Online Learning: Perceptions of Pre-service EFL Teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic Era

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Abstract

This descriptive qualitative research aimed at investigating pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of using online learning during COVID-19 pandemic era. For the purpose of the research, two instruments were used; a 48-item-questionnaire and open-ended interviews with the aim of investigating and collecting data related to the participants' use of online learning. The participants were 101 pre-service EFL teachers who were enrolled in the fourth year English Department at the Faculty of Education, Arish University during the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The results of the research revealed that the top five advantages of using online learning were (1) saving time and effort, (2)using preferred technological devices, (3) sharing documents and resources quickly and easily, (4) accessing resources and references easily and (5) acquiring new experiences and technological skills. On the contrary, the top five challenges of using online learning were(1) having a weak internet network, (2) the lack of suitable devices, (3) poor electricity connection that hinders online learning,(4) difficulty in fully understanding all subjects within online learning, and (5) suffering from isolation and depression across online learning. Finally, open-ended interviews revealed more benefits and challenges of using online learning that were not included in the questionnaire and hence, suggestions for better use of online learning were provided and suggestions for further research were proposed.

Keywords*: Pre-service EFL Teachers, Online learning, Perceptions.*

التعلم عبر الإنترنت: تصورات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية قبل الخدمة خلال فترة جائحة كورونا

الملخــص

هدف هذا البحث الوصفي النوعي إلى التعرف على تصورات الطلاب المعلمين، تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية بالفرقة الرابعة بكلية التربية جامعة العريش في استخدام التعلم عبر الإنترنت خلال حقبة جائحة كورونا. وقد تكونت مجموعة البحث من (١٠١) طالبًا معلمًا بالفصل الدراسي الأول من العام الجامعي ٢٠٢٢–٢٠٢٣م. ولتحقيق الهدف من البحث، استخدمت الأداتان البحثيتان التاليتان: (١) استبانة بغرض تعرف آراء مجموعة البحث حول استخدام التعلم عبر الإنترنت، وقد اشتملت هذه الاستبانة على (٤٨) مفردة. (٢) مقابلات شفهية مفتوحة لمجموعة البحث بغرض التأكيد على صحة تحقق هدف الاستبانة السابقة. وأسفرت نتائج البحث عن جملة نتائج مميزات التعلم عبر الانترنت أهمها: (١) توفير الوقت والجهد. (٢) استخدام الأجهزة التكنولوجية المفضلة. (٣) تبادل المستندات والمراجع بسرعة ويسر. (٤) الرجوع إلى المراجع والمصادر بسهولة ويسر. (٥) اكتساب خبرات ومهارات تكنولوجية جديدة. كما بينت النتائج أن جملة معوقات تعترض التعلم عبر الانترنت أهمها: (١) وجود شبكة انترنت ضعيفة. (٢) عدم وجود أجهزة مناسبة. (٣) انقطاع التيار الكهربائي لفترات طويلة. (٤) تدني فهم بعض عناصر التعلم عبر الانترنت. (٥) الشعور بالعزلة والاكتئاب في التعلم عبر الانترنت. وقد اقترحت مجموعة البحث حلولا ومعالجات لتلاشي معوقات التعلم عبر الانترنت، أهمها: (١) وجوب تدريب كاف للمعلمين أثناء الخدمة على استخدام الانترنت في التعلم. (٢) ضرورة تضمين التعلم عبر الانترنت في المقررات الدراسية الجامعية لتطبيقها إذا مادعت الضرورة لذلك. (٣) إتاحة معامل الحاسوب للطلاب المعلمين واستخدامها في التعلم عبر الانترنت. كذلك فقد تم تقديم بعض المقترحات لاستخدام التعلم عبر الانترنت بشكل أمثل، كما تم عرض بعض التوصيات الخاصة بإجراء بحوث مستقبلية في هذا الشأن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية قبل الخدمة ، التعلم عبر الإنترنت ، التصورات ، جائحة كورونا.

Introduction

In December 2019, the whole world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, known as Coronavirus that impacted all human sectors globally. Interaction among people was minimized; social and physical distancing was maximized, to prevent people from getting affected by this fatal pandemic. (Beltekin & Kuyulu, 2020). As a result, "globally, over 1.2 billion children were out of the classroom" (Li & Lilani, (2020). Furthermore, millions of people, especially in educational institutions, have fallen into crisis and hence, had to switch their social, educational and professional activities from face-to face, to online platforms to meet their requirements and needs (Thamrin, et al.,2021).

The education sector responded to COVID-19 Pandemic, in its all systems and levels, as millions of learners had to receive online learning at home instead of having face-to face schooling. It has changed processes and procedures dramatically in all education levels worldwide. As a result of this widely spread disease, the lives of millions of students were critically affected (Amin & Hussien; 2021; Zhong, 2020). Therefore, to halt the spread of the outbreak of this pandemic, the education systems worldwide have shifted schooling from face to face to online learning platforms using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, Moodle, E-learning, Web-based training, Web-based instruction, cyber learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, etc. (Putri1 & Suryaman, 2022). In online learning, the internet is simply used as the main vehicle to convey the electronic academic content of a certain course to students.

In fact, this rapid shift, created more challenges and concerns for students, instructors, and universities at all academic levels (Barakat, et al., 2022; Amin & Hussien; 2021). Via these digital platforms, students can watch videoed lessons, read lessons documents and handouts, and listen to recorded lectures. In this virtual system of education, students and instructors are located in various places, but they share online activities simultaneously in mutual online communication. In addition, students can view such recorded classes many times according to their needs (Arslan, 2019).

