT teachers taught additional technical disciplines to the rest of their school's teachers (Dweikat & Zyoud, 2021).

As schools transition to a remote learning environment in Palestine, students started learning via Teams which can include an online classroom that collaborates interactive, face-to-face conversations, tasks, files, and debates on a single platform available on a mobile device, tablet, laptop, or browser. The MoE&HE produced a guide to basic principles for schools and IT to keep Teams working smoothly so that students and teachers may begin

communicating online as soon as possible. When Teams are formed, after Microsoft Teams training, educators and staff have the ability to create their own Team classes, add specific students, share lessons, generate assignments, connect in real-time via internet; grade and mark work, and provide individualised feedback all from one central location (Bsharat & Behak, 2020). Teams in remote learning can be more effective and successful if the government can provide fast development and preparation, enough information technology training for instructors, device availability, internet accessibility, and additional support for low-income families. As a result, school officials and decision-makers should think about making modifications that will help to better the current reality of virtual learning.

Integrating Technology in Education

In periods of the pandemic breakout, technologies on which most of the web learning depends have greatly "lobbed" high, distance educational environments (Chiemeke & Imafidor, 2020; Mahandeet al., 2021; Recent al., 2020). Distance learning is an approach where learners receive their education at a distance out of campus and it depends on autonomous learning, with some guidance (Natarajan, 2005). According to Napaporn (2014), the term distance learning could include a variety of tools such as interactive DVD-ROMs, audiotapes, videotaped lectures, and lectures delivered to learners via mail. One of the important advantages of online learning is learners' access to knowledge from anywhere. The online learning mode saves time since learners and teachers do not have to physically meet and they do not have to be together on time as well. These days, internet services allow online and distance learning to occur in a synchronous way (Doug, 2002). Teachers can send recorded lessons and lectures to Google Classroom to reach students who cannot attend classes as a result of problems in time and space (Napaporn, 2014) or pandemics, such as the crisis of COVID-19.

Online education is becoming more popular and effective because of the very obvious advantages to the universities including the increasing number of enrollments, development of students' technical skills,

overcoming the problem of the overcrowded classrooms, cost reduction, improving retention and graduation rates by allowing students to work at their own pace and learning style (Palvia et al. 2018). Despite these benefits, some barriers should be addressed.

The most frequently mentioned barriers in literature can be summarized under eight headings: social interaction; issues related to administration; students' motivation; technical problems and skills; skills connected to academic matters; technical abilities; study time and support; expense and internet access (Almaiah et al., 2020; Azzahra, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Fabito et al., 2020; Ilias et al., 2020; Napaporn, 2014). There are other online and distance learning problems related to system complexity and technical issues, administration, instructional methods, and students (Almanthari et al., 2020).

Vaidya (2011) found out that if instructors do not prepare their online courses properly, the results expected from distance learning could be poor. Basilaia & Kvavadze, (2020) studied 950 students who learn online through Google Meet and confirmed that this transition to online learning and teaching gained experience and success which can be implemented in the future. However, Schmidt and Gallegos (2001) advocated online and distance learning is not fit everywhere for everyone. Learners' needs should be self-motivated and self-directed there should be interaction with teachers and classmates in the classroom. Because sharing ideas can aid understanding of course material, course designers should consider the demands of online learners and have a better grasp of the target demographic. Also, academic institutions have a greater need to update their curriculum, and the use of effective learning methods and tactics should be prioritized (Pace, Pettit, & Barker, 2020; Schmidt and Gallegos, 2001; Toquero, 2020). When kids are self-isolated at home, they encounter obstacles such as a lack of self-discipline, positive learning attitudes, adequate learning surroundings, and appropriate learning resources (Bao, 2020). In addition, assessing the demands of online learners would predict success. The focus of a needs assessment should be on highlighting issues in outputs and prioritizing them for resolution. It is one of the most essential

investigative instruments that educational institutions employ to find learners' needs, gaps, and undiscovered areas of the system, as well as other activities (Kahnet al., 2011; Ying & Yang, 2017). Flowers (2001) pointed out that those involving needs assessment as a part of the online education process will reflect on the decisions undertaken by the stakeholders (e.g., faculty, administrators, and students). Distance or online education is a good alternative to a traditional system, especially during pandemic lockdowns; still, some barriers and needs should be considered when applying online and distance learning methods to succeed in this hard time (Batez, 2021). Students were polled on their preferences for e-learning components, internet tools, and video streaming. These were the highest in rank, according to the results. Mobile technology and instructional theories, on the other hand, were ranked last. A T-Test indicated no significant associations between gender and the need to master e-learning components (Azimi, 2014; Ebner et al., 2020).

