

ONLINE LEARNING FOR EFL STUDENTS IN PALESTINIAN UNIVERSITIES DURING CORONA PANDEMIC: ADVANTAGES, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract: This study attempts to examine the perceptions of EFL students in Palestinian universities about online learning advantages, challenges, and solutions during Corona pandemic. Moreover, it aims to highlight the efficiency of online learning as an educational system which can be relied on to achieve goals of high educational institutions. The researchers investigated the current situation of online learning in Palestinian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic using a questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the participants were 191 students (161 females and 30 males), and all of the participants have tried the online learning experience during this pandemic. 33% of them took online courses before, while 67% did not. The questionnaire was posted on 6 English clubs' websites of 6 Palestinian universities: Birzet University, An-Najah National University, Bethlehem University, Hebron University, Al-Quds University, and Palestine Ahliya University. The investigation was concerned in pointing out the challenges facing the students during their online courses, in addition to finding out solutions in terms of involving students in the assessment process. The findings confirmed the need to conduct changes and improvements regarding the implementation of e-learning in the educational process in order to help high ministries of education achieve more real success in spreading knowledge. The researchers concluded that there should be massive efforts in improving the technological infrastructure besides holding good training programs for both students and teachers.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning is identified as courses that are conveyed through web to some places other than the real classes where the educator is instructing in a non-virtual way and students can speak and interact with instructors or other students. While it is conveyed live, students can "electronically" raise their hands and communicate continuously. There are kinds of online lectures which have been pre-recorded and online lecturers where educator or teacher consistently connects/speaks with students and make the evaluation notes as usual. It can be said that the significance of e-learning is connected with the development of high education and its advancement through the improvement of techniques and instruction of new methods. According to Abernathy (2019),

"Online learning is not the next big thing; it is the now big thing.

Significant global events are considered as the reason for any turning point in the invitations field. COVID-19 will be the first cheerleader for the of e-learning in the future. Some people see the unplanned and rapid shifting to e-learning with no training because COVID-19 will weaken the experience itself, while others believe that this hybrid system of education will explore multi-benefits from this process. Wang Tao, vice-president of Tencent Cloud and vice-president of Tencent education said that merging technology in education will speed up the educational process and make the e-learning integral component of the educational process. Education has changed greatly for the surprising and rapid transformation to e-learning, that teaching is

taken through digital platforms. Other companies are reinforcing capabilities to provide a one-stop store for students and teachers. For instance, a Singapore-based collaboration suite called Lark started offering students and teachers unlimited video conferencing time, real-time co-editing of work project, smart calendar scheduling, and auto-translation capabilities, amongst other features. To do this quickly and in time of crisis, Lark upgraded its engineering capabilities and global server infrastructure to guarantee a reliable connection. Indeed, even before COVID-19, there was at that point high development and selection in technological education, with a global sale reached \$18.66 billion in 2019 and the total market for e-learning education expected to reach \$350 billion by 2025. Whatever the applications or the platforms used, no doubt that there is unusual strong usage due to the COVID-19.

Because of COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions over the world are starting to shift to distance education programs or online learning. Students can learn from their rooms since they do not need to attend universities and training centers (Knibel, 2001). Bao (2020) stated that half a million international students turned to their homes to continue learning and to access the necessary materials. Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2020), there are more than 1.5 billion children and youth in 188 countries around the world influenced by Coronavirus outbreak. The educational institutions have reacted smoothly and well-accepted to e-learning. Moreover, UNESCO (2020) added that most of the academic officials are now applying online education as a solution to the Coronavirus crisis. This great shifting includes all the world may imply the future which is becoming the present (Donitsa-Schmidt & Topaz, 2018; Filius et al., 2019; Bao, 2020). This technological step may be a message for all the educational institutions to step into e-learning fields.

The shifting process was different from one country to another, none of them was perfectly prepared, yet, the difficulty of shifting varies according to the technical side for each country. Some universities during the past decade are gradually shifting their programs online and doing away with face to face delivery (Bao, 2020). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching format of blended learning was already used (Dziuban, Moskal & Hartman, 2013). Dr. Amjad (2020), a professor at the University of Jordan

pointed out "I will stick to Lark even after coronavirus, I believe traditional offline learning and e-learning can go hand by hand". Blended learning makes it easier for some countries to fit in. However, a good education system is a prerequisite for progress and knowledge. This blended learning includes both online learning and traditional. However, online learning is limited to the text assignments, it does not include live learning and real interaction.

