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Online Learning Strategies Implemented and Solutions to the Challenges Faced During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Post-Graduate EFL Learners

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Abstract

Objectives: The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic forced the academic spectrum to swap the traditional mode of learning with virtual learning and English language learners (ELL) drew no exception. Keeping the context in mind, the present study explored implemented online learning strategies and challenges faced by post-graduate EFL learners. This research also investigates the factors affecting their choice of online learning strategies. **Methods:** A concoction of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to gather information. The study adopts the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire by Oxford. 63 (33 female and 30 male) Post-Graduate EFL Learners participated in this study. **Findings:** The findings of this paper indicate that 60-65% of participants faced challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, whereas 35-40% did not face such challenges. The extent of challenges and strategies were positively identified by the participants. **Novelty:** Based on the construct i.e. participants' positive responses to the implemented online learning strategies and in the light of the outcomes of this study, it is indicated that the learners hardly faced any issue during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the learners perceived no adverse factors that influenced learning strategies. In conclusion, this study offers suggestions and recommendations.

Keywords: Language learning strategies 1; online learning 2; COVID19 3; lockdown 4; EFL Learners 5

1 Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has enforced universities, colleges, and schools to completely terminate face-to-face teaching and learning. Online or remote learning was the way out to continue the teaching and learning process. The sudden and unexpected shift from face-to-face to online learning during the coronavirus pandemic had its impact on the educational arena. And it appears that the online teaching mode will continue

to be an important tool in the post-Covid-19 era. Learning strategies in face-to-face classes differ from those in online learning. In face-to-face classes, learners used to take notes and engage in discussions along with other in-person learning strategies with the teacher. However, in online learning, the absence of in-person participation with the teacher and another peer may force learners to follow different learning strategies.

The unexpected choice to execute completely remote teaching and learning framework was a big challenge for teachers and educationists who needed to figure out which learning strategies, online media, synchronous and asynchronous tools, and other computerized assets would be utilized to ensure effective guidance for the English language students.

The Ministry of Education, Saudi Arabia [2020] wanted to avoid any disruption in academics. It underlined the importance of online education as a substitute for face-to-face teaching and learning environments. It was an opportunity for the learners regardless of their site or tech skills⁽¹⁾.

Students have been facing several challenges, for example, time management, learning tools, privacy, and most importantly internet accessibility. The majority of learners have been using android cell for online classes. They have also been facing different issues related to anxiety, depression, and an ominous study environment at their places. Learners from distant regions and remote areas mostly face great challenges for online learning during this crisis.

The sudden move to a new learning environment forced students to implement different strategies and styles of learning. Foreign language learners were no exception. They found it difficult to adapt online learning environment immediately. Since there has been little known about the learning strategies adopted by Saudi EFL postgraduates; it is important to investigate and to shed light on the factors affecting the choosing the strategies as stated above.

Singh and Thurman (2020) observed that e-learning is considered as learning experiences using various e tools (e.g. tablets, computers, laptops, smartphones, etc.) with internet accessibility in synchronous or asynchronous environments. Online learning is a platform that makes teaching and learning strategies more student-friendly, innovative, and adaptable⁽²⁾.

Bonafini, et.al (2017) Online learning can be challenging for learners in general and EFL learners in particular. Whelan Ariza EN, (2018) Many studies have explored challenges encountered in e-learning within an online environment. These challenges include but are not limited to, for example, lack of professional development⁽³⁾,⁽⁴⁾ Al-Sharhan S, et.al (2020) & Alenezi A, (2020) academic integrity⁽⁵⁾,⁽⁶⁾, Stein DS, (2020) internet accessibility issues, online instructional strategies, individual learning styles⁽⁷⁾, Abdul HM et.al. (2020) tool inaccessibility, and other technical issues⁽⁸⁾.

Beaudoin et al. (2009) mentioned several critical factors characterizing successful online learning. These factors include self-motivation, time management, ability to learn with restricted support, ability to tackle unstructured settings and relationships with peers⁽⁹⁾.

Learning strategies are classified differently. Rubin (1987) identified two types of learning strategies:

(A) Cognitive learning strategies: These include: (i) Clarification or verification, (ii) Guessing or inductive inferring, (iii) Deductive reasoning, (iv) Practice, (v), Memorization, and (vi). Monitoring.