Egypt, as all other countries, was hit by COVID-19 Pandemic. During this era, all schools and higher education institutes were closed and switched into online learning starting from March 2020 (Taha, 2020). Therefore, social distance was imposed, new terms appeared,

social change was made, and teaching strategies were hastily directed toward online learning so that instruction continues. Furthermore, technology was incorporated into the educational systems within virtual learning environments. This radical change happened suddenly and quickly, without any previous proper preparation. The majority of teachers were not properly trained to use online classes, and so were the students.

As a result, classroom effective communication skills were lacked, students' questions were not appropriately answered and the lack of immediate feedback was there. Further, students' skills were not well honed and, learning was not effective and tasks were not accomplished well within the time allocated to them. In this respect, Ghaemi and Potvin (2021) state that such radical change had its impact on education where students were not able to work on activities and tasks properly and effectively.

In addition, previous research shows some challenges that hinder the effective use of online learning during the COVID-19 era. Such challenges include weak internet connection, the lack of motivation, the lack of understanding the subject matter, poor learning conditions at home, the lack of discipline, the poor adaption of students to online learning, the lack of IT competency, managing their time and organizing their homework to submit their tasks, the lack of interaction, adjusting online classes for students with special needs is a tremendous challenge for deaf or hard of hearing students, inability to meet individual differences between students (Barakat, et al., 2022; Nikou, 2022; Almahasees et al., 2021; Thamrin, et al; 2021; Rosell, 2020).

Furthermore, challenges and constraints of the rapid shift from face to face classes to online classes revealed many challenges such as teachers and students' lack of experience and inadequate digital skills, lack of technological infrastructure, missing out on unique outdoor learning experiences and data being shared online could be at risk of being misused and their intellectual property rights were illegally reproduced (Bao, 2020; König et al., 2020; Auma & Achieng, 2020; Collins et al., 2020; Taha, 2020).

Literature Review & Related Studies

Nowadays, the Internet is widely spread all over the world and, online learning is becoming a fundamental part and parcel of the

educational process worldwide. In this respect, Nielsen (2021) states that in spite of the rapid transition to online learning that happened in 2020, such change was not smoothly done by everyone. Educationally, the Internet supports online learning, teaching, communication, cooperation, collaboration, comfort, and accessibility (Favale et al., 2020).

Online learning is a type of instruction that carries out the delivery of learning experiences, education materials, pedagogical processes and multimedia components, such as images, texts, symbols, graphics, pictures, and videos, audios animations through the use of electronic tools that students can access such as smart phones, laptops, tablets and computers with the purpose of making information more effective and nice.

It is through the internet effective tools, oral communication among students and instructors is held and oral and written messages, PowerPoint slides, videos and handouts are easily exchanged (Bich & Lian, 2021). Ertuğrul (2020), lists 18 reasons binding a learner to stick to online learning. These reasons include saving time, learning at one's pace, having a high comfort level, repeated accessibility in the remote areas and gaining self-discipline. Similarly, Hatchett (2020) adds that online learning "offers flexible, convenient learning, but it also requires discipline, motivation, and effective organizational and time management skills".

Benefits of Online Learning

According to Mokhtar et al, (2020), online learning enables learners to record lectures, mark attendance and reduce schooling expences. According to Chotalia (2022), online learning facilitates students' communication with professors and peers easily and flexibly through bulletin boards and similar forums using their preferred learning technology". Moreover, online learning offers flexibility of learning, ease of access and controlled learning environments (Sá, & Serpa, 2020). Furthermore, online learning helps learners to acquire new experiences and skills, reduces the cost of traveling to universities and related expenses, is a relaxed and productive source of knowledge, helps children manage their study time, helps children learn to use modern technologies, scaffolds students' language learning, integration of a wide range of technologies into EFL instruction diversity of teaching

approaches. In addition, online learning leads to easy attendance, time-saving, time management, high flexibility and accessibility, affordability and globality, opportunities for students to perform other activities while undertaking their studies (e.g., part-time jobs), (Al-Nofli, 2022; Sun & Zou, 2022; Alharbi & Khalil, 2022; Curelaru et al., (2022), Martin, 2022; Burton, 2022).

Besides, Thompson (2022) assures that online learning is fast and easy sharing of resources more affordable, convenient, and interactive, unlocks more learning opportunities, fosters more interaction and sharing resources. Besides, online learning suits a variety of learning styles, reaches a broader audience, offers a variety of learning opportunities on one platform, Easy accessible and convenient from any place (Sarangi, 2021;). Besides, assignments can be sent online to a large number of students within a very short time, (Curelaru et al., 2022; Allison & Hudson, 2020;). In addition, the advantages of online learning during COVID-19 Pandemic era according to Mukhtar et al., (2020) include remote learning, comfort and accessibility.

Challenges of Online Learning

On the contrary, some studies referred to some challenges encountered by by EFL learners in terms of using online learning such as the risk of low attention levels, the difficulty with time management, the complexity of the educational materials used in e-learning, weak Internet networks especially in rural and remote areas, lack of communication , difficulty in assessing student learning ; lack of instructional time ; difficulty in executing hands-on activities, losing focus on studies as they might go off track from subject studies, the lack of socialization skills and non-verbal behavior, putting students in isolation and depression, causes the lack of practice-based learning, the lack of technical equipment e.g. Laptop, desktop computer and tablet with keyboard ; (Al-Nofli, 2022; Alharbi & Khalil, 2022; Curelaru et al., (2022); Martin, 2022; Burton, 2022; Diab & Elgahsh, 2020). In addition to having health concerns and prevention of cheating is difficult, (Sarangi, 2021), Thompson (2022) adds that online learning requires self-discipline, additional training for instructors, creates a sense of isolation and is prone to technical issues.