There are many studies and reviews showed that online education can be used as a main system of education in the future. In the report of UNESCO (2020) & Murphy (2020), the online system of education will be as effective as school-based methods in the future. So, by 2030, technology will reshape the universities. There is a review that analyses more than 1000 learning researches which are done by the US Department of Education. They discovered that students who take their courses online outperform classroom-based students across demographics as well as most subjects. Another review showed that online students have the advantage of time with the involvement of programs and technologies. Thus, the gap between online students and classroom-based students is likely to enlarge. Some reports provided many reasons as to why students can learn effectively through online studies. So, they said students have more opportunities to think and to have more control over their studies. As stated by Picciano (2017) and Wang & Hu (2019), successful online students are likely to be organized, initiative, and able to complete their works without close supervision.

As maintained by Bao (2020), lecturers help more during the implementation of e-learning. Teachers can facilitate discussions at both group and individual levels. They can respond to questions asked by learners, design appropriate assignments, and examine students' learning. Furthermore, Lalani & Li (2020) added that students recall 25-60% more material in online learning compared to 8-10% in a classroom. Moreover, e-learning requires 4-60% less time. According to Wang and Hu (2019), e-learning is a helpful alternative for students and the researchers should study different ways of making it more interested in thinking and creation (Donitsa-Schmidt & Topaz, 2018; Garcia & Badia, 2017). This reinforces the intellectual thinking in addition to individual perspectives and improvements. It is needed to learn the deep use of technology and its software.

It is not easy to depend on online education due to technical issues, especially in developing countries. However, all humans have the right to continue education in times of the disaster, crisis, and violence. This is based on the assumption that all students are treated equally and have access to education. If we look at countries which have limited technologies, we will find difficulties in adapting such systems in schools (Sintema, 2020). As Bao (2020) and Filius et al. (2019) indicated that going completely online requires crucial planning and investments from all sectors, various studies have shown that even though there are examples of having plans for using online/distance learning during the pandemic, they are generally concentrated on smaller cases than a global crisis as COVID-19 pandemic.

Some results of other studies showed that online teaching environments can be used successfully in higher education or school as long as a reliable technical environment and support are available. There are educational institutions that may be hesitant to apply different forms of online teaching. Because of the fear of change, concerns about the technical reliability, workload issues, worries about student outcomes in the new environments, and other factors as stated by Bacow et al. (2012), Bolliger & Wasilik, (2009), Betts & Heaston, (2014), and McQuiggan (2012), if the university has not previously taken the instructors and students through an online teaching training, they might not have enough resources including recording platforms on campus and at home to get the instructor to record and present the work in a way that can be accessed by learners, then the online plan ends right there. So, before institutions decide to implement online teaching to teach in this Coronavirus era, they should study this issue very well. It is not just about the ability of educational institutions to provide online learning, but also about learners who should have the accessibility to the internet, as having smartphones or laptops which not all students have.

According to Skulmowski (2020), the social lives of students in a university cannot be reduced and limited to a chat or a series of direct message exchanges. Biswas (2020) argued that an analysis based on students' responses to social media proves that students do not face challenges because of the technical operational obstacles. Instead, they have difficulties concerning the lack of a good learning attitude, discipline, or good

learning environment during this time. Through the study, it is noticed that one of the primary challenges in e-learning is to improve a sense of community. To find such a community, the findings indicated the importance of uplifting social interaction and collaboration levels (Shlossberg & Cunningham, 2016; Wang & Hu, 2019). Bao (2020) showed that a paper of COVID-19 effects on a Chinese university observed that ignored factors, such as speakers' body language, voices, and other aspects can barely be conveyed via text-based forms of e-learning, to have an e-learning that achieves the educational objectives as the traditional one. It is essential to provide multimedia that achieves the semi-real interaction which is provided in the body language, the voice, and the teachers' gestures. We, therefore, say the importance of both students and teachers come together to create an efficient and effective online community. So, technology is considered as a vital part of the e-learning process.