E-learning is a web-based system that uses digital technologies and various types of educational materials to provide students with a personalized, learner-centered, open, engaging, and interactive learning environment that supports and enhances learning processes. Online learning can be convenient for learners, flexible, and accessible. Learners are free to learn at their own pace (Mendez, & Nagles, 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2019). Additionally, online or distance education costs might be less than face-to-face or traditional education (Distance Learning Plan, 2013, cited in Napaporn, 2014). All of this has a major impact on the field of education and training. The pace of change is high and accelerating. This digital learning universe will link technology and education but, more importantly, link society to wider socio-economic trends and structural emergencies in an organic way. This is recognized by the European Union Digital Education Action Plan for 2020. Technology is rapidly converting the globe reshaping aspects of peoples' lives, work, and education (Dwivediet al., 2020).

Like other aspects and sectors, training and educational systems are rapidly changing (Valeeva & Kalimullin, 2021). According to Jena (2020), the properly planned and designed implementation of digital technologies

for teaching and learning may give positive aspects such as openness, flexibility, personalization, access to a more diverse pool of learners, and the opportunity for more engaged and interactive forms of cooperation and communication.

The Context of Teaching English and Integrating Technology

Ultimately, English classes in Palestine aim to ensure that students develop basic proficiency in the target language, so that they can communicate orally and in writing in context- specific English, understand foreign languages, and create context-specific English (Alquds Open University, 2009).

In general, this goal is not achieved. There is a continuing dissatisfaction with the overall performance and proficiency of students in the English language and students' inability to communicate using English appropriately in real-life situations. The results of the studies and research conducted to identify the problem argue that the educational curricula and the learning outcomes are unsatisfactory concerning the capacity building of English as an academic language (Barri, 2017; Dweikat, 2016; Ramahi et al, 2016; 2015; Abou Jalal, 2015; Palestinian National Authority, 2015; Dajani, 2014). They attribute the challenges that teaching English faces to some factors, including poor outdated curricula, missing modern learning spaces, and lack of professional educators in TEFL to integrate educational technology (MoEHE, 2015; Rixon, 2013) the low quality of training due to a lack of technology and unappealing materials, as well as a lack of motivation (Abu Shehadeh & Dwaik, 2013; Bakeer, 2018). In addition, EFL teachers' traditional teaching practices fail to keep students' interests alive, or to keep their cognitive development stable and sustainable (Bakeer, 2018).

Integrating technology into education was one of the solutions suggested to improve students' linguistic competencies and develop 21st-century skills and lifelong learning, (Bakeer, 2019). In Palestine, schools were forced to utilize elearning and blended learning methods due to strict social distancing measures.

Both the assessment process and education in Palestine had to adapt to this change, as in other countries, using different Learning Management Systems known to them, but not experienced in. As a result, academics and students have faced various obstacles (UNESCO, 2020), such as a lack of possibilities to support teachers in better-using technology in remote teaching, or teachers being unprepared to deal with the abrupt transition in educational delivery as a result of COVID-19. They haven't been able to learn new ways to teach children how to communicate more effectively, think creatively, and work together more effectively.

In addition, there are shortcomings in well-prepared flexible curricula to be accessed online to ensure the quality of learning.

The above studies highlight the need to find practical solutions to overcome the barriers to teaching English. Integrating technology, learners' needs and attitudes, and flexible curricula are important elements to keep in mind when planning for the change. In Palestine, we observed this interest - discussions with teachers over time indicated that using different learning management systems in education can be challenging at times.