(B) Metacognitive learning strategies: These are used to manage, adjust, or self-direct language learning⁽¹⁰⁾.

Oxford (1990) identified three direct and three indirect strategy types. Direct strategies that are related to language use include memory, cognitive and compensatory strategies. Indirect strategies comprise metacognitive, affective, and social strategies⁽¹¹⁾. However, Beltrán (1996) classified learning strategies into four categories: (1) support strategies which include motivation, attitudes, and affect, (2) processing strategies, which include selection, organization, and processing, and (3) knowledge personalization strategies which include creative and critical thinking recovery and transfer strategies⁽¹²⁾.

Hilles & Sutton (2001) observe that learning strategies extend to cover awareness of students' learning styles that influence effective learning strategies to facilitate the smooth flow of the language learning process⁽¹³⁾.

Armstrong et al. (2012) averted that learning styles here are defined as the favored ways of reacting cognitively and behaviorally to learning tasks in different contexts. These styles can influence the learners' motivations and attitudes to learning, and form their performance⁽¹⁴⁾.

Other studies have also been conducted to investigate the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on EFL/ESL learners' strategies. Shams, M., et.al.(2022) examined the students' accessibility and success of E-learning portals using the DeLone and McLean (D&M) model. Their study compared female and male student groups regarding the usage of the E-learning portal in the higher education context. The participants included 254 male and female students. The results revealed a significant and direct relationship of e-service quality with system use and user satisfaction for females and male students. Also, there was a significant and positive relationship between system use and user satisfaction with E-learning portal success for both; female and male students⁽¹⁵⁾.

Gaeta, M. et.al. (2021), analyzed the relationships between students' emotions, coping strategies, and self-regulated learning in online learning during the Covid-19 lockdown. The results indicated that, although anxiety, boredom, and frustration were present among participants, gratitude, joy, and hope were positively related to self-regulated learning and were dominating

during that situation. Also, students had to manage strategies that focused on facing and reassessing the situation. Thus, students were able to manage strategies that mediated the relationship between emotions and self-regulated learning⁽¹⁶⁾.

Mseleku (2020) investigated the challenges and chances of online learning during the current pandemic lockdown. He reported that most of the challenges were caused as a result of insufficient time and experience with technology, internet connection problems, and lack of teaching and learning resources⁽¹⁷⁾.

Dhawan, S. (2020) stated that the sudden outbreak of a deadly disease called Covid-19 caused by a Corona Virus shook the entire world. The present circumstance challenged the education system across the world and forced educators to move to an online mode of teaching overnight. He also describes the importance of online learning and challenges, analysis of e-learning modes in the time of pandemic and includes suggestions for educational institutions on how to cope with challenges faced by online learning⁽¹⁸⁾.

Dawadi, S., et.al. (2020) studied the effect of the Covid-19 on the Nepal education system, with an attention to school education. They suggest that the challenges it has been experiencing in the advent of Covid-19 are primarily due to its faulty implementation strategies and inability to implement teaching plans⁽¹⁹⁾.

It is widely believed that the impact of learning strategies has always been highly effective in EFL contexts. Steinkamp (2018) suggested that high-achieving learners apply different behavioral strategies that may lead them to achieve good results while others fail to attain any progress in learning. Many learners suffer and some might be delayed or give up on their online education due to the lack of organization, arrangement, and self-monitoring skills⁽²⁰⁾.

Since there has been little research investigating learning strategies and learning styles used by Saudi EFL learners in general and post-graduate students in particular, this study explored the learning strategies used by post-graduate students during the coronavirus pandemics. The findings helped find out how EFL learners have adjusted their regular strategies to fit into the new online context and highlighted a few challenges they encountered.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Hypothesis

There are significant differences between students' learning strategies in face-to-face and online learning.