Such challenges and obstacles radically reduce the quality of online learning and negatively affect EFL students' motivation, participation, communication, skills and enthusiasm within the online learning processes. However, online schooling can be much more competitive and effective in technologically advanced countries where training on this system, funding and motivation are widely offered to both teachers and students. In addition, it was found that online classes' preparation entails more effort to ensure having interactive online courses (Alharbi & Khalil, 2022, Almahasees et al., 2021; Zaharah, et al 2020). It was also found that online classes' preparation entails more effort to ensure having interactive online courses, causes emotional and physical exhaustion such as headaches, back pain and eye problems (Curelaru et al., (2022); Almahasees et al., 2021).

Although online learning has its pros and cons, we have to accept it as the only temporary solution for a period of time that is characterized by the worst Coronavirus-19 pandemic era and hence, "we should consider both the merits and demerits of online classes and work out the balance between the two so that we can get the best out of both" (Sarangi, 2021). In addition, Hazaymeh (2021), is with the opinion that instructors should be aware of the effectiveness of digital technologies as instructional method for empowering their students to achieve the intended educational goals within online EFL classroom. In addition, Amin and Hussien(2021) assure that "Students and staff readiness for this new teaching strategy should be supported while adjusting to the new changes". Furthermore, the limitations of online learning during COVID-19 Pandemic era according to Mukhtar et al., (2020) include inefficiency and difficulty in maintaining academic integrity.

Related Studies

Related studies have investigated major students' perceptions of online learning. In this respect, Putri1 and Suryaman (2022) investigated English major students' attitudes towards the use of Zoom Meeting for online learning in learning English speaking skill. A questionnaire was distributed via Google Form and the results showed that among the positive impacts of using Zoom meeting application were understanding the course materials easily, and students' speaking skills were improved. However, most of the students were bored and hence, they lost their

motivation in leaning as a result of the use of Zoom in learning. In addition, Curelaru et al., (2022) conducted a thematic analysis of the perceptions of university students concerning online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study sample included 209 participants among undergraduate and postgraduate students. Findings indicated that among the advantages of using online learning are comfort and accessibility, economy (saving time and money), and psychological and medical safety. On the other hand, disadvantages of using online learning included health and psychosocial problems (e.g., stress, anxiety, decreased motivation, isolation/loneliness, and apathy) and learning process problems (e.g., misunderstandings, a lack of feedback, additional academic requirements, a lack of challenge, and disengagement).

Similarly, Bich and Lian (2021) explored the challenges encountered by major English students toward learning English speaking skills using online learning during COVID-19 Pandemic and proposing suggestions for solving such challenges. Thirty five major English students participated in the study. A questionnaire survey and interviews were used. Results showed that students' attitudes were negative toward learning in learning speaking skills using online learning. Besides, a study conducted by Thamrin, et al., (2021) aimed at investigating the perceptions of undergraduate students at the Indonesian university of Bung Hatta University of online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study sample included 118 participants who responded to a questionnaire using Google forms. It was found out that 50% of the participants were not satisfied with their online experience due to having technical problems with internet connection, lack of understanding the subjects, poor learning conditions at home and lack of self-discipline. In addition, Ameen's phenomenological design study (2021) explored the critical challenges that influenced online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Kurdistan, Iraq. The participants included 14 experts who were interviewed to give detailed information needed to the investigated issue. The results of the study showed seven challenges that influenced online learning namely; poor internet connection, illiteracy of teachers on technological matters, resistance from students, lack of devices, poor electricity connection, lack of platforms, and lack of conducive environments.

Furthermore, Almahasees, et al's study (2021) investigated the perceptions of Jordanian faculty and students toward online learning

during COVID-19 era. The study randomly selected sample included 50 faculty members and 280 students. Two online surveys were distributed to the sample. It was found out that online learning was useful during the COVID-19 era in spite its efficacy was less effective than face-to-face learning and teaching and it could not substitute face-to-face learning. In addition, Shinta & Aprilia (2020) investigated EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of online teaching-practicum during COVID-19 pandemic at University of Malang, Indonesia. A survey designed utilizing a questionnaire and follow up interviews were used and the findings revealed four main challenges of using online teaching namely; classroom management, assessment, the lack of supporting facilities and the Internet, and limited orientation of the practicum. However, EFL pre-eservice teachers perceived positive enhancement related to their knowledge, teaching skills, teaching methods and gaining new ideas and interest in teaching.

Furthermore, Hazaymeh (2021) investigated EFL undergraduate students perceptions on online learning. Sixty participants responded to an online survey. The results showed that the participants had a positive attitude toward online learning which helped them enhance their creativity, innovation, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, research and information fluency.

Besides, Mahyoob (2020) investigated the challenges and obstacles of using online learning by EFL students at Taibah University, KSA, during the COVID-19 Pandemic era. A survey-based questionnaire was distributed to 184 participants. It was found that the challenges confronted by EFL students in terms of using online learning were related to technical, academic and communication challenges. In addition, EFL students were found to be not satisfied with online learning because it did not help them fulfill their expected language learning progress.

