

# Teaching English Online in the Times of Covid-19 at a Saudi University: Opportunities and Challenges

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## Abstract

During the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in the late 2020, online learning has become a coercive solution and a last resort, not just a luxurious option of learning style. The forced sudden transition from face-to-face educational system to online education is an unprecedented phenomenon that represented a challenge in itself, therefore, needed to be explored and studied thoroughly. This study, based on a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design, aims to explore the opportunities and challenges of teaching English online in the times of Covid-19 through surveying English language instructors in the context of a Saudi government university in the city of Jeddah in the Western Region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study utilised a survey approach using an adopted questionnaire to 41 instructors (23 males and 18 females). Analyses of the data indicated that the majority of the teachers were knowledgeable and experienced enough with the online platforms, however, they were overwhelmed with the unexpected and sudden transformation to the full mode online learning. Furthermore, a large number of the participants expressed their initial frustration trying to adjust to the full mode online system, however, they found ample opportunities for more teaching and learning flexibility with an autonomous learning provision for the students.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Online learning, Teaching English, Opportunities and challenges, Saudi Arabia, CALL, MALL

## 1. Introduction

Since the dawn of the wide-spread use of internet all over the world, there have been many trends of exploiting the internet of contemporary education realm in the digital age (Isaias et al., 2020). Whether this exploitation is implemented in an organized and structured practice or even in a random manner, and subject to personal or institutional educational goals, it is always considered as an addition to traditional learning methods. However, the vast majority of methods which teachers have been using in teaching and learning, have not seen any significant changes in the past two centuries (Collins & Halverson, 2018). As such, it is evidently clear that the era of digitisation and technology have both provided endless opportunities to implement invaluable transformations in our modern-day education via a plethora of constantly evolving and advanced learning management systems (LMSs) (Aldiab et al., 2019). An important and critical indication for such LMSs is the provision of opportunities for distance learners to utilise in their education (Cavus, 2015). If LMSs are to be perceived as a successful and viable education service delivery models, they should fulfil the minimum needs and outcomes of the teaching and learning in a parallel level with that of the traditional education, if not even exceeding such traditional education outcomes (Duin & Tham, 2020; Sutiah et al., 2020). Most importantly, the experiences and views of the instructors need to be gathered so that a framework of the best teaching and learning practices are generated and conducted in the online classrooms (Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2020).

Notwithstanding the previously aforementioned parameters and elements of online education, and with the global pandemic outbreak of Covid-19 in late 2020, online learning has become a coercive solution and a last resort with raised significant challenges, not just a luxurious option of learning style. This abrupt and forced sudden transition from face-to-face de facto educational system to the full mode online education is an unprecedented phenomenon that represents a challenge in itself and could be very problematic (Al-Bargi, 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020). Such challenges in higher education worldwide in particular and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have prompted researchers to explore solutions beyond the boundaries and limitations of face-to-face educational systems. Furthermore, it was equally crucial to explore opportunities which were experienced with the big momentum of full mode online learning from the viewpoints of teachers themselves.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the designation of this infection and characterising it as a global pandemic, the education systems in the whole world was almost destined to entirely move into complete shutdown. It was inevitable for the policy makers in the educational field in Saudi Arabia to make the decision on developing an online studying environment via digital learning management systems, by making it an affective and attainable learning which was made with an immediate transition in education and starting distance learning in a very short time. These abrupt and sudden changes represented a challenge for both teachers and learners but was eventually considered and perceived as successfully conducted process. Throughout this transition and later on, implementation of the full mode online teaching and learning, several emerging challenges as well as opportunities were experienced by the

language teachers themselves where it was important to acquire their experiences in this research study. From several anecdotal observations and monitoring of numerous online lessons, it can be seen that issues relating to students' behavioural ethics as well as motivation and quality students' work and outcome were but few of the challenges that were experienced by a large number of teachers during their online teaching. However, very few studies have been conducted in the context of Saudi Arabia where a holistic overview of both, the advantages and disadvantages were thoroughly presented from the voices of those within the profession.

### *1.2 Purpose of the Study*

The rapid implementation of online learning systems could not possibly be done without challenges as well as opportunities which may not have been experienced before the covid-19 pandemic lockdown and full mode online learning. As such, the aim of this study is to explore these challenges from the instructors' point of view. Additionally, the study aims to discuss the opportunities that presented itself in that worldly chaotic situation where ample benefits could be attained from the impact of the positive side of full mode online learning. Therefore, the online education in the Saudi context during the outbreak of Covid-19 needs to be explored and studied thoroughly. There needs to be an authentic exploration of the perceptions and opinions of teachers of what they perceive as the positive aspects of online learning as well as the negative elements the surfaced during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown and the resultant full mode online teaching and learning process.

### *1.3 Research Questions*

Based on the designated and delineated background elements of this research study, the researcher aimed at addressing the following two research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by the Saudi EFL instructors during the covid-19 pandemic outbreak and resultant transformation of education from onsite to complete online teaching and learning mode?
2. What opportunities does this pandemic provide to English language teaching (ELT) in the Saudi context as well as the wider global context?