2.2 Research Questions

- What are the new learning strategies used by EFL learners in online learning?
 - Do the EFL learners face challenges in online learning while executing learning strategies?
 - What are the factors affecting the choice of learning strategies in online learning

This research has been conducted using a survey amongst a group of post-graduate students enrolled in two master programs: Applied linguistics and TESOL programs at the College of Languages and Translation- Najran University. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 participants who were in their second semester 2020-21, out of them only 63 i.e., 52.38% female and 47.62% male students offered to respond to the questionnaire specially prepared for collecting data for this research. Consequently, the researchers took only 63 students as the participants of the study. Very few students already have previous experience of online teaching and the learning process. The details of the participants are given in graph no. 1 below:

A concoction of qualitative and quantitative methods is used to gather information. The study adopts the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire by Oxford. Quantitative data in the form of a questionnaire is conducted online using Google form to avoid any face-to-face Coronavirus infection. Learners were asked to rate each item according to how strongly they agreed from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.3 Research Data Collection Instrument

Quantitative data in the form of a questionnaire was conducted online using Google form which was divided into five sections namely:

- Part A: The demographic characteristics of students participating in the study,
- Part B: Students' views on e-learning,
- Part C: Learning strategies in online education,
- Part D: Factors influencing learning strategies and
- Part E: Challenges encountered in e-learning.

2.4 Data Analysis

The present study was conducted after completing the online master courses during the covid-19 pandemic. The corpus of the data contains editing, classifying, and tabulating the statistics which was collected from the postgraduate students of the Department of English, college of languages and translation, Najran University, Najran, Saudi Arabia. This research explored participants’ e-learning learning experience in higher education during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. In particular, we recognized the extent of challenges and factors that participants experienced, what the Covid-19 pandemic meant for their e-learning experience and the strategies that they used to face these challenges.

2.5 Choice of Participants

Corpus of the data for the analysis was collected from the two post-graduate clusters of students registered in MA Applied Linguistics and MA in TESOL at the Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, Najran University, Najran, Saudi Arabia. These students had already completed their masters’ course during the Covid-19 pandemic. Ethical review and approval were not required for the study on human participants by the local legislation and institutional requirements.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Part A: Demographic Characteristics of the participants

Figure 1 displays participants’ responses to the questionnaire items related to the Demographic Characteristics of Students Participating in the Study from items no.1-4. Item (1) “Gender” shows that there are 52.38% female and 47.62% male. Item (2) “college” shows that all the participants who have been included in this study are from the College of Languages and Translation. Item (3) “age” describes the age of the participants. There is not a single student in the age group of 18-20, 40.60% are in the age of 21-25 while 59.40% of them are above 25 years of age. The next item of this table “Urban/Rural” tells us that the majority of the students i.e. 66.80% belong to urban areas whereas 33.22% belong to rural areas.

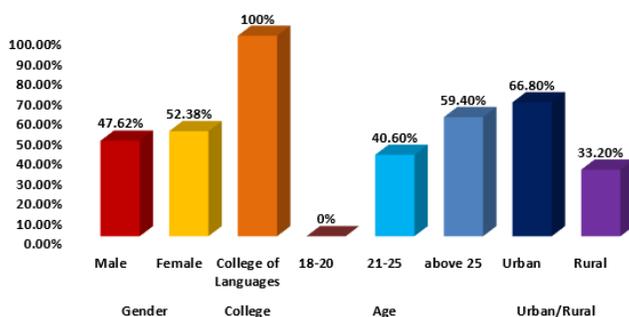


Fig 1. Project details of the participants (Item no 1-4)

3.2 Part B: Students’ Views on E-Learning (item 1-10)

Under this section, all the respondents were asked questions related to the learners’ views on E-Learning by assigning appropriate rankings to the given options. Based on these rankings, the researchers assigned a Likert Scale: (5: Strongly disagree, 4: disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 2: agree, 1: Strongly agree) respectively. Then, the scores were converted into percentages. “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” were considered as positive responses in favor of the questionnaire item or questions while “Disagree” and “Strongly disagree” were considered as negative responses.

Table 1 presents the average scores of the participants’ views on e-learning that they experienced during online learning. In this table, the average of 20.10% of participants strongly agreed with the item (1-10) of the questionnaire such as online teaching and learning is a challenge to teachers, and students as well, online teaching is more effective than F2F learning, attending lectures are more comfortable than F2F lectures and online learning improves your technical skills to utilize the resources of the internet. 15.08% of participants agreed and 19.05% neither agreed nor disagreed while 27.10% of participants disagreed and the other 7.30% strongly disagreed with these items. Thus, we can say that the answers in this section were positive while very few participants gave a negative answer. The majority of the participants’ views were strongly positive.