In fact, the application of online learning was not only limited to the theoretical aspects of learning and teaching, but also it was imposed on EFL student-teaching practicum during COVID-19 Pandemic era. (Koşar, 2021; Kadir & Aziz, 2021; Shinta & Aprilia, 2020; Naila & Sadida, 2020). The student teaching practicum is a crucial component of the teacher education program. In this program, pre-service teachers

study theoretical aspects of the curriculum, and then they are sent to schools to practice what they have learned theoretically before they step to the real world of teaching (Ibrahim, 2021; Kadir & Aziz, 2021). In this respect, the findings of Remmi and Hashim (2021) indicated that pre-service teachers' perceptions of using online formative assessment were positive.

Moreover, Koşar (2021) investigated the impact of online teaching practicum on 25 EFL pre-service teachers' preparedness for teaching during COVID-19 Pandemic era. Data were collected by questionnaires that were emailed to the participants, and were analyzed using inductive content analysis. The results showed that EFL pre-service teachers had negative perceptions towards implementing online practicum and that face-to-face teaching practicum would not be fruitful if it is replaced by online teaching practicum. Besides, Kadir & Aziz (2021) reviewed the challenges pre-service teachers face in their practicum as well as the new dimensions of teaching practicum during Covid-19 Pandemic era, and presented opportunities of online teaching practicum, in addition to implications for teacher education program.

In addition, AlRasheed et al, (2021) investigated EFL pre-service teachers' practices and perceptions of using an online-based teaching practicum at Al-Imam University in Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire was distributed to 33 EFL pre-service teachers. Although some participants were viewed as innovators in their online teachers, results revealed some issues related to the lack of both time management, new technologies and the findings pointed to the need for training EFL pre-service teachers on using more methods, strategies of teaching and communication skills for attaining better outcomes. .

Context of the Problem

Due to the radical change in education as a redult to the sudden spread of COVID-19 Pandemic in early 2021 where schools were closed, social distance was imposed, and economics was severely affected and hence, online learning was introduced as a teaching strategy all over Egypt. The abrupt transition from face to face schooling to online learning happened without any proper training. In addition, students, teachers, parents and administrators in rural and remote areas were not well-versed with the art of online learning and teaching and as a

result, they suffered from these huge challenges because the online services and resources were not readily available. Some male students had to move to areas where the internet service was partially available. Females were not able to do so for cultural reasons. A big number of parents did not accept the instant transition from face to face learning to the online one. In addition, such presents were not well-versed with the procedures of accessing the online learning to help their children access the internet. As a result, students were unable to attend online classes or have their assignments accomplished on time. As a result of this pandemic, EFL students were abruptly disrupted academically, psychologically and socially across and educational institutions. Such challenges raised by the widespread of COVID-19 Pandemic and its reflection on education where online learning was used at all education levels was investigated by a tremendous number of researchers such as Al-Nofli, 2022; Alharbi & Khalil, 2022; Putri1 & Suryaman (2022) ; Ali et al. (2021) ; Qasim et al (2021) ; Barakat, et al., 2022; Almahasees, et al's study (2021) ; Hazaymeh (2021) ; Amin & Hussien (2021) & Shinta & Aprilia (2020).

Statement of the Problem

Pre-service EFL teachers at Arish Faculty of Education had to shift from the traditional teaching method of face-to face to online learning during COVID-19 Pandemic era. This happened suddenly, without any proper preparation. As a result of this shift, tremendous challenges were encountred by these pre-service EFL teachers. Therefore, this research attempts to investigate the pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of using online learning during COVID-19 pandemic era.

Research Questions

The present research attempts to answer the following questions:
1. What are the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers of online learning benefits during the Covid-19 pandemic era?

2. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive online learning challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic era?

Significance of this Research

This research is hoped to be significant in introducing theoretical knowledge, insights and perspectives to pre-service teachers, teachers, researchers, and stockholders in terms of online learning concerning advantages, disadvantages and solutions to challenges related to the administration of online learning. In addition, researchers can benefit from the findings of this research as it presents a survey of the constraints and consequences related to online learning and hence, they can find solutions to some issues related to such constraints and obstacles that may appear in similar problematic contexts such using various kinds of learning platforms used to learn a subject. Besides, course designers may make use of the procedures followed in overcoming the challenges related to using online learning.

Delimitations of this Research

This research was delimited to:
1. Pre-service EFL teachers who were enrolled in the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Arish University during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023 who received online learning for two academic semesters.
2. The first semester of the academic year 2022-2023.

Method

Research Design

The present research is a descriptive qualitative one. It aims at investigating the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic era at the Faculty of Education – Arish University.

Participants

The current research included 101pre-service EFL teachers: 80 females and 21 males. The average age of the participants was 20-23 years. All the participants were enrolled in the fourth year, English Department at the Faculty of Education, Arish University in North Sinai governorate during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023 (N=121). However, 20 students were excluded from the statistical analysis because they participated in the administration of the piloting the research tool "questionnaire" to measure its reliability.

Instruments

To achieve the purpose of this research, two instruments were prepared by the researcher and used namely; a questionnaire and open-ended interviews.

1. The questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 7 sections. Section (1) covers the initial information of the participants (name, age, year and number of coursed studied online). Section (2) includes online platforms where the participants were asked to mark the online platforms they used during COVID-19 Pandemic era. Section (3) covers the advantages of online learning. This section includes 28 items. Section (4) includes the disadvantages of online learning. It includes 20 items. In sections (5) and (6), students were asked to express their own opinions in terms of providing more advantages and disadvantages of online learning rather than the items that were not mentioned in the questionnaire and, in section (7), students were asked to provide their suggestions and comments to make the use of online learning more fruitful.