### *1.4 Significance of the Study*

This major transition to online learning manifested itself in such a momentum that it gave us a great prospect to explore the potentials of online teaching and learning. It provided us with panoramic viewpoints of all the different aspects as well as an in-depth exploration of all possibilities and capabilities of the system. Studying such situations will result in a wider aspect of explorations that will enrich the field of education for future guided implementation of online teaching and learning. Furthermore, the contribution of this research study will allow teachers in the EFL context to relate to such experiences and encounters which EFL teacher participants in this research in Saudi Arabia have expressed about full mode online teaching and learning. The latter is necessitated by the fact that the majority of research into online learning dwells deep into the challenges and obstacles of this realm rather than explore

the possibilities and opportunities which lend itself once a comprehensive research is conducted.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Online Language Learning and Technology*

In their book on online communication in language learning and teaching, Lamy and Hampel (2007), debated that this phenomenon has been around for the last three decades. They discussed the major concepts of language learning and communication that is mediated by computer technology, while identifying the general theoretical foundations that had been used to shape the computer mediated language learning practices in the field. Lamy and Hampel (2007) clarified that the cognitivism and the socioculturalism theories of second language acquisition are the main informing frameworks in the field, with a continuous reconsideration of their principals in accordance with technology mediated language learning. Overviewing these theories and linking them to the principals of technology mediated education under practice, the authors came up with what they called ‘the three core concepts of education’. They claim that the core concepts are conditional for the success of the technologized language learning. These concepts are: mediation, which is facilitating the process of learning through the use of technology. The second concept is the technology literacy that should be gained by both teachers and learners. The third concept is the affordances of providing a computer-mediated learning situations in the different learning environments. While the quality of the educational process is due to the ease or difficulty with which technology is obtained by learners and the learning setting, the online pedagogy and teaching skills depends on the understanding of the previously mentioned core conditions. They examined afterwards the assessment tools used in technology mediated learning progress, as well as the tools of researching. As such, educational professional, regardless of their speciality or subject designation expertise, need to comprehend the overall elements of both challenges as well as opportunities offered to the learners in order to generate successful learning outcomes and met educational target. Serdyukov (2020) state that:

Online learning offers generous benefits for learners. Its main attraction, convenience, however, is causing a conflict between asynchronous and synchronous modes of learning which can lead to numerous adverse effects. The shift towards asynchronous at the expense of the synchronous practices are noticeable in some colleges which may deprive students of the two critical benefits of education, personal and social development, and cause deterioration of the learning outcomes (p. 1).

### *2.2 Online Language Teaching and Learning Principles and Indications*

In order to fully define online language teaching and learning, we must take a comprehensive overview of the literature published in this specialty, then we can go into deeper details to categorize definitions based on its educational characteristics. Being a very broad and complex field resulted in multiplicity of names and types, many of which could fall under the same category or have the same definition with minor change in details. For instance, online teaching and learning could be called; distance learning, CALL (computer assisted language

learning), e-learning, blended learning, mobile learning...etc. all of the above share a main quality which is the use of modern age technology in education. Cojocariu and Boghian (2014) explain it as “Most of the terms . . . have in common the ability to use a computer connected to a network, that offers the possibility to learn from anywhere, anytime, in any rhythm, with any means” (p.23). Technology has a huge characteristics value, this value on itself is the reason of integrating it in education. The educationally advantageous characteristics of technology are uncountable. One of the most important benefits is that it defies the barrier of time and place, technology contributes to the continuity of the education process, regardless of the difference in time and place in which both the teacher and the learner are located, as the learners can access educational materials via the Internet at any time they want, which makes it easy for them to schedule the time of his learning among his other life tasks. As these facilities make learning a continuous state in the lives of individuals who could be facing obstacles that deny them face to face learning. Seaman et al. (2018) defines distance learning as: “ Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously” (p. 11).’ Nevertheless, according to Doyumgaç et al. (2021): “ Online education is the most extensively used term to describe all information and communication technologies-based learning approaches” (p. 3). Therefore, online learning is the term that is going to be mainly used in this study.

### *2.3 Online Language Teaching and Learning in the Context of Saudi Arabia*

Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is given a great priority among the evolving projects of its future developmental vision. The ministry of education in Saudi is working continuously to upgrade its systems to keep pace with developed countries in its various segments and districts. Believing in the state that education is the best investment and that the educated individual is the basis of progress and advancement in every changing society that is open and welcoming to what is new. In a time of cognitive explosion and information revolution, modern technology has imposed itself on various fields, such as education and its new teaching and learning methods (RAOUFI et al., 2020). Therefore, Saudi Arabia did not hesitate to integrate technology into education in the best way possible that supports the existing educational system while introducing the developed technological methods of teaching and learning in both general and higher education sectors (Aldiab et al., 2019). Regardless of the slow growth of technological usage at the beginning, starting from 2006, there has been a major development in online and technology based learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Aljabre, 2012). This development occurred when some major Saudi universities, King Saud University (KSU), King Abdulaziz University (KAU), and King Faisal University (KFU), established new Deanships of e-learning and distance learning. Aljabre (2012) mentioned that their goal is utilize the latest technology in education, by means of providing online learning resources and access to the tools (virtual classes, online courses), in addition to students and faculties technology training. Moreover, in 2007, the ministry of higher education established The National Centre for E-learning and Distance Learning, which focuses on creating projects and programs that supports and facilitates

e-learning in Saudi (Alharbi, 2013). There is a long list of achievements made by this centre that cannot be enumerated, but to mention a few of them as summarized by Alharbi (2013);

- JUSUR; a learning management system that helps to register students in the portal, plan and schedule courses, deliver courses, track students' progress and issue reports of their performance, evaluate and test students.
- SANEED; a centre for support and counselling that provides educational, academic and advisory guidance to all beneficiaries of e-learning.
- Saudi Digital Library: a project that aims to cover the requirements of scientific research, empower competency and build a knowledge-based society, and to provide digital books and resources.
- MAKNAZ; an electronic national repository that helps to develop digital content, enrich the curricula, and to retrieve, reuse and share learning objects.