This prompted researchers to investigate the barriers, needs, and attitudes of learners towards the use of these learning effectively online.

Method

Questions of the study

In our study, we addressed the following five research questions:

- 1) According to students in government schools, what are the most common barriers to using online learning?
- 2) What needs do students in state schools indicate to integrate online learning into education?
- 3) What are students' attitudes towards online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in state schools in Palestine?
- 4) Are there significant differences in state school students' views of the barriers, needs, and attitudes towards English language learning online due to gender variables?

- 5) Is there a significant relationship between the learners' attitudes towards the English language online, barriers, and needs?

Purposes of the study

The study aimed to:

1. highlight barriers and needs those learners to face when studying EFL through different learning effectively online,
2. compare students' barriers and needs as related to gender,
3. investigate the relationship between learners' attitudes towards studying EFL online, barriers, and needs to online learning.

Research Instrument

In this ex post facto research, a quantitative methodology was used to collect data. Before being delivered to the selected group of respondents, the researchers designed a five-point Likert questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire collected personal data from the respondents who were asked to complete their gender and place of living. The second part of the questionnaire was created expressly to address the study's goals in terms of instructor attitudes on the barriers, needs, and attitudes towards different learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic in state (governmental) schools in Palestine. Our research group collected all the items based on the previous studies' literature review and decided on including a questionnaire that consists of four sections of 30 items. The first domain measured challenges that students face when learning online (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). The second domain measured what students need when they go online to learn (10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20). The third domain measured students' attitudes towards online EL Learning during COVID 19 Pandemic. The participants rated the questionnaire items from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*.

Also, the questionnaire was handed to four experts from Palestine. All of their suggestions were taken into consideration. For example, they suggested dividing the questionnaire into domains such as needs, barriers, and attitudes.

We checked the reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach Alpha (.972-.891) (Cronbach, 1951). This is higher than the recommended reliability value of 0.7 (Pallant, 2013).

Data analysis

Computed data indicated that 1180 participants responded to the distributed questionnaires and completed them fully. The researchers analyzed the responses of the participants using (SPSS) to provide answers to the study's questions. To do descriptive statistical analysis, we employed means, frequencies, standard deviations, t-tests, and One-Way ANOVA for Independent Samples.

The participants in the current study were 423 males and 757 female governmental school learners (N=1180) in Palestine formed the subjects for this research study. The researchers used a stratified random sampling technique. The researchers distributed 1180 questionnaires and collected them all with students' responses. The 726 of the participants live in the city, 438 live in the countryside, and 16 live in camps.

Results

The data were analyzed in light of the research questions, and the following findings were discovered:

The most common barriers to online learning Students were asked about the most common barriers to learning effectively online in Palestine. Means and standard deviations were determined to explain this inquiry, table1 shows the results.

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations related to the most frequent barriers facing the use of learning online during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The most frequent barriers facing learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic		Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Students' Responses
1	Administrative issues	3.72	0.91	High
2	Social Interactions	3.64	0.84	Medium
3	Academic skills	3.56	1.08	Medium

4	Technical skills	3.11	0.95	Medium
5	Learner Motivation	3.68	0.75	High
6	Time and support for studies	3.63	0.85	Medium
7	Cost and access to the Internet	3.80	0.82	High
8	Technical problems	3.74	0.76	High
9	Total	3.61	0.70	Medium