The questionnaire follows the 5-point-Likert scale from 1 to 5. (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree and (5) Strongly agree.

Validity of the Questionnaire

To estimate its validity, the questionnaire was submitted to a panel of 6 university professors specialized in Curricula and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to check its appropriateness, sufficiency, clarity and suitability for administration.

However, the questionnaire was modified according to the feedback received from the jurors and was ready to be administered to a sample of 20 participants to estimate its reliability.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

To estimate its reliability, the "test-retest reliability method" was used. The questionnaire was administered to 20 pre-service EFL teachers twice with 15 days between the pre and post administrations. Students' responses to the questionnaire items in both administrations were almost the same, and hence, the questionnaire was reliable and suitable for the administration. (Please see appendix for the final version of the questionnaire).

2. Open-ended Interviews

Open-ended interviews were used to collect data from the participants in terms of online learning. Students were asked to provide their input about online learning; advantages, disadvantages, problems they faced when using online learning as well as suggestions for a better future use of online learning. In addition, pre-service EFL teachers were given the opportunity to freely express their ideas. In fact, a big amount of data was elicited from the interviewees and various issues related to online learning were revealed.

Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire in its final version was posted online and its link was provided to the participants who were given one week to respond to its items.

Results of the Research and Discussion

After the questionnaire was administered to the research participants, monitoring of all grades in the selection of the five choices, the questions were answered.

The Answer of the First Question:

1. What are the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers of online learning benefits during the Covid-19 pandemic era?

In order to answer the first question, the Mean, Standard Deviation, Rank and Degree of scores of the research participants in the first part of the questionnaire "*The advantages of online learning*" are calculated. This procedure was executed by SPSS program, version 7 and the results are presented as follows:

Table (1) Means, Standard Deviation, Rank and Degree for the first part of the questionnaire "Advantages of Online Learning"

No	Statement	Mean	STD.D	Rank	Degree
1	Manage the classes.	2.7	1.4	12	Medium
2	Reduce schooling expenses.	3.6	1.3	6	Big
3	Record lectures.	3.6	1.4	6	Big
4	Communicate with professors easily anytime/anywhere.	3.7	1.3	5	Big
5	Use my preferred technological device (i.e, mobile, Laptop).	4.0	1.2	2	Big
6	Have flexibility of learning.	3.5	1.2	7	Big
7	Access resources and references easily.	3.8	1.3	4	Big
8	Mark attendance easily	3.7	1.3	5	Big
9	Manage my online learning environment.	3.3	1.2	9	Medium
10	Acquire new experiences and technological skills.	3.8	1.2	4	Big
11	Save time and effort.	4.1	1.3	1	Big
12	Enhance my motivation for learning	3.3	1.2	9	Medium
13	Attend online classes easily	3.6	1.2	6	Big
14	Share documents and resources quickly and easily	3.9	1.3	3	Big

15	Provide more learning opportunities.	3.7	1.2	5	Big
16	Enhance my social skills.	3.2	1.4	10	Medium
17	Send assignments to professors easily.	4.0	1.3	2	Big
18	Improves my language skills	3.4	1.4	8	Medium
19	Assignments are easily assessed.	3.8	1.3	4	Big
20	Participate in activities easily & smoothly.	3.5	1.5	7	Big
21	Enhance my creativity (i.e. organization, experimentation).	3.1	1.1	11	Medium
22	Collaborate with colleagues & professors.	3.3	1.3	9	Medium
23	Enhance my critical thinking- i.e., Analysis, problem solving	3.2	1.2	10	Medium
24	Solve learning problems	3.1	1.2	11	Medium
25	Enhance the decision-making skills	3.2	1.1	10	Medium
26	Conduct online research.	3.8	1.2	4	Big
27	Consolidate the relationships with professors and colleagues.	3.3	1.3	9	Medium
28	Have a stress-free learning.	3.3	1.5	9	Medium
	Total	**3.51**	**1.27**		

Data analysis of table (1) shows that pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of online learning during COVID-19 Pandemic era reached a big average level of 3.51 with (1.27) standard deviation. The items (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (10), (11), (13), (14), (15), (17), 19), (20) and (26) proved to be big with means ranging between (3.4 and 4.2). This indicates that online learning was on a big degree of help to pre-service EFL teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic era in terms of reducing schooling expenses, recording lectures and attending classes, ,

In addition, the items (1), (9), (12), (16), (18), (21), (22), (23), (24), (25), (27) and (28) revealed a medium range with a mean floating between (2.6 and 3.4) and two standard deviations between (1.1 and 1.5).

This also indicates that online learning was of medium degree of benefit to pre-service EFL teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic era in terms of (1) managing classes and online learning environment, (2)

enhancing participants' creativity, (3) social and language skills, (4) collaborating with colleagues and professors, (5) solving learning problems and decision-making skills and (7) getting a stress-free learning.