Although online teaching can present obstacles to the teachers since they need to acquire online teaching competencies in planning, employing, and evaluating the performance of their students, but providing teachers with sufficient training courses can help them to effectively carry out the courses through electronic delivery. There are numerous devices available with innovative tools for the teachers to access and to enhance learning for the students with diverse educational needs. Barr and Miller (2013) stated that the technology devices, design of the program, choices of teachers, responsive curriculum, and supportive stakeholders are essential and significant for the successful delivery of the lessons in the online environment. In that case, these support an opportunity for higher education institutions to expand the training of the teachers for online learning instruction as Ludeman et al. (2009) commented that the training for the teachers can improve students' learning in educational programming for teachers to facilitate the goals aligned to the learning goals.

Skulmowski and Rey (2020) claimed that interactive learning media which permits a responsive plan of instruction yet interactively has been seen as a reason for the cognitive load. Using video technology these days can be seen as an indicator of the interest in multimodal learning. As proof, the tools and the programs that provide online courses and the social sense

started to be strongly used after COVID-19 pandemic. However, a large-scale study stated that seeing the instructor's face in an educational video does not affect learning (Kizilcec, Bailenson, & Gomez, 2015). This is an example of the misconception of trying to faithfully reproduce real world classes digitally and show that the digitalization requires university instructors to rethink their digital teaching. The aim should not be to recreate the "ritual" of classes digitally but to find efficient methods of providing students with information they need and opportunities to apply this knowledge.

A few decades ago, technology advancement has been greatly increased. Smith (2000) claimed that online learning offers getting rid of the temporal and spatial restrictions that are used in the face to face learning. Research stated that e-learning has been seen to increase the retention of information, and take less time which means the changes coronavirus have cause may stay. Lee (2002) in his study said that using synchronous electronic meeting enhances learners' communication skills. Furthermore, Warschauer (1999) and Yang & Chen (2007) pointed out that e-learning makes speaking skills fruitful for allowing students more equal participation than face-to-face interaction. Many studies show that EFL students are likely to take many advantages through e-learning. Yang & Chen (2007) and Shuchi & Islam (2016) mentioned that students can use online courses to earn English language skills which are speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Al-Menei (2008) illustrated that computer-assisted plays a great role in the English writing skills of Saudi students. This study showed that the students who used computer programs to correct their paragraphs and to check their grammar have an important improvement in their writing skills in English as Romeo (2008) stated that when learners listen and use complex sentences, they change their understanding and learning. Moreover, Yang & Chen (2007) stated that e-learning helps students to develop their ability in speaking English by communicating with others in virtual world, more than the traditional classes, for the environment of traditional classes which are full of Arabic language dominance. In addition, virtual classes can have a very large number of students. This can affect their communication with the teacher negatively. So, students cannot be supplied with an apt environment for learning English. Farzi (2016) noted that computers can set up to provide

instructions to help students to correct their mistakes. Moreover, some e-learning applications allow students to learn English promptly and get advantage of language assets. Moreover, it can offer them participation in their pronunciation through verbal correspondence and recognition of the English language real environment (Debski and Gruba, 1999; Yang and Chen, 2007; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Al-Hassan and Shukri, 2017). Yet, Westbrook (2006) has contended blending e-learning into the concentrating of EFL is not conveying foreseen results.

However, OECD data, one of the most challenges that impedes online learning is students with unavailable internet access. This gap is different from one country to another. For example, 95% of Switzerland students, Norway, and Austria have technical support, however, only 34% have. Many students around the world are having challenges regarding technical support, especially poor country and developing ones. However, education is still an important right and a must for any student far from his/her conditions. We have to know the technology capacity of publishing the significance of knowledge and work hard to raise the efficiency of higher educational institutions. Education is the one thing which improves and enhances any country.