With a total score, (of 3.61), the barriers to learning effectively online during the COVID-19 pandemic are medium as Table 1 shows. This implies that when adopting learning online in education in Palestine, pupils in government schools encounter various problems which are mostly related to the infrastructure in the education system. These problems also make students unable to attend classes in full. As Table1 shows, these obstacles are administrative issues; some of them are related to learners' motivation. Other problems are connected to time and support for studies and technical problems. These barriers which exist in the literature discussed above concur with the barriers in the studies which were conducted by (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, & Althunibat, 2020; Al-Qassem & Qamhawi, 2021; Azzahra, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Fabito, Trillanes, & Sarmiento, 2020; Ilias et al., 2020; and Subaih et al, 2021; Van & Thi, 2021). Results also showed that the highest mean for the most frequent barrier (3.80) was given to the variable 'Cost and access to the Internet' which is considered a high level of response. This is because of the difficult financial conditions Palestinians face during the COVID 19 pandemic (Hamad, 2021; Hussein et al., 2020). This result does not concur with the above studies. The following degree was given to the variable 'Technical skills and problems' with a medium degree mean (3.74). This obstacle is consistent with obstacles discussed in studies by Akuratiya and Meddage (2020) and Dhawan (2020). The third highest mean (3.72) was given to the variable 'Administrative issues'. Also, the "Cost and access to the Internet" barriers mean is (3.80). This is because of the uncertainties the Palestinian economy goes through. Another challenge is 'Technical problems' such as poor internet connectivity as a result of occupation imposing restrictions. Occupation does not allow Palestinians to buy high internet connectivity (Cristiano, 2019). "Learners' motivation" is another problem that is high

with a mean (of 3.68). Sustaining learners' motivation and engagement is not an easy task for teachers in online courses. More specifically, teachers in Palestine are not familiar with the technological techniques to get their learners engaged in the process. This result is consistent with (Gustiani, 2020; Hung et.al, 2010). As their first experience in online education, teachers and administrators are keen to make the process successful. This justifies the lower means of the “social interactions” domain and “academic skills” domain. It is clear from the table above that the mean of “technical skills” challenge is medium which suggests that students as digital natives do not lack a lot of technical skills and consequently, do not feel such technostress using technology (Mokh et al., 2021). However, some studies for instance Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) suggested developing tools for authentic assessments and timely feedback. Such a result is also consistent with the results of (Almanthari et. al., 2020). In a nutshell, barriers in the previous studies such as internet access, technical competence, insufficient support, inadequate training, and limited resources were all mentioned as factors that can affect the success of learning online (Regmi & Jones, 2020).

Students' needs

We asked students to show their needs when learning online. This is the second question the study tried to answer. Means and standard deviations were estimated to show their needs. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations of how school students perceive their needs to integrate the learning effectively online in education

	Needs to integrate online learning into education effectively	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Students' Responses
1	Sufficient school facilities for online learning	3.67	1.13	Medium
2	Self-study handbook for online learners	4.01	0.88	High
3	Workshops for online learners	4.09	0.79	High
4	Simplifying the process of online learning	4.02	0.83	High
5	Improvement of the system's attractiveness	4.10	0.78	High

6	High-speed connectivity	4.14	0.86	High
7	Flexible schedule	4.35	0.65	High
8	Ethics of online learning	4.38	0.76	High
9	Adequate communication with parents to coordinate curriculum-aligned learning	4.17	0.72	High
10	Students need technical skills using technology	4.04	0.92	High
	Total	4.10	0.60	High

Table 2 presents that the total score of students' needs is generally high ($M=4.10$). This signifies that students generally need a lot of requirements when going online to learn. For example, students need 'Ethics of online learning'; 'Flexible schedule'; 'High-speed connectivity'. These needs are consistent with the results of (Rudd & Rudd, 2014). Mulyanti et al. (2020) examined students' needs and found students need an internet network to access resources and sufficient devices and facilities. However, 'Sufficient school facilities for online learning need to be scored as medium ($M=3.67$). During the closure of schools teachers and students were using their appliances and home access to the internet. Students were more in need of the other items than 'school facilities'. Mokh et al. (2021) confirmed such needs. There is a larger need for schools to develop flexible curricula and make them more responsive to students' learning requirements outside of traditional classrooms. Research revealed a need for models to assist in the current changes in education. Moreover, a country such as Palestine needs institutional digital transformation; the design of personalized online learning models; the design of an online learning model that reduces the workload on instructors; and the redesign of the learning process. Shawaqfeh (2020) found the same results related to students' needs for more training on ICT. The results of Table 2 is consistent with (Al-Nofaie, 2020; Ahmad & Zabadi, 2020; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Agustina & Cheng, 2020; Baloran & Hernan, 2021; Destianingsih & Satria, 2020; Packet al., 2020; Schmidt & Gallegos, 2001; Toquero, 2020).