The results of this research are consistent with the results of Chotalia (2022) in terms of the positive role of online learning in "facilitating students' communication with professors and colleagues anytime/anywhere", with Sa & Serpa, (2020) in terms of "having flexibility of learning", and with (Al-Nofli, 2022; Alharbi & Khalil, 2022; Curelaru et al., (2022); Martin, 2022; Burton, 2022; Diab & Elgahsh, 2020) in terms of "using their preferred technological devices", "the flexibility of learning, accessing resources and referencing easily, marking attendance, saving time and effort, having a stronger relationship with professors and colleagues, getting more learning opportunities and conducting online research". In addition, the results of this research are consistent with the results of Thompson (2022) and Sarangi, (2021) in terms of "the ease of sharing resources" and "the suitability of online learning to different learning styles". Furthermore, the results of this research are similar to those of Curelaru et al., (2022) and Allison & Hudson (2022) in terms of "sending assignments and sharing documents in a very short time". Furthermore, there were similarities between the results of the present research and those of Almahsees, et al., (2021) and Shinta & Aprilia (2020) in term of "the enhancement of EFL participants' knowledge", "teaching skills", "teaching methods", "gaining new ideas and interest in teaching", "creativity, innovation, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making and research".

The answer of the Second Question:

2. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive online learning challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic era?
In order to answer the second question, the Mean, Standard Deviation, Rank and Degree of scores of research participants in the second part of the questionnaire "*The challenges of online learning*" are calculated.

This procedure was executed by SPSS program, version 7, and the results are presented as follows:

Table (2) Mean, Standard Deviation, Rank and Degree

No	Statement	Mean	STD. D	Rank	Degree
29	The risk of low attention levels due to online learning	3.2	1.4	4	Medium
30	Weak Internet network in using online learning.	3.9	1.4	1	Big
31	The lack of suitable devices for online learning.	3.4	1.3	2	Medium
32	The lack of online instructional time.	3.3	1.3	3	Medium
33	I resist online learning.	2.9	1.3	7	Medium
34	I lose focus within online learning	1.3	1,4	10	v. Small
35	Some of my professors suffer from illiteracy of technological matters in terms of using online learning.	3.2	1.3	3	Medium
36	It is difficult to fully understand all subjects within online learning.	3.3	1.3	3	Medium
37	I suffer from isolation and depression across online learning	3.0	1.4	3	Medium
38	Online learning causes the lack of self-discipline for me.	2.8	1.2	8	Medium
39	The lack of technical equipment e.g. Laptop, desktop computer and tablet with keyboard within online learning.	3.2	1.4	4	Medium
40	Cheating can be prevented using online learning.	2.7	1.5	9	Medium

41	I have a poor electricity connection that hinders online learning.	3.4	1.4	2	Medium
42	Lack of a suitable platform.	2.9	1.3	7	Medium
43	Online learning leads to poor classroom management	3.3	1.4	3	Medium
44	Online learning is boring.	3.1	1.3	5	Medium
45	Online learning causes health and psychological problems (e.g., stress, anxiety, decreased motivation, and isolation/loneliness.	2.9	1.5	7	Medium
46	Online learning leads to learning process problems (e.g., misunderstandings, a lack of feedback).	3.2	1.3	4	Medium
47	Lack of challenge and disengagement.	3.2	1.3	4	Medium
48	Online learning hinders my speaking skills.	3.0	1.3	6	Medium
Total		3.06	1.35		

Data analysis of table (2) shows that pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of online learning during COVID-19 Pandemic era reached a large average level of 3.06 with (1.35) standard deviation. The item No (30) " Weak Internet network in using online learning", proved to be "big" in degree, with a mean ranging (3.4 and 4.2). This indicates that the majority of the participants have a weak Internet network in using online learning. However, items (29), (31), (32), (33), (34), (35), (36), (37), (38), (39), (40), (41), (42), (43), (44), (45), (46), (47) and (48) proved to be "medium" in rank, with means ranging between (1.3 and 3.9). This indicates that online learning was on a "*medium degree*" of help to pre-service EFL teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic era in terms of "the risk of low attention levels due to online learning", "the lack of suitable devices for online learning and instructional time",

"resisting online learning", "the lack of technological skills among professors", "understanding subjects across online learning", "being depressed", "having the lack of technological equipment, self-discipline, in using online learning", "avoiding cheating", "having poor electricity connections", " the lack of suitable platforms", "poor classroom management", "getting bored", "having psychological problems", "the lack of challenge and disengagement", and "hindering one's speaking skills". On the contrary, the degree of item (34) was very small with a mean (1.3) and standard deviation (1.4).

The results of this research are consistent with the results of Al-Nofli (2022), Curelaru et al., (2022), and Alharbi & Khalil (2022) in terms of "the risk of low attention levels due to online learning", "putting students in isolation and depression and suffering from the lack of practice-based learning". Moreover, the results of this research are similar to those of Martin (2022), Burton (2022), and Diab & Elgahsh (2020) in terms of "the lack of technical equipment i.g, Laptop, desktop computer and tablet with keyboard" as one of the challenges related to using online learning. Further, there is a similarity in the results of the present research and the results of Thomson (2022) and Sarangi (2021) in terms of "the poor classroom management and learning process problems (e.g., misunderstandings", and "the lack of feedback) caused by online learning". In addition, there are similarities between the results of this research and those of Putri & Suryaman (2022), Curelaru et al., (20220, Bich and Lian (2021), Thamrin et al., (2021) Ameen (2021), Almahsees (2021) and Shinta and Aprilia (2020) in terms "the negative sides caused by online learning and perceived negatively by EFL university learners such as "losing motivation, health and psychosocial problems (e.g., stress, anxiety, decreased motivation, isolation/loneliness, and apathy)" and "learning process problems (e.g., misunderstanding, a lack of feedback, additional academically requirements, a lack of challenge, and disengagement", "having technical problems of internet connection", "the lack of understanding the subjects", "poor learning conditions at home" and "the lack of self-discipline", "illiteracy of teachers on technical matters", "poor electricity connection", " the lack of classroom management and supporting facilities" and "not being helped to fulfill their expected language learning progress".