In 2011, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, approved the Council's decision regarding the establishment of the Saudi Electronic University (SEU). A Royal Decree was issued on the approval of the establishment of this university as a government educational institution that provides higher education and lifelong learning, and that it is an electronic complementary for the system of educational institutions under the supervision of the Council of Higher Education. The Saudi Electronic University provides a virtual learning environment based on information and communications technology, e-learning, and distance education to cope with the needs of comprehensive development and the labour market (Habib & Ramzan, 2020; Hadoussa, 2020). It was a pioneering idea aimed at allowing all those students with specific needs, or otherwise, preventing them from pursuing their tertiary education onsite or face-to-face, to have the opportunity to study their courses online (Aldiab et al., 2017). Although the inauguration of the SEU was a great opportunity for distance and online education, nearly all other tertiary education establishments in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and up to the covid-19 pandemic outbreak, remained either entirely delivering their teaching onsite (face-to-face) or, a mixture of onsite and online (but mainly onsite) where the online element of teaching and learning of this blended learning was merely a minor part of the courses taught at universities (Al-Bargi, 2021; Aldossary, 2021).

#### *2.4 Technology, Education in KSA and the Covid-19 Pandemic*

Having this solid foundation of technology integration in education helped a lot in facing the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak that crippled the world and enabled the ministry of education in KSA to make a rapid and immediate shift to a fully online learning system (Moawad, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic hit the education sector like all other sectors by surprise. The existence of a digital technology system already implemented by the ministry of higher education minimized the closing effects of universities and saved the academic year" (Abdulrahim & Mabrouk, 2020, p. 20). Complementary to its previous efforts, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia swiftly established virtual platforms called: 'Madrasati, IENtv, and Virtual Rawda' to handle the consequences of the global crisis which necessitate shutting down schools and transforming learning to distance education (Hassan, 2021).

### *2.5 Online Learning During COVID-19*

Most governments around the world had to temporarily close their educational institutions in order to limit the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic by enforcing full mode online learning and mandatory lockdown (Mishra et al., 2020). The abrupt shutdown and sudden transformation from onsite to full mode online education have had a big impact on the students as well as on teachers all over the world (García-Alberti et al., 2021; Martín-Sómer et al., 2021). Though few countries decided to have a partial shutdown and thus, closing schools in some regions but not others, the majority of the countries around the world mandated lockdown protocols and transformation from onsite to online education (Flores & Swennen, 2020). This unfortunate occurrence affected the education of millions of traditional learners. The UNESCO works to provide support to poor and developing countries to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures, particularly the impact on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and seeks to facilitate the continuity of education for all through distance learning. Schools' shutdown has a very critical social and economic impact on communities. UNESCO released a non-exhaustive list of some of the reasons why school closures are so harmful, and how it could affect our lives in all matters. I will mention the aspects related to learning and educational systems. Interruption of the learning process deprive learners from their opportunities for growth and development, and this disadvantage of closure is more severe for students from underprivileged groups, who have fewer educational opportunities outside of school (Syahputri et al., 2020). When schools close, parents are often asked to facilitate children's education at home, and they may face difficulty in performing this task especially for parents with limited education and resources. Lack of technological resources or poor internet connectivity is another barrier to continuous learning, especially for students from underprivileged families, which leads to unequal access to digital learning platforms. There is an expected increase of dropout rates, since it is challenging to ensure that children and youth will return to schools when they reopen and continue studying, especially when it comes to closing schools for a long period of time. As a contribution to the world's fight against this pandemic, UNESCO launched The Global Education Alliance, which is a proposal for cooperation and exchange to protect the rights of education during this unprecedented disturbance and its aftermath; the alliance brings together more than 140 members to ensure the continuity of learning, facilitation of electronic communication, and overcoming the barriers (Viju, 2021).

These exceptional events and unprecedented pandemic has been going on for less than two years and the literature is already getting rich in research that is revolving around the subject and tackling every aspect of it (Abdulrahim & Mabrouk, 2020; Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Allo, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Joshi et al., 2020; Lengkanawati et al., 2021; Olcott, 2020). Perhaps the most argumentative feature that differentiate between decades of using online education and the use of online education in the time of Covid-19 is that it is no longer just an option, it is now a necessity (Dhawan, 2020). Therefore, reluctance in transforming the teaching and learning process from in-person (onsite) to online education is not affordable. Educational institutions are required to make fast adjustments to the new situation and follow through with procedures of social distancing. They will be scrutinized and evaluated based on their

firm decision taking and successful shift making. It is not unlikely that there might be a lack of sustaining educational quality, but it is a sacrifice that nations are willing to take for the benefits of surviving the pandemic with the least possible losses. Nevertheless, it is the institutions' duty to manage this pitfall of the sudden transformation in education and overcome it through providing all potential means of success (Jiang et al., 2021).

Despite all the benefits that have been reported in the literature on the integration of technology into teaching and learning locally and internationally, and the support that educational institutions in Saudi Arabia have been provided with, there is still a slower pace for the integration of technologies in English language teaching. This study, along with previous work, aims to understand one of the stakeholders' perspectives on the insights of lessons learnt from Covid-19 to enhance the experiences of both teachers' and students' in English language Education within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and beyond.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

This research study utilized a survey research methodology where the data is collected by using a questionnaire.