Table 1. Students’ View on E-Learning(Item 1-10)

Sl. No.	Questions	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree			Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		No. of Responses	Percent %	No. of Responses	Percent %	No. of Responses	Percent %	No. of Responses	Percent %	No. of Responses	Percent %	
1	Q.1	11	17.46	11	17.46	12	19.05	22	35.48	7	11.11	
2	Q.2	12	19.05	13	20.63	24	38.10	8	12.90	6	9.52	
3	Q.3	17	26.98	16	25.40	12	19.05	14	22.58	4	6.35	
4	Q.4	11	17.46	11	17.46	16	25.40	15	24.19	10	15.87	
5	Q.5	27	42.86	5	7.94	9	14.29	17	27.42	5	7.94	
6	Q.6	32	50.79	4	6.35	7	11.11	15	24.19	5	7.94	
7	Q.7	17	26.98	6	9.52	9	14.29	25	40.32	6	9.52	
8	Q.8	32	50.79	10	15.87	8	12.70	12	19.35	1	1.59	
9	Q.9	14	22.22	10	15.87	11	17.46	26	41.94	2	3.17	
10	Q.10	28	44.44	9	14.29	12	19.05	14	22.58	0	0.00	
Average		20.1	31.90	9.5	15.08	12	19.05	16.8	27.10	5	7.30	
Standard Deviation		8.70	13.81	3.69	5.86	4.94	7.85	5.79	9.34	2.99	4.74	

3.3 Part C: Learning strategies in online education (item 11-20)

Based on the data given in Table 2, it has been observed that the average (36.51%) of the participants always used learning strategies. Further, it was reported that (38.37%) participants sometimes used strategies in online education which was the highest percentage considered as a positive response. On the other hand, (19.3%) of them reported that they occasionally used these strategies while (2.3%) and (0.70%) of them further observed that they rarely or never used the strategies given in the questionnaire respectively which was considered as negative. We noticed that the majority of the participants used strategies in online education but there was no uniformity in their answers.

Table 2. Learning Strategies in Online Education (Item 11-20)

Sl. No.	Questions	Never		Rarely		Occasionally		Sometimes		Always	
		No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent %	No. of Responses	Percent%
1	Q.11	2	3.17	0	0.00	12	19.05	22	34.92	27	42.86
2	Q.12	1	1.59	9	14.29	14	22.22	19	30.16	20	31.75
3	Q.13	0	0.00	1	1.59	11	17.46	26	41.27	25	39.68
4	Q.14	0	0.00	4	6.35	10	15.87	26	41.27	23	36.51
5	Q.15	0	0.00	4	6.35	12	19.05	23	36.51	24	38.10
6	Q.16	1	1.59	3	4.76	15	23.81	24	38.10	20	31.75
7	Q.17	1	1.59	6	9.52	14	22.22	23	36.51	19	30.16
8	Q.18	0	0.00	7	11.11	19	30.16	22	34.92	15	23.81
9	Q.19	1	1.59	4	6.35	15	23.81	20	31.75	23	36.51
10	Q.20	0	0.00	2	3.17	11	17.46	23	36.51	27	42.86
Average		0.60	0.95	4.00	6.35	13.30	21.11	22.80	36.19	22.30	35.40
Standard Deviation		0.70	1.11	2.75	4.36	2.67	4.24	2.25	3.57	3.80	6.03

3.4 Part C (a): Learning strategies in online education (Item 21-32)

Table 3 also displays the “learning strategies in online Education from (item 21-32). The elucidation based on Table ?? is as follows: It was noticed that the majority of the participants (40.80%) always used learning strategies. Further, it was also observed

that (35.94%) of participants used sometimes, (20.08%) of them reported that they occasionally used these strategies. On the other hand (2.54%) and (0.63%) of them rarely and never used the strategies given in section “C” respectively. However, we discerned that there was no uniformity in their answers to the questions asked. In line with the exposure of the findings, we noticed that most of the participants used strategies in online education e.g. “ask yourself questions”, metacognitive strategies like “arranging and planning to learn”, problem-solving strategy”, “graded assignments” and makeup plan strategies.