When interviewed and asked about their perceptions of the advantages and benefits of using online learning, pre-service EFL teachers' replies included the following:

The first five top replies were: (1) It was a new online learning experience, (2) selecting learning materials from a variety of resources (i.e., Google, Blogs,YouTube), (3) saving one's time & effort instead for going to classes at the university in hot or cold weathers, (4) reducing transportation expenses, and (5) getting more online references.

In addition, the second top five replies were: (6) enhancing one's communication and collaboration with others (professors and colleagues), (7) flexibility in learning, (8) allowing us to attend classes at any place, (9) helping us to be independent learners and (10) avoiding infected places and people.

Finally, the rest of pre-service relpies were: (11) providing disabled students with the needed knowledge while being at home, (12) helping students to attend online classes more than face-to-face classes, (13) helping students to record lectures and listening to them at any time, (14) reducing social anxiety, (15) attending classes while being socially relaxed among family members, (16) developing listening and reading skills, (17) sharing ideas and opinions freely, (18) enhancing time management, (19) creating groups through which ideas and documents are shared easily and flexibly, (20) gaining more technical and internet skills, and (21) enhancing shy students' participation.

However, when asked about the shortcomings of using online learning, pre-service EFL teachers' replies included the following:

(1) Having poor internet and electricity connection that doesn't help catching all online classes, (2) losing focus and having inability to follow online classes, (3) missing many online classes as a result of being untrained in using online learning, (4) having distractions at home that negatively affected following online classes.

Finally, when asked to provide their suggestions in terms of a better use of online learning, the majority of pre-service EFL teacher's suggestions focused on the following:

1. Training on using online learning should be provided to both students and teachers.
2. Decisions regarding using online learning should not be taken suddenly and quickly.

3. The use of online learning should be included in university classes so that students get ready for any sudden action regarding to the application of online learning.

4. Computer labs at the faculty should be made use of more and more, so that pre-service teachers' computer skills are enhanced.

Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers of using online learning during COVID-19 Pandemic era. The results of the research revealed that all the participants studied 28 subjects online, and that they used five platforms for online learning namely; Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp and Telegram.

In terms of the first part of the questionnaire that deals with "*the benefits of using online learning*", it is noticed that the top preferences of pre-service-EFL teachers in terms of responding to the questionnaire items that are characterized by *ease* and *smoothness*. The examples that reflect this notion are items No. (1) Saving time and effort, No. (4) Communicate with professors easily anytime/anywhere, No. (6) Having flexibility of learning, No. (7) Accessing resources and references easily, No. (8) Mark attendance easily, No. (13) Attend online classes easily, No. (14) Share documents and resources quickly and easily, No. (17) Send assignments to professors easily, No. (19) Assignments are easily assessed, and No. (20) Participating in activities easily and smoothly.

In addition, it is observerd that there are two items that are mostly preferred by the participants namelt; No. (2) Reduce schooling expenses and No. (11) Save time and effort. Moreover, the participants seem to prefer online activities that enable them to enhance their learning and research. The items that show this belief are (15) Provide learning opportunities and No. (26) Conduct online research. Besides, the participants' perceptions tend to be "*big*" in degree and "*high*" in rank (2). This is shown in item No. (5) Use my preferred technological device (mobile, Laptop).

On the other hand, the majority of the items that got a "*medium degree*" were those items that require *the ability to manage, enhance,*

collaborate, and solve problems. The examples that view this notion are items No. (1) Manage the classes, No. (9) Manage my online learning environment, No. (12) Enhance my motivation for learning, No. (16) Enhance my social skills, No. (18) Improve my language skills, No. (21) Enhance my creativity, No. (22) Collaborate with colleagues and professors, and (25) Enhance the decision-making skills.

As for the second part of the questionnaire that covers the challenges of using online learning, it is indicated that the majority of the participants suffer from "a weak Internet network in using online learning", item No. 30, rank (1). This is true, because these students come from remote areas where the internet facilities are rarely supported and such areas are in a critical need for such services. In addition, the students who usually live in such remote areas have "a lack of suitable devices for online learning" item No. 31 rank (2) because the absence of the Internet facilities and electricity, this doesn't encourage them to get the devices they need. Furthermore, items No. (36), No. (37), No. (41) reflect a great bad level of life conditions of these students who suffered from social distance imposed on them during the COVID-19 Pandemic era and hence, they rarely contacted each other and as a result, they suffered from psychological problems such as isolation, depression and stress across online learning No. (45), and this made online learning boring, item No. (44). Besides, it was indicated that the participants faced some problems related to online learning such as the lack challenge and disengagement item No. (47), inability to develop their own speaking skills No. (48), losing focus within online learning No. (34) and as a results they tended to resist online learning. item No. (33).

It's worth noting that the situation in North Sinai is totally different from that of any other area in Egypt. During the COVID-19 Pandemic era, people suffered not only from that pandemic itself, but they also suffered from the lack of electricity, internet services, and communication and limited transportation. Such suffering was due to security purposes where the government was fighting terrorism in that area under the shield of the so known as "The Comprehensive Military Operation", and thus, this was reflected upon all aspects of life in this area.