#### *3.2 Data Collection Instruments*

The quantitative data collection instrument utilised was a 33-item custom designed on 5-point Likert scale consisting of three parts: Part 1: the demographic section, Part 2: EFL teachers' attitudes to online instruction, and Part 3: obstacles of implementing online instruction). The purpose of the questionnaire was that it was utilised to generate numerical data that can be transformed into usable statistics. As such, the numerical data was used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables that may provide answers to the research questions. It could be also used to and generalize results from a larger sample population (Nassaji, 2015). The questionnaire instrument used in this research was adapted from Dashtestani (2014) and reformed to answer research questions and to fit the circumstances of the research inquiry, since it was originally designed to investigate online learning in normal circumstance rather than Covid-19 specific conditions. Once the questionnaire was piloted and approved, the final form of the questionnaire consisted of the original three parts (demographic information, EFL teachers' attitudes to online instruction, obstacles of implementing online instruction). It contained of 33 items in total on a 5-point Likert scale that could be answered in approximately 10 minutes. Google forms have been used in designing the online form of the questionnaire for its practicality and ease of use and its familiarity among the participants in the Saudi context.

#### *3.3 Participants*

The participants are EFL instructors teaching in The English Language Institute (ELI) in King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The responses were gathered through a snowball sampling technique, the researcher contacted faculty members who, in their part, shared the online forum of the survey to other instructors. The respondents on the

questionnaire consisted of forty-one male and female instructors teaching English at a Saudi university with the advantage of number for the male instructors as represented in the table below.

### *3.4 Procedures and Ethical Considerations*

First, an approval was granted from the ELI in King Abdulaziz University administration to conduct this study in their context. Then, the questionnaire was distributed in an online form to the instructors and their participation was consensual and voluntary. The participants were ensured that their participation in the study is confidential, and all information is used for research purposes only. As well as a clarification of their right to participate anonymously. The responses were collected and analysed in a full semester's time span. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 24) was used to analyse the obtained data in this study p-value of 0 .05 was considered statistically significant. The program is used to clarify Frequency, percentage, to identify the personal data, awareness and obstacles faced the respondents. The Mean and standard deviation have been accomplished too. The figures preparation was conducted using Microsoft Excel 2010. The results are fully reported and discussed.

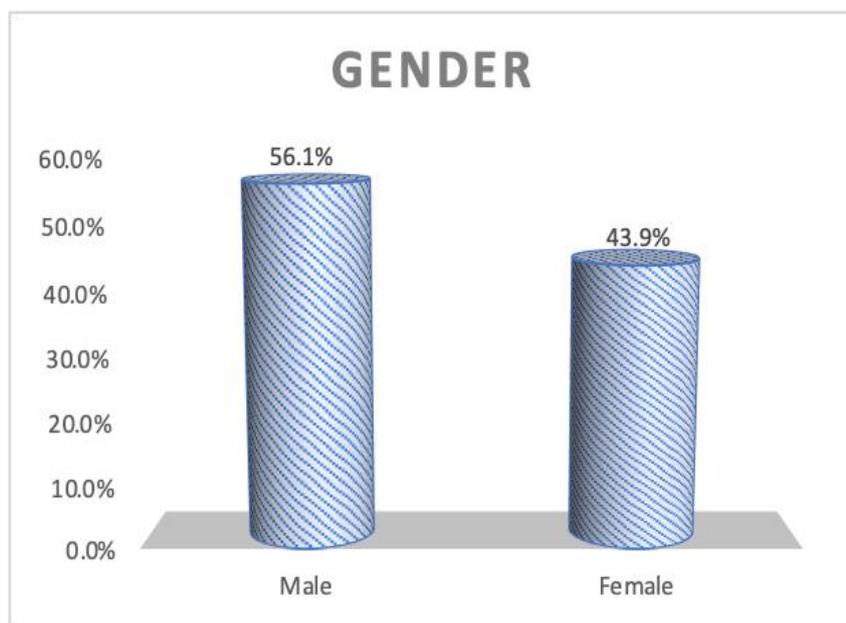


Figure 1. Participants' Gender

The other variable in the demographic scale is the scientific degree acquired by the participants, which indicates the quality of teaching and the level of their background knowledge of teaching methodologies. In the sample, teachers with master's degrees were the majority at 53.7%.

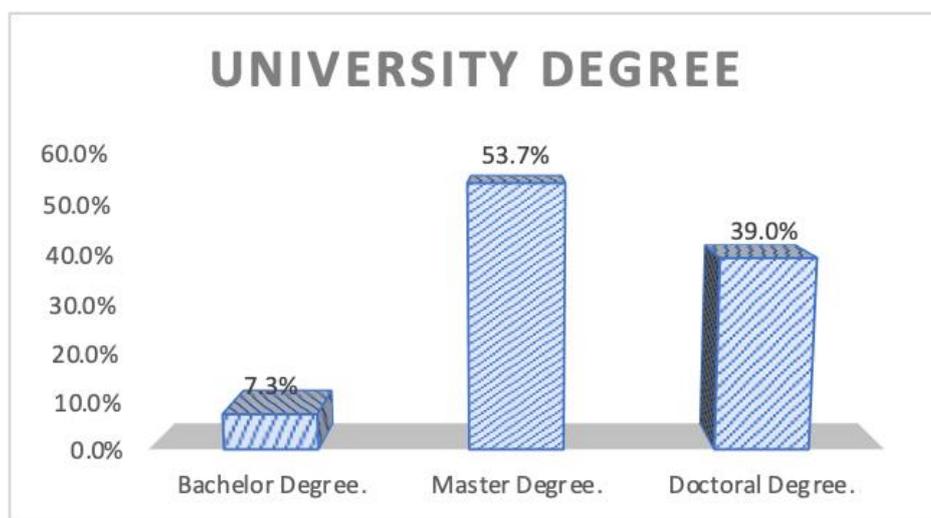


Figure 2. Participants' university degrees

The demographic data for the age variable shows that the majority of respondents were aged 30–39. They also have great teaching experience and a long history of using the computer and Internet which will be extensively referred to later in the discussion.