Students' attitudes towards online learning

We asked students about their attitudes towards EFL learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in state schools in Palestine. The following table displays means and standard deviations.

Table 3 Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Attitudes towards Online EL Learning during COVID 19 Pandemic

	Students' attitudes toward learning English online during COVID 19 pandemic	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Students' Responses
1	I am interested in studying English from different digital resources.	4.02	1.13	High
2	I think that learning English online promotes my language skills.	4.04	0.88	High
3	Using digital materials provided by the teacher makes learning English more efficient.	3.73	0.79	High
4	The available digital tools allowed me to communicate with my classmates to do tasks.	3.53	0.83	Medium
5	I am positive about e-learning because I get immediate feedback.	3.56	0.78	Medium
6	E-learning provides an enjoyable learning environment for learning English.	3.89	0.86	High
7	I would prefer to have some English classes online, with face-to-face classes in the classroom.	4.13	0.65	High
8	Online learning of English is effective for me when there are no distractions.	3.56	0.67	Medium
9	Online learning helps me share information, thoughts, and ideas through social network environments such as Facebook, What's App, Messenger...etc.	3.45	1.19	Medium
10	E-learning is not efficient as a learning method if not supported by face-to-face lectures.	3.78	1.20	High
11	Overall, I prefer e-learning and I believe that it is better than the traditional method during the closure when learning English.	3.61	1.19	Medium
	Total	3.75	0.75	High

Table 3 shows that during the COVID 19 pandemic, the total mean for students' attitudes toward online learning was high ($M=3.75$) and the standard deviation was (0.75). In items 7 and 11, students expressed positive attitudes and preference for combining both online and face-to-face learning *I would prefer to have some English classes online, with face-to-face classes in the classroom*, ($M=4.13$, SD 0.65). Students in Palestine have never experienced learning languages online (Aydin, 2014; Gulbinskienė et al., 2017; Hamad, 2021) before the pandemic so they believe that e-learning enhances their language learning experiences. This is clear in item 2 ($M=4.04$, $SD=0.88$). Moreover, students were interested in studying from different resources ($M= 4.02$; $SD=0.86$). The result is consistent with (Erarslan, 2021). When experiencing online learning, students indicated that different social networks help them share information, thoughts, and ideas this concur with (Almekhlafy, 2020). When students were asked to tell their attitudes towards online digital learning materials, the effectiveness of online learning in promoting language skills, and the learning environment, they preferred such a mode of learning. However, when we asked them about their attitudes towards the effectiveness of online learning as a method of learning alone, they preferred to blend with face-to-face. This conclusion is consistent with (Hussein et al., 2020).

Barriers, needs, attitudes, and gender

We asked learners about their views of the barriers, needs, and attitudes toward English language learning online as related to gender variables.

The t-Test for Independent Samples was employed to answer this question, and the findings are shown in table 4.

Table 4 T-test for Independent Samples of the Students' Views of the Barriers, Needs, and Attitudes due to Gender Variable

Domain	Gender	N	Means	St. Dev.	t-value	Sig*
Barriers	Male	423	3.59	0.85	0.659	0.510
	Female	757	3.62	0.60		
Needs	Male	423	3.95	0.67	6.392	0.000
	Female	757	4.18	0.54		
Attitudes	Male	423	4.03	0.79	9.765	0.000
	Female	757	3.60	0.69		

Note. At the 0.05 level, there isn't evidence supported by the data that means are the same. Thus, these means are more likely to be different.

The results revealed that there are no significant gender differences in students' attitudes towards the barriers to learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic because males' attitudes were steadier, whereas females were more engaged. Because of their psychological nature, females are more eager to attend electronic lectures on a regular basis, as well as more dedicated to regulations, laws, and instructions, and more meticulous in imposing penalty instructions. Both male and female students face challenges and those challenges justify the high level of their needs. Moreover, there is a substantial gender difference in students' attitudes on the need to learn online in language education in favor of females. Female students have stronger self-regulation, and are more perseverant, and engaged (Richardson & Woodle, 2003) than males (Alghamdi et al., 2020), which also justifies their significant positive attitudes towards online learning. This result concurs with (Chung, 2020; Khan et al., 202; Korlat et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2021; Nistor, 2013; Reinhart et al., 2021; Shawaqfeh et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021; Walia et al., 2019; Yasmin, 2022; Yawson & Yamoah, 2021).