Recommendations

In the light of the results attained, the following recommendations could be presented:

- Online learning should be partially incorporated as a teaching strategy in all levels of education.
- All teachers, students and administrators should be trained on online learning.
- Earlier training should be provided before the administration of online learning.
- Schools in remote areas should be provided with internet facilities and electricity so that online learning can be properly used in these schools.
- Egyptian universities should provide students with stable, reliable internet connection to maximize online learning.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings of the present research, the following implications for further research are suggested:

- Exploring the critical challenges that affect the application of online learning.
- The effectiveness of using online learning in developing the language skills among primary school pupils.
- The effect of online learning on enhancing the communication skills between students and teachers.

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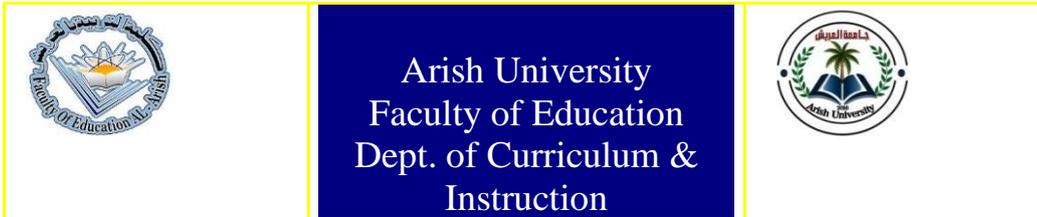
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Appendix (A) Questionnaire

	Arish University Faculty of Education Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction	

A Questionnaire

Online Learning: Perceptions of Pre-service EFL Teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic Era".

Dear 4th year EFL student,

The questionnaire attached herewith, is intended to explore your perceptions of using online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic era.

As a pre-service EFL teacher, kindly read all the statements in the questionnaire below and mark your responses that suit your preference.

Bear in mind, this instrument uses a five-point Likert type scale; from strongly disagree to strongly disagree with values 1-5.

Important:

The information you provide is confidential and will be only used for research purposes.

Thank you very much for your cooperation & help.

Mahdi M. A. Ibrahim, Ph.D
Department of Curriculum & Teaching Methods
Faculty of Education – Arish University

1. *Initial Information:*

1. Full Name in English (Optional)	
2. Age	20-21 21-22 22-23 23-24
3. Academic Year	
4. Number of Subjects studied online	

2. *Online Platforms*		
Please mark the platform you used in online learning.		
1	Zoom,	
2	Microsoft Teams	
3	WhatsApp	
4	Moodle	
5	Telegram	
6	Other online platforms (Please specify)	

3. *Advantages of Online Learning*

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Not Sure 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
	Online learning enables me to do the following					
1	Manage the classes.					
2	Reduce schooling expenses.					
3	Record lectures.					
4	Communicate with professors easily anytime/anywhere.					
5	Use my preferred technological device (i.e, mobile, Laptop).					
6	Have flexibility of learning.					
7	Access resources and references easily.					
8	Mark attendance easily.					
9	Manage my online learning environment.					
10	Acquire new experiences and technological skills.					
11	Save time and effort.					
12	Enhance my motivation for learning.					
13	Attend online classes easily.					
14	**Share documents and resources quickly and easily.**					
15	Provide more learning opportunities.					
16	Enhances my social skills.					
17	Send assignments to professors easily.					
18	Improves my language skills.					
19	Assignments are easily assessed.					
20	Participate in activities easily & smoothly.					
21	Enhance my creativity (i.e. organization, experimentation).					
22	Collaborate with colleagues & professors.					
23	Enhance my critical thinking (i.e. Analysis, problem solving etc.)					
24	Solve learning problems.					
25	Enhance the decision-making skills (i.e., Team work, creativity, organization).					
26	Conduct online research.					
27	Consolidate the relationships with professors and colleagues.					
28	Have a stress-free learning.					

4. *The Disadvantages of Online Learning*

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
29	The risk of low attention levels due to online learning.					

30	Weak Internet network in using online learning.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
31	The lack of suitable devices for online learning.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
32	The lack of online instructional time.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
33	I resist online learning.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
34	I lose focus within online learning.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
35	Some of my professors suffer from illiteracy of technological matters in terms of using online learning.	■	■	■	■	■
36	It is difficult to fully understand all subjects within online learning.	■	■	■	■	■
37	I suffer from isolation and depression across online learning.	■	■	■	■	■
38	Online learning causes the lack of self-discipline for me.	■	■	■	■	■
39	The lack of technical equipment e.g. Laptop, desktop computer and tablet with keyboard within online learning.	■	■	■	■	■
40	Cheating can be prevented using online learning.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
41	I have a poor electricity connection that hinders online learning.	■	■	■	■	■
42	Lack of a suitable platform.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
43	Online learning leads to poor classroom management.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
44	Online learning is boring.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
45	Online learning causes health and psychological problems (e.g., stress, anxiety, decreased motivation, and isolation/loneliness.	■	■	■	■	■
46	Online learning leads to learning process problems (e.g., misunderstandings, a lack of feedback).	■	■	■	■	■
47	Lack of challenge and disengagement.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
48	Online learning hinders my speaking skills.	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬

5. In your opinion, are there other advantages not mentioned above that you would add?

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6. In your opinion, are there other disadvantages not mentioned above that you would add?

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7. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?

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Thank you very much for cooperation & help.