#### 4. Results and Data Analysis

Quantitative data are gathered by using a survey to attain an objective numerical representation of teachers' attitudes and experiences of online teaching during the pandemic. The questionnaire attempts to answer the first and the second research questions. The first question is: What are the challenges faced by Saudi EFL instructors during this pandemic? The second question is: What opportunities does this pandemic provide to English teaching? The questionnaire consisted of three sections that are reported here separately. The responses of the participants were uploaded into the SPSS and then each response was designated a numerical reflective value as follows: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5. Such designation was necessary so as to compute results obtained and for eliciting directions in the responses of the participants (Harpe, 2015).

##### 4.1 The First Section

This section inquired about the participants' demographics in an attempt to look into the relations between instructors' personal and professional traits and how it may have affected their responses. The demographic variables in this study are the gender, age, years of teaching EFL, years of using computers and Internet, and the instructors' university degree as represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information (n= 41)

Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	23	56.1*
Female	18	43.9
<b>Age</b>		
20 – 29 Yrs	2	4.9
30 – 39 Yrs	21	51.2*
40 - 49 Yrs	13	31.7
50 - 59 Yrs	5	12.2
<b>Years of teaching EFL</b>		
Less than 5.	8	19.5
5 – 10 years.	10	24.4
10 – 15 years.	13	31.7*
More than 15.	10	24.4
<b>Years of using computers and Internet</b>		
Less than 5.	2	4.9
5 - 10 years.	7	17.1
More than 10.	32	78.0*
<b>University degree</b>		
Bachelor's degree.	3	7.3
Master's degree.	22	53.7*
Doctoral Degree.	16	39.0

*\*indicates the highest percent*

Table 1 shows that most of respondents their age in (30 – 39 Yrs) 51.2%, while 40 - 49 Yrs, 50 - 59 Yrs, and 20 – 29 Yrs recorded 31.7%, 12.2%, and 4.9% respectively, nevertheless male represented the majority of the respondents 56.1% and female were 43.9%, most of respondents' Years of teaching EFL was 10 – 15 years 31.7%, however, 5 – 10 years, and

More than 15 accounted the same proportion 24.4% equally, 51.2% the lowest percent was for Less than 5. The vast majority of participants their Years of using computers and Internet was in group (More than 10) 78.0%, whilst 5 - 10 years, and less than 5 consecutives, forasmuch most of them their university degree was master's degree 53.7%, whereas Doctoral Degree, and Bachelor Degree scored 39.0%, and 7.3% in sequence.