Bao (2020) commented on the reaction of the shifting process to e-learning according to the technical infrastructure for each country. Furthermore, many researchers showed the advantages of e-learning. Wang and Hu (2019) commented that e-learning is a great system for making a creative and outstanding student who has self-reliance, also e-learning requires less time. Moreover, Lalani and Li (2020) added that student's memory saves from the academic material more than in the traditional classrooms. Some educational institutions feel afraid of using e-learning during this pandemic for the technical reliability and worries about students' outcomes from the e-learning (Bacow et al., 2012; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Betts & Heaston, 2014; McQuiggan, 2012). While Biswas (2020) indicated that students face problems which are complicated to them more than technical support. Ananga and Biney (2017) showed that the importance of identifying students' technical status is more important than creating online courses. Skulmowski (2020) has illustrated the importance of the social lives of students. There is an importance of offering a sense of

community and collaborative activates for students (Shlossberg & Cunningham, 2016; Wang & Hu, 2019). Barr and Miller (2013) talked about the importance of designing technological programs that goes with students and e-learning needs. While some researchers suggested solutions. Ludeman et al. (2009) said that the training for the teachers can improve students' learning in education. While Skulmowski and Rey (2020) illustrated that alternative media help students to adapt the knowledge through e-learning.

The problem of this study is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which caused the rapid and unplanned transition of universities and educational institutions to e-learning as an alternative and only option to complete the educational process for students during COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden transition, therefore, caused a sense of general tension among EFL students themselves of difficulties in providing the necessary technical support to complete the educational process. Such as internet service, providing the right devices, and even technological skills. Teachers have also faced similar problems due to the poor technological infrastructure of most universities as technical support as well as their weak technological skills. Although some universities have relied on integrated learning in the previous years, yet, it still a bold and the only step in the shade of what is happening in the world.

Due to the importance of continuous learning process with higher standards in the Palestinian universities, the research helps the higher educational institutions in Palestine to design a high quality e-learning system that helps the competent authorities in the use of modern means to develop teaching English and develop students' skills. Secondly, this research results have benefits for other researchers by its solutions in addition to the recommendations to consider in their future researches. Moreover, to take the research results and students' perceptions into consideration and to have an overall look through e-learning, this study highlights the poor technical support students in Palestine. Furthermore, it encourages the higher institutions to develop their technological field and to step forward through the technology.

There are some limitations and gaps for this study which might highlight some points the future researchers may work on. First of all, this study was performed on a relatively small

population: Only EFL students in five Palestinian universities in the West Bank. That is because the study was done during coronavirus lockdown, which hindered the researchers' ability to communicate with more students or to make qualitative research instruments, such as, interviews. As a result, social media sites were the only means of communication. In addition, this research does not investigate the perception of parents and instructors towards e-learning.

As for the time factor, the researchers have conducted the research during the summer semester which was way shorter than normal semesters. There was not enough time to collect more data and expand the targeted population in order to have a larger-scaled survey.

This research is interested in shedding light on the advantages of using e-learning for EFL students and to show the challenges faced by the students during e-learning process. Finally, to highlight some solutions that can solve the problems of the study.

1. What are the advantages for using E-learning for EFL universities' students?
2. What are the challenges that the EFL universities' students face while using E-learning?
3. What are the possible solutions for solving the challenges that the EFL students face?

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire targeted a sample of 191 students of both genders (84.3 females and 15.7 males) of EFL students from six Palestinian universities which are: Hebron University (48 students/25.1%), Birzeit University (26 students/13.6%), Bethlehem University (29 students/15.2%), An-Najah National University (33 students/17.3%), Al-Quds University (27 students/14.1%), and Palestine Ahliya University (28 students/14.7%). The participants were from different levels of study and ranged as follows: First-year (4.7%), second-year (12%), third-year (19.9%), fourth-year (50.8%), and MA (12.6%). Moreover, the participants were graded according to evaluations systems: Average system (50.8%), A.B.C... system (38.2%), and pass/fail system (11%). Filling the questionnaire was optional to all participants.

This study used a quantitative approach. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was conducted as an instrument to collect the data. The questionnaire consists of forty-five close-ended questions which is

answered in the form of five-point Likert-Scale and given to participants of EFL students from five Palestinian universities. Participants answered the questions that range from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire is divided into three sections (advantages of e-learning, challenges and solutions). The questions were carefully chosen to know advantages, challenges, and solutions of applying online learning in EFL programs in Palestinian universities.