Table 3. Learning Strategies in Online Education (Item 21-32)

Sl. No.	Questions	Never		Rarely		Occasionally		Sometimes		Always	
		No. of Responses	Percent%								
1	Q.21	1	1.59	6	9.52	17	26.98	18	28.57	21	33.33
2	Q.22	1	1.59	3	4.76	14	22.22	23	36.51	22	34.92
3	Q.23	0	0.00	0	0.00	14	22.22	25	39.68	24	38.10
4	Q.24	0	0.00	0	0.00	17	26.98	24	38.10	22	34.92
5	Q.25	1	1.59	3	4.76	15	23.81	18	20.00	26	41.27
6	Q.26	0	0.00	1	2.00	16	25.40	17	26.98	29	46.03
7	Q.27	0	0.00	1	1.59	10	15.87	24	38.10	28	44.44
8	Q.28	0	0.00	1	1.59	10	15.87	27	42.86	25	39.68
9	Q.29	0	0.00	2	3.17	19	30.16	20	31.75	22	34.92
10	Q.30	1	1.59	1	1.59	19	30.16	22	34.92	20	31.75
11	Q.31	0	0.00	1	1.59	14	22.22	24	38.10	24	38.10
12	Q.32	0	0.00	1	1.59	14	22.22	19	30.16	29	46.03
Average		0.40	0.63	1.80	2.90	15.10	23.97	21.80	33.75	23.90	37.94
Standard Deviation		0.52	0.82	1.81	2.86	3.21	5.10	3.39	6.92	3.03	4.82

3.5 Part D: Factors influencing learning Strategies item (33-41)

In Table 4, the findings discovered that (43.15%) participants agreed that many factors influenced learning strategies. (24.03%) strongly agreed and (25.58%) neither agreed nor disagreed with item no. 33-41. The remaining (5.94%) and (1.29%) participants disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. These findings confirmed that most of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that many factors influence the learning strategies such as syllabus designing, technical support, styles, lack of organization, course designing, learning styles, self-monitoring skills, incongruous administrative support, and time management.

Table 4. Factors Influence Learning Strategies (Item 33-41)

Sl. No.	Questions	Never		Rarely		Occasionally		Sometimes		Always	
		No. of Responses	Percent%								
1	Q.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	18	28.57	27	42.86	18	28.57
2	Q.34	0	0.00	2	3.17	14	22.22	25	39.68	22	34.92
3	Q.35	0	0.00	1	1.59	17	26.98	25	39.68	20	31.75
4	Q.36	1	1.59	9	14.29	14	22.22	24	38.10	15	23.81
5	Q.37	1	1.59	9	14.29	12	18.00	28	20.00	13	20.63
6	Q.38	2	3.17	3	4.76	20	31.75	22	29.00	16	25.40
7	Q.39	1	1.59	7	11.11	12	19.05	27	42.86	16	25.40
8	Q.40	1	1.59	0	0.00	27	42.86	19	30.16	16	25.40
9	Q.41	1	1.59	6	9.52	13	20.63	23	36.51	20	31.75
Average		0.78	1.23	4.11	6.53	16.33	25.81	24.44	35.43	17.33	27.51
Standard Deviation		0.67	1.06	3.69	5.86	4.87	7.86	2.83	7.60	2.87	4.56

3.6 Part E: Challenges Encountered in e-learning (item 42-48)

In this section, the data discussed the challenges encountered in e-learning during the lockdown period. Table 5 reveals the findings that (32.95%) participants agreed that there were many challenges encountered in e-learning. (23.26%) strongly agreed and (22.09%) neither agreed nor disagreed with item no. 42-48, while the remaining (14.43%) and (7.36%) participants disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Consequently, we observed that there was no consistency in the answers mentioned in part-E. We noticed that majority of the participants faced challenges during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown and very few disagreed with this perception.

Table 5. Challenges Encountered in E-Learning (Item 42-48)

Sl. No.	Questions	Strongly agree		Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%
1	Q.42	1	1.59	6	9.52	12	19.05	24	38.10	20	31.75
2	Q.43	0	0.00	5	7.94	8	10.00	27	42.86	23	36.51
3	Q.44	6	9.52	10	15.87	12	19.05	19	30.16	16	25.40
4	Q.45	4	6.35	5	7.94	16	25.40	21	33.33	17	26.98
5	Q.46	10	15.87	13	20.63	16	18.00	14	20.00	10	15.87
6	Q.47	3	4.76	12	19.05	18	28.57	17	29.00	13	20.63
7	Q.48	5	7.94	8	12.70	13	20.63	20	31.75	17	26.98
Average		4.14	6.58	8.43	13.38	13.57	20.10	20.29	32.17	16.57	26.30
Standard Deviation		3.34	5.30	3.31	5.25	3.36	5.90	4.31	7.22	4.28	6.79