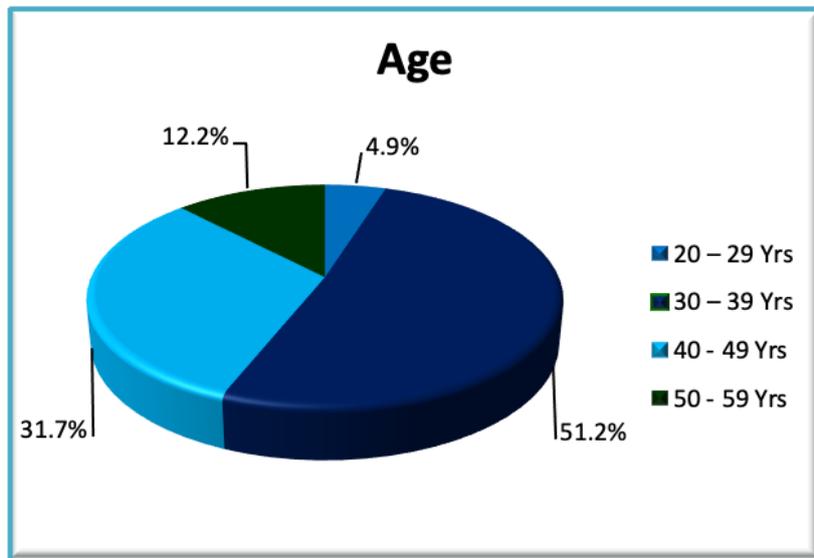


Figure 3. Age

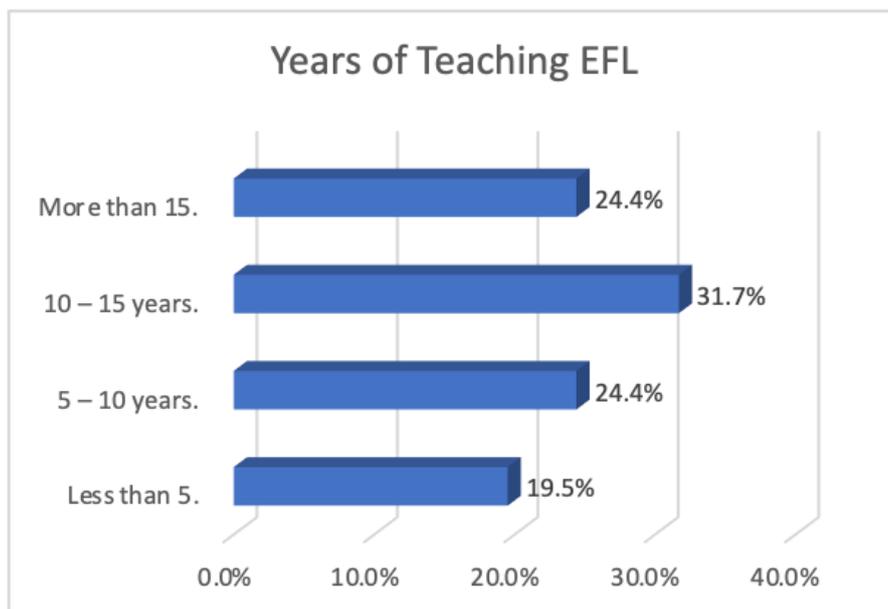


Figure 4. Years of teaching EFL

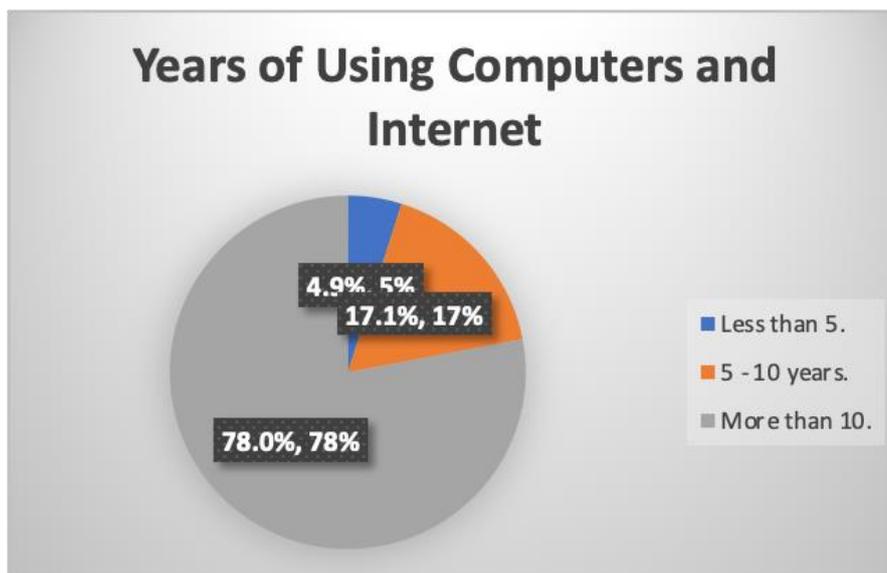


Figure 5. Years of using computers and Internet

#### 4.2 The Second Section

The second section of the questionnaire examined teachers' attitudes towards online teaching at the time of COVID-19. It contained 17 items that are answered objectively through a 5-point Likert scale, by which respondents specified their level of agreement to the statements in five points: (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Undecided; (4) Disagree; (5) Strongly Disagree. The participants' responses and level of agreement and disagreement to the statements are presented in Table 2, however, the mean and standard deviation of the teachers' attitudes towards online teaching at the time of COVID-19 is measured and presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Teachers' attitudes towards online teaching at the time of COVID-19 items (n=41)

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students were more autonomous in online EFL courses.	6(14.6%)	19(46.3%)	6(14.6%)	8(19.5%)	2(4.9%)
Online EFL teaching enhanced students' motivation.	2(4.9%)	10(24.4%)	7(17.1%)	14(34.1%)	8(19.5%)
Online EFL teaching was time efficient.	11(26.8%)	17(41.5%)	4(9.8%)	7(17.1%)	2(4.9%)
Authentic materials were used in online EFL teaching.	8(19.5%)	21(51.2%)	6(14.6%)	5(12.2%)	1(2.4%)
Learners could communicate more comfortably in online EFL courses.	7(17.1%)	16(39.0%)	5(12.2%)	11(26.8%)	2(4.9%)

Online EFL teaching promoted more learner-centered approaches to teaching	5(12.2%)	15(36.6%)	5(12.2%)	14(34.1%)	2(4.9%)
Online EFL classrooms were easily accessible to students	12(29.3%)	16(39.0%)	5(12.2%)	8(19.5%)	0(0.0%)
Multimedia-based materials could be used in online EFL teaching easily.	23(56.1%)	13(31.7%)	2(4.9%)	2(4.9%)	1(2.4%)
Various types of materials could be used in online EFL teaching.	9(22.0%)	23(56.1%)	4(9.8%)	5(12.2%)	0(0.0%)
Online EFL teaching was cost-effective	6(14.6%)	14(34.1%)	8(19.5%)	9(22.0%)	4(9.8%)
Online EFL courses promoted students' and teachers' technological competence	21(51.2%)	17(41. %5)	2(4.9%)	1(2.4%)	0(0.0%)
Online EFL teaching was in line with experiential approaches to learning	4(9.8%)	17(41.5%)	9(22.0%)	11(26.8%)	0(0.0%)
Online EFL teaching provided better equal opportunities for learners to learn English	4(9.8%)	10(24.4%)	11(26.8%)	16(39.0%)	0(0.0%)
Online EFL teaching promoted better collaboration among students	2(4.9%)	10(24.4%)	9(22.0%)	16(39.0%)	4(9.8%)
Various feedback could be provided for students in online EFL teaching	7(17.1%)	19(46.3%)	9(22.0%)	5(12.2%)	1(2.4%)
Online EFL teaching was easy to be implemented	9(22.0%)	19(46.3%)	5(12.2%)	8(19.5%)	0(0.0%)
Online EFL courses were more interactive than traditional courses	2(4.9%)	7(17.1%)	4(9.8%)	18(43.9%)	10(24.4%)

Table 2 shows that most of respondents agree that Students were more autonomous in online EFL courses 46.3%, while 34.1% disagree that online EFL teaching enhanced students' motivation, 41.5% agree that online EFL teaching was time-efficient, 51.2% agree that authentic materials were used in online EFL teaching, 39.0 %agree that learners could communicate more comfortably in online EFL courses, 36.6% agree that online EFL teaching promoted more learner-centred approaches to teaching, 39.0% agree that online EFL classrooms were easily accessible to students, that 56.1% strongly agree multimedia-based materials could be used in online EFL teaching easily, 56.1% agree that Various types of materials could be used in online EFL teaching, 34.1% agree that online EFL teaching was cost-effective, 41.5% agree that online EFL courses promoted students' and teachers' technological competence, 41.5% agree that online EFL teaching was in line with

experiential approaches to learning, 39.0% disagree that online EFL teaching provided better equal opportunities for learners to learn English, 39.0% disagree that online EFL teaching promoted better collaboration among students, 46.3% agree that Various feedback could be provided for students in online EFL teaching, 46.3% agree that online EFL teaching was easy to be implemented, and 43.9% disagree that online EFL courses were more interactive than traditional courses.