The questionnaire is formulated using the Likert-scale to indicate the degree of agreement and disagreement from 1-5 which are: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. It was formed using Google Forms. After that, the questionnaire was distributed through social media sites to participants with the needed instructions and clarification of its purpose and intended category to answer.

Responding was open on the 5th of July, and the researchers received 191 responses, then responses were stopped on the 14th of July. After collecting the quantitative data, they were analyzed statistically using SPSS.

The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was tabulated. The result shows that the overall Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of the questionnaire is very high ($r = 0.91$), indicating a high degree of internal consistency, and therefore presenting a considerably reliable instrument. The researchers examined the validity of the questionnaire and its content, and they edited its content to make it suitable and useful.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following sections present the results of the demographic data in part one of the questionnaire, as it appears in table 1.

Table 1. *The results of the demographic data*

			Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
University	Hebron University	48	25.1	25.1
	Birzeit University	26	13.6	13.6
	Bethlehem University	29	15.2	15.2
	An-Najah National University	33	17.3	17.3
	Al-Quds University	27	14.1	14.1
	Palestine Ahliya University	28	14.7	14.7
	Total	191	100.0	100.0
	Gender	Male	30	15.7
Female		161	84.3	84.3
Total		191	100.0	100.0
Level of study		First	9	4.7
	Second Year	23	12.0	12.0
	Third Year	38	19.9	19.9
	Fourth Year	97	50.8	50.8
	MA	24	12.6	12.6
	Total	191	100.0	100.0
	Have you taken any online courses before?	Yes	128	67.0
No		63	33.0	33.0
Total		191	100.0	100.0
Evaluation System	Average	97	50.8	50.8
	A. B. C. D....	73	38.2	38.2
	Pass/Fail	21	11.0	11.0
	Total	191	100.0	100.0

This table represents the samples of the students, who respond in the questionnaire. The questionnaire covered six Palestinian

Universities: Hebron University (48 students/25.1%), Birzeit University (13.6%), Bethlehem University (15.2%), An-Najah

National University (17.3%), Al-Quds University (14.1%), and Palestine Ahliya University (14.7%). The majority of the respondents are females which reflects the overall population of the Palestinian Universities. The overwhelming majority of students 191 (84%) are females, and 15% are males. Furthermore, (67%) have taken online courses before, while (33%) have not. This gives a sense of variation in the perception according to the individual experience for each student with online learning. In addition to that, half of the students which are seniors (50%) illustrate that most of the English clubs' pages in the Palestinian universities are run by the fourth-year students. while just (4%) are freshmen, (12%) are sophomore, (19%) are junior, and (12%) are MA students.

The following sections presents the results of part two of the questionnaire:

Table 2. *Correction key*

Correction Key	
Very low	1 – 1.79
Low	1.8 – 2.59
Neutral	2.60 – 3.39
High	3.4 – 4.19
Very high	4.20 – 5

Question one: What are the advantages of online learning?

This part used descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for calculating the questionnaire items to examine the advantages of online learning from student's perspective. This table contains 12 items. See table 3 for the calculated means of items and their standard deviation.

Table 3. *The calculated means of items and their standard deviation*

	Advantages	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
9	E-learning improves students' technological skills.	191	3.85	.917
6	E-learning is an appropriate solution to complete the educational process under the Coronapandemic	191	3.80	1.077
4	Recording lectures help me re-watch lectures I missed	191	3.77	1.177
8	E- Learning encourages collaborative activities and group work through social media applications.	191	3.69	.998
3	E-learning increases my self-reliance and urges me to do more research	191	3.55	1.049
12	E-learning learning offers effective communication tools	191	3.49	.983
11	E-learning provides me with a valuable learning experience	191	3.47	.999
2	Participating in online courses increases my confidence.	191	3.39	.993
7	My instructors use new methods of teaching that are consistent with E-learning	191	3.36	1.076
10	I recommend adopting E-learning as an official method recognized by both educational institutions and scientific research organizations	191	3.30	1.183
5	E-learning provides a good interaction environment between students and instructors.	191	3.08	1.076
1	All the courses I took can be effectively taught online	191	3.06	1.166

The table shows all the items got ratings between neutral and high. Item number 9 gets the highest rating (mean =3.85). This means that most of the students do not have enough proficiency to deal with technology and they are more agreed that e-learning improves their

technological skills. As Henry (2001) said that e-learning is an appropriate system for learning, skills, and knowledge.