3.7 Part E (a): Challenges Encountered in e-learning (item 49-52)

In continuation of Tables 5 and 6 shows the challenges encountered in e-learning. It was noticed that (31.98%) participants opted for the option “to a small extent.” (23.84%) chose “to a very large extent” (16.28%) indicated “to a large extent” and (13.95%) and (13.95%) of them further responded “to a small extent and to a very small extent” respectively. Therefore, we found that there was no uniformity in the answers asked in the questionnaire. We noticed that all the participants used mixed answers. We can say that around 60-65% of the participants felt that they faced great challenges while the other 35-40% did not face such challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

Table 6. Challenges Encountered in E-Learning (Item 49-52)

Sl. No.	Questions	To a very large extent		To a large Extent		To some Extent		To a small Extent		To a very small Extent	
		No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%	No. of Responses	Percent%
1	Q.49	20	31.75	12	19.05	20	31.75	6	9.52	6	9.52
2	Q.50	18	28.57	20	31.75	18	10.00	4	6.35	3	4.76
3	Q.51	21	33.33	9	14.29	23	36.51	5	7.94	5	7.94
4	Q.52	6	9.52	7	11.11	12	19.05	25	39.68	13	20.63
Average		16.25	25.79	12.00	19.05	18.25	24.33	10.00	15.87	6.75	36.51
Standard Deviation		6.95	11.03	5.72	9.07	4.65	12.06	10.03	15.93	4.35	6.90

3.8 Part F: Experience of attending online lectures

Table 7 displays item No. 53 of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to rate their experience of attending online lectures during the lockdown period. The order of ranking to those 5 listed scales was (55.8%) of the participants considered the option

(e) “excellent” as the 1st rank of all. (25.6%) of them considered option (b) “very good” as the 2nd rank, 11.6% of the participants gave the 3rd rank to the option (d) “good”, another 4.7% and 2.3% of them felt that the option (d) “poor” and (e) “very poor” as the 4th and 5th rank respectively. Based on the above table and graph no. 8, the majority of the participants recounted their experience of attending online lectures during lockdown period were “excellent” and “Very Good”, whereas a very small number of participants have chosen options (d) and (e) as a negative response.

Table 7. Showing the experience of attending online lectures during the lockdown period

Sl. No.	Likert Scale	No. of Responses	Percentage%
53.	Very Poor	2	3.17
	Poor	4	6.35
	Good	10	15.87
	Very Good	17	26.98
	Excellent	30	47.62
Average		12.6	20
Standard Deviation		11.35	18.01

In the light of the last essay type question No. 54, most of the students like online learning rather than F2F learning because digital learning gives students benefits of more comfort, saving time, giving more assets, available from anyplace and cost bearing.

Only 38 out of 63 students expressed their views with regards to the difficulties/challenges they faced in e-learning during the pandemic lockdown. There were different types of challenges, issues, and difficulties that students had mentioned against the answer of this question such as ten students mentioned that “Technical issues, internet, wi-fi, and computer literacy were the main challenges as the whole online teaching and learning process is based on these digital items. The students’ comments include...

- a. “Mostly technical issues.”
- b. “Technical issues, time management, and self-motivation.”
- c. “Internet connection/ difficult to communicate with teachers and students.”
- d. “Technical difficulties with learning platforms. Unlike other platforms, Blackboard doesn’t seem to manage Internet traffic very well.”
- e. “The main problem is losing the Internet.”
- f. “Stay connected to the internet without any problems was my major challenge.”
- g. “E-Connection”
- h. “The Internet”
- i. “Slow Internet”

Two students mentioned that “shortage of time” and “Personal speaking problem were also challenges for them. The students’ answers are given below:

- a. “Personal speaking issue.”
- b. The time of exams is not enough/Even the time of exams and lectures.”

Two students identified “problem of time management” and “self-motivation problem” were great challenges they faced during online learning. Following are their answers:

- a. “Sometimes electrical problems or internet issues very slow especially during exams.”
- b. “Internet connection/ difficult to communicate with teachers and students/ time management.”
- c. “Time management”

Seven students said “overloaded Blackboard was another big problem” during e-learning. The students’ comments include...

a. “The major problem that I met, is the dealing with the BB during both the final and Mid-term exams since that some instructors asked us to answer questions with abnormal ways or using some complicated ways in very limited periods; such issues were reasons to get my marks low, such instructors could easily avoid such ways which led to putting more stress on our or my head. Moreover, some instructors did not give their courses in simplified ways.”

b. “Technical difficulties with learning platforms. Unlike other platforms, Blackboard doesn’t seem to manage Internet traffic very well.”