Table 3. Mean and Standard deviation of Teachers' attitudes towards online teaching at the time of COVID-19 items (n=41)

Items	Mean	Std.	Agreement degree	Rank
Students were more autonomous in online EFL courses.	3.46	1.12	Agree	9
Online EFL teaching enhanced students' motivation.	2.61	1.20	Disagree	16
Online EFL teaching was time efficient.	3.68	1.19	Agree	7
Authentic materials were used in online EFL teaching.	3.73	1.00	Agree	5
Learners could communicate more comfortably in online EFL courses.	3.37	1.20	Undecided	10
Online EFL teaching promoted more learner-centered approaches to teaching	3.17	1.18	Undecided	13
Online EFL classrooms were easily accessible to students	3.78	1.08	Agree	4
Multimedia-based materials could be used in online EFL teaching easily.	4.34	0.97	Strongly Agree	2
9- Various types of materials could be used in online EFL teaching.	3.88	0.90	Agree	3
10- Online EFL teaching was cost-effective	3.22	1.24	Undecided	12
Online EFL courses promoted students' and teachers' technological competence	4.41	0.71	Strongly Agree	1
Online EFL teaching was in line with experiential approaches to learning	3.34	0.99	Undecided	11
Online EFL teaching provided better equal	3.05	1.02	Undecided	14

opportunities for learners to learn English				
Online EFL teaching promoted better collaboration among students	2.76	1.09	Undecided	15
Various feedback could be provided for students in online EFL teaching	3.63	0.99	Agree	8
Online EFL teaching was easy to be implemented	3.71	1.03	Agree	6
Online EFL courses were more interactive than traditional courses	2.34	1.18	Disagree	17
Total	3.44	0.56	Agree	

Table 3 illustrated that the highest mean was 4.41 in favour of "Online EFL courses promoted students' and teachers' technological competence", whilst "Multimedia-based materials could be used in online EFL teaching easily", "Various types of materials could be used in online EFL teaching". "Online EFL classrooms were easily accessible to students", "Authentic materials were used in online EFL teaching", "Online EFL teaching was easy to be implemented", "Online EFL teaching was time-efficient", "Various feedback could be provided for students in online EFL teaching", "Students were more autonomous in online EFL courses", "Learners could communicate more comfortably in online EFL courses", "Online EFL teaching was in line with experiential approaches to learning", "Online EFL teaching was cost-effective", "Online EFL teaching promoted more learner-centred approaches to teaching", "Online EFL teaching provided better equal opportunities for learners to learn English", "Online EFL teaching promoted better collaboration among students", "Online EFL teaching enhanced students' motivation", and "Online EFL courses were more interactive than traditional courses" recorded 4.34, 3.88, 3.78, 3.73, 3.71, 3.68, 3.63, 3.46, 3.37, 3.34, 3.22, 3.17, 3.05, 2.76, 2.61, and 2.34 respectively. The total mean of all items was  $3.44 \pm 0.56$ , however, the agreement degree of total mean was "Agree".

### 4.3 The Third Section

This section of the questionnaire examined the obstacles faced by teachers to the implementation of online teaching at the time of COVID-19. It contained 11 items that are answered objectively through the same 5-point Likert scale for consistency purposes, by which respondents specified their level of agreement to the statements in five points: (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Undecided; (4) Disagree; (5) Strongly Disagree. The participants' responses and level of agreement and disagreement to the statements are presented in Table 4, however, the mean and standard deviation of the obstacles faced by the teachers during their online teaching at the time of COVID-19 are measured and presented in Table 5.

Table 4. Obstacles to the implementation of online teaching at the time of COVID-19 (n=41)

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There was a lack of technological infrastructure to facilitates EFL teaching	2(4.9%)	15(36.6%)	5(12.2%)	18(43.9%)	1(2.4%)
Students lacked the necessary Internet-based skills to participate in online EFL courses	3(7.3%)	10(24.4%)	4(9.8%)	21(51.2%)	3(7.3%)
There were cultural resistances to the implementation of online EFL teaching	2(4.9%)	9(22.0%)	8(19.5%)	20(48.8%)	2(4.9%)
There was a lack of interaction in online EFL courses	12(29.3%)	19(46.3%)	4(9.8%)	5(12.2%)	1(2.4%)
Teachers did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL teaching	2(4.9%)	11(26.8%)	12(29.3%)	13(31.7%)	3(7.3%)
Online EFL courses were just appropriate for autonomous learners.	6(14.6%)	18(43.9%)	8(19.5%)	8(19.5%)	1(2.4%)
There was not much teacher supervision over students in online EFL courses	13(31.7%)	18(43.9%)	5(12.2%)	4(9.8%)	1(2.4%)
Online EFL teaching was not responsive to students' needs	3(7.3%)	13(31.7%)	14(34.1%)	11(26.8%)	0(0.0%)
Online EFL teaching placed a lot of demands on EFL teachers	11(26.8%)	23(56.1%)	5(12.2%)	2(4.9%)	0(0.0%)
Online EFL courses were not motivating for students	2(4.9%)	22(53.7%)	7(17.1%)	10(24.4%)	0(0.0%)
Students did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL courses	4(9.8%)	10(24.4%)	11(26.8%)	13(31.7%)	3(7.3%)