Item number (8) illustrates that e- learning encourages collaborative activities and group work through social media applications

(mean=3.69). This means that collaborative activities which are one of the most vital teaching principles can be held easily through the virtual environment with the assistance of social media or even some social applications. This item supports e-learning to be considered as a fruitful educational system.

Item number (3) indicates that most of the students agree on the fact that e-learning increases their self-reliance and urges them to do more research (mean=3.55). This shows that students notice that e-learning gives them the role of the scholar. Letting students search for information on their own and do more researches helps them to think more critically which goes with the objectives of education. This makes the educational process student-centered and highlights the importance of teacher role as a supervisor and facilitator. Wang and Hu (2019) confirmed that e-learning is helpful alternative for students and he asked researchers to study more ways of making e-learning more interesting on thinking and creation. Donitsa-Schmidt and Topaz (2018) and Garcia & Badia (2017) illustrated that this reinforces the intellectual thinking and individual perspectives and improvements.

Item number (11) 'E-learning provides me with a valuable learning experience' (mean=3.47) shows that students consider their experience as a valuable one, which gives the sense of adapting

with the new educational process. This gives a good prediction for the coming educational plans.

Item number (10) 'I recommend adopting E-learning as an official method recognized by both educational institutions and scientific research organizations' (mean=3.30), which has a 'neutral' rating, shows that students have some sticking points with e-learning, although they consider e-learning in item (11) as a valuable experience.

Item number (1) gets the lowest rating, 'All the courses I took can be effectively taught online' (mean=3.06). It has a 'neutral' rating. This indicates that students believe that not all courses can be taught effectively online. That means there is a need to make an in-depth analysis on the criteria that makes a course acceptable to be taught effectively online, then to find new strategies that may make courses able to be taught online effectively.

Question Two: What are the challenges that students face in online learning?

This part used descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for calculating the questionnaire items to examine the advantages of online learning from students' perspective. This table contains 18 items. See table 4 for the calculated means of items and their standard deviation.

Table 4. *The calculation means of items and their standard deviation*

	Challenges	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
8	E-learning increased the size of assignments and the studying hours.	191	4.13	1.005
15	Lack or slow internet connection	191	4.1047	.95671
3	Lack of concentration and some students are distracted using other social media.	191	4.08	.833
2	Some instructors do not have the necessary skills to deal with E-learning.	191	4.08	.911
1	Lack of reliable technical support for students.	191	3.97	.894
4	Lack of real interaction	191	3.97	.978
10	E-learning reduces the outcome of courses with a practical side (e.g. writing, TEFL 2)	191	3.91	.933
6	Some students do not possess the necessary technological skills to enroll in online courses.	191	3.91	.893
12	Lack of sufficient time for students with special needs to accomplish the assignments and exams	191	3.8743	.99732
18	Low quality of sound and picture	191	3.8168	1.06767
7	Recorded lectures encouraged some students not to attend classes.	191	3.81	1.090

9	Having other responsibilities (e.g. work, being housewife) beside being a student affected negatively the E-learning.	191	3.81	1.085
11	Lack of virtual library and resources that meet students' academic needs.	191	3.785 3	1.11497
16	Lack of reliable laptop/smartphone	191	3.785 3	1.05680
17	Lack of a calm room to attend my online classes (noisy surrounding environment)	191	3.780 1	1.15340
13	Evaluation was not done in a fair and objective manner.	191	3.727 7	1.08055
5	Lack of timely feedback for students' assignments.	191	3.72	1.082
14	Evaluation methods (e.g. exams) were not accurate due to easy means of cheating.	191	3.717 3	1.08272

All challenges' items get high - very high ratings. Yet, the item number (8) gets the highest rating, (mean=4.13). This illustrates that students face assignments tension which shows that instructors during their first experience with online courses do not take the overall stressful situation of students being at home during COVID-19 pandemic into account. This highlights the need to use different evaluation tools with acceptable size in proportion to students' situations.