Learners' attitudes towards English language learning online, barriers, and needs

We asked learners about their attitudes toward English language learning online, barriers, and needs. The r-value was calculated using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, which measures the statistical relationship between barriers and needs. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 *Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of the Barriers and the Needs to Learning Online during COVID-19*

Variables		(r) value	Sig*
Barriers	Needs	0.565	0.000

Note. At the 0.05 level, there isn't evidence supported by the data that means are the same. Thus, these means are more likely to be different.

Table 7 shows that Pearson's Correlation Coefficient value is (0.565) and the significant level is (0.000). This result suggests an intermediate relationship between the two variables the barriers to using online learning and the students' needs in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results above revealed that students regardless of their gender encountered many barriers when they used online learning. The results are consistent with those (Barteit et al., 2020; Baticulon et al., 2021; Bsharat et al. 2022; and Regmi & Jones, 2020). Barriers to using online learning and the attitudes toward learning English online during the COVID-19 pandemic are presented in table 8.

Table 8 *Pearson's Correlation Coefficient between the Variables Barriers to adopting learning English online and the Students' Attitudes towards Learning English Online during COVID-19 Pandemic*

Variables		(r) value	Sig*
Barriers	Attitudes	0.348	0.000

Note. At the 0.05 level, there isn't evidence supported by the data that means are the same. Thus, these means are more likely to be different.

Table 8 indicates a significant relationship between the barriers t and students' attitudes towards learning English online. Students believe that barriers could improve or lower their attitudes towards learning English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such result concurs with Kaharuddin (2020), Sinaga and Pustika (2021). In a very close context, Al-Salman and Haider's (2021) in their study concluded that students' online experience changed their attitudes towards learning online positively. We tried to identify the need when adopting learning English online and students' attitudes toward online learning. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 9 *Pearson's Correlation Coefficient between the Variables Needs to adopt learning English online and the Students' Attitudes towards Learning English Online during COVID-19 Pandemic*

Variables	(r) value	Sig*
Needs Attitudes	0.128	0.000

Note. At the 0.05 level, there isn't evidence supported by the data that means are the same. Thus, these means are more likely to be different.

Table 9 indicates that Pearson's Correlation Coefficient value is (0.128) and the significant level is (0.000). This result suggests a significant relationship between the needs of students to use online learning and students' attitudes towards online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid development of technological tools and the availability of the internet and social networking changed the way people live work and operate (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Rapanta, 2020; Noles, 2021). In a globally competitive educational system, there has been considerable change in the dynamics between technology, pedagogy, and society, in the last two decades to evolve a flexible lifestyle equipped for modernity. More and more technological tools are replacing old teaching methods and strategies in higher education. However, before the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning in Palestine had been rarely used due to the perception that it is not an effective learning approach (Shraim, 2012). In March 2020, over 1.5 billion students globally were out of school as preventative measures for the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, Palestine closed their doors to traditional school-based learning, with 1.3 million students disrupted, (UNESCO, 2020a). Higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Palestine were tested when they resorted to e-learning learning at the outbreak of COVID-19 which forced a sudden shutdown of all the educational institutions. This sudden shift to online education tested the readiness of educational institutions to complete education remotely. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders and educators searched for rapid development of emergency online education strategies and plans that have not been developed in advance (Rush, 2016) as it has been noticed that, in

developing countries, most countries were not prepared to shift students online. Higher educational institutions in Palestine were tested when they resorted to e-learning and mobile learning at the outbreak of COVID-19 which forced a sudden shutdown of all the educational institutions. The current study pointed out some insufficient practices where HEIs are not equipped with digital resources to replace face-to-face learning. Stakeholders and educators are to develop prior plans to transition online for supplementary education and before any other emergencies arise .In the case of COVID-19, it appears that few countries were prepared to transition students online, in particular developing countries, The results indicate that participants identified that the information technologies such as social media, mobile devices, and online discussion sessions are useful for promoting integration and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic in Palestine as well as design and delivery of educational materials. The findings also identify various challenges including the widening of the learning digital gap and an increasingly negative attitude towards online learning. This research explores the effectiveness of e-learning in reaching almost all students and evaluating their performance despite public isolation procedures, and on the other hand, it points out some insufficient practices where HEIs are not equipped with digital resources to replace face-to-face learning.