Table 4 shows that most of respondents disagree that There was a lack of technological infrastructure to facilitates EFL teaching 43.9%, while 51.2% disagree that Students lacked the necessary Internet-based skills to participate in online EFL courses, 48.8% disagree that There were cultural resistances to the implementation of online EFL teaching, 46.3% agree that There was a lack of interaction in online EFL courses, 31.7% disagree that Teachers did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL teaching , 43.9% agree that online EFL courses were just appropriate for autonomous learners, 43.9% agree that There was not much teacher supervision over students in online EFL courses, 31.7% agree that online EFL teaching was not responsive to students' needs, 56.1% agree that online EFL teaching placed

a lot of demands on EFL teachers, 53.7% agree that online EFL courses were not motivating for students, and 31.7% disagree that Students did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL courses.

Table 5. Obstacles to the implementation of online teaching at the time of COVID-19 (n=41)

Items	Mean	Std.	Agreement degree	Rank
There was a lack of technological infra structure to facilitates EFL teaching	2.98	1.06	Undecided	7
Students lacked the necessary Internet-based skills to participate in online EFL courses	2.73	1.14	Undecided	11
There were cultural resistances to the implementation of online EFL teaching	2.73	1.03	Undecided	10
There was a lack of interaction in online EFL courses	3.88	1.05	Agree	3
Teachers did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL teaching	2.90	1.04	Undecided	9
Online EFL courses were just appropriate for autonomous learners.	3.49	1.05	Agree	4
There was not much teacher supervision over students in online EFL courses	3.93	1.03	Agree	2
Online EFL teaching was not responsive to students' needs	3.20	0.93	Undecided	6
Online EFL teaching placed a lot of demands on EFL teachers	4.05*	0.77	Agree	1
Online EFL courses were not motivating for students	3.39	0.92	Undecided	5
Students did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL courses	2.98	1.13	Undecided	8
Total	3.30	0.49	Agree	

Table 3 illustrated that the highest mean was 4.05 in favour of "Online EFL teaching placed a lot of demands on EFL teachers", whilst "There was not much teacher supervision over students in online EFL courses", "There was a lack of interaction in online EFL courses", "Online EFL courses were just appropriate for autonomous learners", "Online EFL courses were not motivating for students", "Online EFL teaching was not responsive to students' needs", "There was a lack of technological infrastructure to facilitates EFL teaching", "Students did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL courses", "Teachers did not have positive attitudes towards online EFL teaching", "There were cultural resistances to the implementation of online EFL teaching", and "Students lacked the necessary Internet-based skills to participate in online EFL courses" recorded 3.93, 3.88, 3.49, 3.39, 3.20, 2.98, 2.98, 2.90, 2.73, and 2.73 in sequence .

The total mean of all items was  $3.30 \pm 0.49$ , however, the agreement degree of total mean was

"Undecided".

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Challenges and Opportunities as Perceived by the EFL Teachers

This sequential explanatory mixed methods research study aimed at identifying teachers' perceptions and opinions on the transition to full-mode online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak at a major university in Saudi Arabia. The conclusions, implications, and recommendations from the study draw importance from the accounts and feedback from the participants' teachers who made valuable contribution to the study and contributing to the responses to the two research questions in this study.

The perceptions of the teachers of the challenges and difficulties which the data analyses in this study indicated, are in line with what recent researchers have indicated (Al-Bargi, 2021; Aldossary, 2021; Flores & Swennen, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Moawad, 2020; Syahputri et al., 2020). The participants felt the impact of the sudden transition to full mode online learning in a manner which they have not expected or even fully trained for. They felt that the momentum of the transition has initially given the teachers an overwhelming sense of limitations and occasionally, hesitation as to what would be the best pedagogical approach when teaching online. Such challenging circumstances gave a sense of confusion and bewilderment to the teachers, however, it led to both a thorough and rigorous lesson planning and effective lesson delivery. The teachers expressed their inevitable need for ample time to re-think engagement and motivation to participate effectively during online lessons.

However, this research study aimed at also exploring other avenues and a way of thinking outside the box, as it were, with regards to the status of full-mode online environment as the lockdown was enforced in KSA due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. As such, it is evident that there were several positive outcomes of this unprecedented experience which mainly revolved around gaining enormous experience of online teaching as well as giving low achieving students an opportunity to feel free to participate without feeling threatened by the more able and high-grade achieving student peers. The latter is in line with several recent research studies (Al-Bargi, 2021; Aldossary, 2021; Flores & Swennen, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Moawad, 2020). Furthermore, the status of the full mode online teaching was, at a later stage, perceived as "different" and also as an "interesting change" which subconsciously instigated a sense of positivity and also encouraged the students to deal with and adjust to the new reality of online learning. As such, the teacher participants presented a balanced and unbiased views with regards to what they perceived as challenges and obstacles on the one hand and the advantages and benefits on the other.

### 5.2 Recommendations for Future Studies

This research study was conducted with possibilities to engage as many teachers as possible. However, future studies could have a wider base and a larger number of teacher participants as well as the consideration of involving the students themselves so as to gather their own perceptions and their own experiences of learning in a full mode online environment. As such, comparisons, and evaluations of the perceptions of the teachers on one hand, and the students on the other, can be obtained.

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