Items number (15), (1), (18) and (16) get 'high' rating by students. 'Lack of slow internet connection' (mean=4.10), 'Lack of reliable technical support for students' (mean=3.97), 'Low quality of sound and picture' (mean=3.81), and 'Lack of reliable laptop/smartphone' (mean=3.78). These four items refer to the needed technical support for the high standard of e-learning in order to achieve the required learning objectives. E-learning is not just depending on supplying online courses, but also on offering the needed technical support for both teachers and students. These four items seriously need to be taken into consideration.

Items number (3) and (7), 'Lack of concentration and some students are distracted using other social media' (mean=4.08) and 'Recorded lectures encouraged some students not to attend classes' (mean=3.81) show that next to the challenge of poor technical support, they also have lack of good 'learning attitude'. Students are facing difficulties to discipline themselves even with ignoring sync courses under the pretext of watching it later, or by using social media during the lecture. This result is in line with Biswas's (2020) study, who said that students have lack of discipline. These attitudes are subsumed under the fact that students did not adapt to the new educational environment.

Items number (2) and (6) 'Some instructors do not have the necessary skills to deal with e-learning' (mean=4.08) and 'Some students do not possess the necessary technological skills to enroll in online courses' (mean=3.91) refer to the need and the necessity of organizing technical trainings for teachers and students to have the needed flexibility dealing with online courses. 'Baby Boomers Gen' includes people who have been born between 1944-1964, those people are facing problems with the readiness of using modern technology in the learning process and dealing with it easily. Students whether they were classified as 'millennials' or 'X generation' are considered better in using technology, yet, not with newly standard applications that need trainings to be used efficiently.

Item number (4), 'Lack of real interaction' (mean=3.97) shows that students do not find e-learning suitable enough for interaction between lecturers and students. Bailenson and Gomez (2015) stated that seeing the instructor's face in an educational video does not affect learning, this confirms the result of item (4) in the study. Moreover, according to Skulmowski (2020), it is hard to keep a sense of community during online courses.

Item number (5) 'Lack of timely feedback for students' assignments' (mean=3.72). Even this item is considered as a penultimate point, yet, it gets a 'high' rating that gives serious proportions. As Bill Gates (2013) said 'We all need people who give us feedback. That's how we improve'. Without the feedback, learners may finish their educational journey without knowing the weakness, this leads them to 'own self-doubt'. Furthermore, they cannot teach what they have learned effectively in the future. In long run, this will affect the general knowledge of the country.

Item number (12), 'Lack of sufficient time for students with special needs to accomplish the

assignments and exams' (mean=3.87). This point shows that during the first e-learning experience, students with special needs do not get any planned support as giving them extra time to match their capacity.

Item number (14) is the last item in the challenges part, it says 'Evaluation methods (e.g. exams) were not accurate due to easy means of cheating' (mean=3.71). This shows that cheating during e-learning exams is an easy mean, which refers to serious danger that students will not trust e-learning as an accurate system for their grades. In addition to that, a university degree is not also accurate enough to be adopted which

leads to a useless university degree. Universities need to use a surveillant system for students' fairness.

Question Three: What are some of the suggested solution for the challenges that students face in online learning?

This part used descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for calculating the questionnaire items to examine the advantages of online learning from students' perspective. This table contains 15 items. See table 5 for the calculated means of items and their standard deviation.

Table 5. *The calculation means of items and their standard deviation*

	Solutions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
9	Training instructors on the various teaching methods and online delivery	191	4.2199	.88486
15	Providing needy students with reliable smartphones/laptops	191	4.1780	.94018
2	Developing a technical support unit in every educational institution to help students to overcome the technical difficulties.	191	4.1675	.81641
10	Offering instructors the necessary technical support that they need while teaching online	191	4.1571	.86842
11	Grant students reasonable time to accomplish their assignments	191	4.1571	.89821
12	Providing students valid contact details (mobile number, emails) of technicians who offer continuous technical support	191	4.1414	.92105
14	Strengthening the internet infrastructure in Palestine	191	4.1309	1.03550
13	Establishing a virtual library with valid learning resources	191	4.1099	.95336
1	Applying different teaching methods that promote meaningful interaction in the online environment	191	4.06	.977
6	Identifying the technical situation of students-electronic devices, networks speed	191	4.0524	.92189
8	Training students to enable them to be equipped with the necessary technological skills that is necessary for their online participation	191	4.0419	.88753
5	Improving an observing attendance system for students and sending them notification if they were absent.	191	3.9529	1.08234
4	Providing timely and an accurate feedback create an honest and trust relationship between students and instructors.	191	3.9476	.96102
7	Developing online educational applications that prevent cheating trails.	191	3.8534	1.01540
3	Using oral and analytical exams to make the assessment more reliable.	191	3.4555	1.23836