Conclusions

Numerous studies celebrated the tremendous favorable impact of online learning in the Palestinian context. However, these studies did not take into consideration prior technical training of students. Expertise and training in online learning context is a key factor in maintaining the aspired goals of the educational process. This research is a silver spot in highlighting students' minimum level of motivation to take part in online learning situations which is caused by lack of basic knowledge in active interaction with digital designed interactive educational situations.

To reach students remotely, educational institutions were forced to shift their teaching to e-learning and blended learning modes as a result of

strict social distancing measures and school closures. The lack of forewarning for this shift put the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Palestine commitment to providing high-quality education to students to the test. The results of the study indicate that although access to technology was a recommendation made by several researchers, state school students in Palestine face challenges such as barriers to integrate online learning into education effectively in learning English. Students perceive some need to integrate the different online ICT tools in education (Ali, 2020). However, foreign language students had positive attitudes toward reaching them remotely online rather than through self-study courses. This study highlighted that students in Palestine are willing to take part in learning online, especially English language, but they still lack the technical skills and adequate financial support to point tools or even consistent internet connections to interact actively in the access of learning. Financial factors and technological tools are striking examples of constrains that hinder making the educational process successful.

A critical issue is the importance of context and the need to integrate policy, pedagogy, and methodology in terms of the underlying social needs and political and economic realities of a changing Palestine. Learning, therefore, needs to be located in a milieu of anticipated crisis, uncertainty, and response to the corrosive impact of austerity and growing inequalities in the wider socio-economic system (Bruce 2019). Unaltered educational systems cannot produce the innovative changed mindsets now required. Digital learning can prosper if linked to trust, open communications, and adaptable innovation. Training is a process that both response to and manages change. Competence does not exist in a vacuum. Vision and collaboration underline quality digital learning that values individual requirements and meets real learning needs. The findings also show that stakeholders' and teachers' experience and lessons learned during the COVID-19 shutdown could be considered as a roadmap for sustained, long-term planned systematic transition to online learning as a supplement to the traditional classroom methods, not as a replacement for them. In addition,

the gained skills and knowledge could lead to real solutions for online learning.

Stakeholders and educators are to develop prior plans to transition online for supplementary education and before any other emergencies arise (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Rapanta, 2020). In the case of COVID-19, it appears that few countries were prepared for this dramatic shift online, in particular developing countries. This paper presents practices adopted by educational institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these institutions used technology to deliver learning outside of traditional classrooms in informal settings. Lessons learned are crucial in understanding what changes are needed to shift to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. After schools are reopened, educators need to report the skills and information required to inform the practice of any critical situation that will disrupt learning again (Anderson, 2020; Leung, 2020). Lessons learned are also crucial in determining how to achieve quality education and achieving goals of providing instruction during emergencies and challenging times.

It is also crucial scholars postulate that many investigations, while informative, only provide information after schools are reopened (Epson 2015; Russell, 2016), which is unhelpful in informing the current situation and could also result in recall bias (Rainey, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to gather feedback about practices adopted which helps inform the current situation and provide formative data to support transition students online in the future (Rainey et al., 2016).

Recommendations

The researchers provided the following recommendations the based on the study findings:

1. Equip educational institutions with Learning effectively online needed for integrating technology into education.
2. Develop teachers' and students' technical skills to enable them to use different Learning effectively online effectively.

3. Adopt flexible curricula that reach students in difficult times and at their pace.
4. Have adequate communication with parents to coordinate curriculum-aligned learning
5. Clarify ethics of online learning in schools.
6. Implement innovative methods of teaching and appealing digital materials to be enjoyable to students.
7. Set up flexible schedules for students.

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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