Table 5 reveals that all of the items got high ratings which gives a sense of optimism that it may be possible for raising e-learning standards in the Palestinian Universities. Item (9) 'Training instructors on the various teaching methods and online delivery' (mean=4.21) shows that students

notice that instructors face problem during e-learning and the importance of training them in order to have more structured lectures.

Item number (2) 'Developing a technical support unit in every educational institution to help students to overcome the technical

difficulties' (mean=4.16). Students agreed on the necessity of offering technical support service in order to control over any technical problem that students face during their lectures, exams, etc. This illustrates that students in their fresh e-learning experienced facing technical problems.

Item number (1) 'Applying different teaching methods that promote meaningful interaction in the online environment' (mean=4.06) indicates that students' new experience do not have enough teaching methods that explore the sense of interaction. Moreover, that indicates that students notice the importance of teaching methods during the online lecture.

Item number (3) is considered as the last item, 'Using oral and analytical exams to make the assessment more reliable' (means=3.45). This item shows that students agreed on using analytical exams in order to have more accurate and reliable results. Moreover, they believe that the applied evaluation methods are not completely reliable.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the EFL participants agreed on most of the advantages, challenges, and solutions that are included in the study. The results of this study indicate the advantages of using e-learning in the Palestinian Universities as turning students to be researchers, making students more confidence and have self-reliance, improving their technological skills, and offering them valuable experience. Secondly, the results indicate the challenges of using e-learning in Palestinian Universities. For example, the lack of technical support that the universities have, the need for training lecturers to improve their technological skills, the unreliable evaluation system, and the poor technological infrastructure. These challenges show the necessity of taking these results into considerations, and make a real step by solving the challenges, especially in developing the technological field in all the Palestinian Universities in order to go with the educational objectives. Finally, the results show most of the suggested solutions are accepted by students, such as training students and teachers, using critical and oral exams, improving an observing attendance system, identifying the technical situation of students, and strengthening the internet infrastructure in Palestine.

This study shows that students have an overall positive attitude towards e-learning. However, the results of the study indicate that there are

some challenges that decreased the effectiveness of e-learning. As a result, the researchers recommend that educational institutions which implement e-learning should consider the following.

1. There are several teaching methods, yet not all of them are suitable for e-learning. Thus, educational institutions should make training programs for instructors on the most effective teaching methods for online delivery.
2. During the teaching process, results show that there is a need to develop a technical support unit for both instructors and learners in order to overcome their continuous technical difficulties.
3. Since education is the right of everyone and not all learners have the capability to afford reliable tools (e.g. laptops/smartphones) to follow up the e-learning, educational institutions should work on providing reliable means of using e-learning.
4. Training students who do not have the necessary technological skills to uplift them to a level that they can take better advantage and participate in e-learning

Since e-learning is developing at high speed, further research can be ongoing. Other studies can complement the outcomes of this study, taking into consideration of the use of different types of qualitative research instruments in addition to including a wider population from other countries. Moreover, perhaps future research can be concerned in making an in-depth analysis of the suitable teaching methods, course design, and technological tools that should be adopted, and to investigate whether these practices have helped e-learning actualize students' academic goals or not. Furthermore, since the right of education is recognized as a human right for everyone, future studies can examine the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the education of students with disabilities and special needs. This kind of research may focus on their needs, especially the technological ones and the kind of support they might need. Finally, this study aimed to find out the perspectives and views of learners. However, other studies can investigate the perception of instructors and parents towards e-learning.

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