- c. “Lack of organization & BB problems”

d. “Unfortunately, some answers to the exam in BB had been deleted two times. It was not fair, and there was not any way to indemnity in grades for what happened.”

e. “Internet problems and a bug in BB sometimes.”

f. “Technical difficulties with learning platforms. Unlike other platforms, Blackboard.”

g. “The use of BB”

One student mentioned that “slow typing speed while writing exams” is a challenge during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Student’s comment includes...

a. “Slow typing answers.”

Some of the students rejected the idea of total online learning without F2F learning for various reasons such as F2F interaction and communication with the teachers during the course is more important than total online learning because students can learn from their instructor and classmates. A face-to-face classroom creates an environment that develops teamwork. Students commented that ...

a. “We live and work in a world where we interact with people.”

b. “Study in the classroom with instructors is very important than the learning online.”

c. “Interaction with other people is an integral part of education.”

A few students said that they did not have any problem or faced any challenge during the covid-19 pandemic, others said “nothing”. The comments of the students include...

a. “Actually, there is not a huge difficulty that we can’t manage, but honestly, as master students, our classes happens through networks so there is no difference but in contrast, we found e-learning and BB classes very useful, as we can return to the lecture’s records easily and we get many benefits from it before exams if we face any ambiguous.”

b. “Besides this, I believe that online learning for Female master’s students is the only viable option since actual classes on campus are also conducted via the network and not face-to-face.”

c. “I’ve never faced any technical issues. I could contact all my teachers and receive effective feedback at any time. I could contact and work as a group with my classmates successfully.”

d. “There is no issue.”

e. “Nothing”

f. No Problem”

The solutions of all the above-mentioned difficulties and challenges have been given below under the heading of “Suggested Remedial Actions.”

According to the results, students’ responses on “the views on e-learning” were positive and most of them strongly agreed with the items in the questionnaire. In part C of the results, several students used strategies in online education such as “ask yourself questions”, “arguing and planning to learn” etc. and they responded positively with the majority of them selecting the option “always”. As far as the factors influencing learning strategies are concerned the result findings confirmed that the majority of the participants responded positively that several factors influenced learning strategies. Finally, the results show that 60-65% of the participants faced challenges during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown, whereas 35-40% of them did not face such challenges. The overall outcome of the result shows that in all the 6 sections of the questionnaire, participants gave positive responses such as strongly agree or agree with exception of very few who chose to go otherwise.

4 Research Limitation

A few restrictions or limitations in this research should be recognized and tended to in future investigations. One constraint of this research was that it only revolved around two master courses namely MA in Applied Linguistics and MA (TESOL) students’ points of view. Future investigations might include other courses such as B.A. and B.Sc. participating in the teaching and learning. Researchers may go further by considering instructors’ perspectives and experience to get a total perspective on the circumstance and what various components collaborate or create problems for the others. Finally, this pandemic has without any doubt reformed and taken the teaching and learning process as far as possible. Nonetheless, this extraordinary instance is the same thing that will make the education framework more firmly grounded and endure future menaces.

5 Suggested Remedial Actions

Students should arrange a high-speed internet connection at their homes and they should get technical support from the IT Department and their concerned teachers for successful learning.

Digital training should be provided to all the students and teachers who are not familiar with computers or any e-tool that can be helpful for them to solve technical problems.

Time management is a very essential issue in e-learning. Students should identify the things that affect their timings while taking online learning such as distractions and multitasking. They can take help from their parents, families, and friends to control timing. The best way to manage time is that students should make a schedule for the whole day.

Self-Motivation is one of the challenges while taking online classes. Students can keep themselves motivated by keeping in touch with their teachers and classmates. They should discuss the topics they have already learned and share information. Students should log in every day, should not miss any lectures, and should not lose interest.

Setting a proper place is also a big challenge, especially in large families. There should be a proper place for taking online lectures and discussions in every students' home or there will be a disturbance that will affect the learning during the pandemic. Students should set a proper place in their homes for study to avoid distraction.

Syllabus designing and Course Content selection have always been important issues in both online as well as offline courses. As far as Covid-19 pandemic lockdown is concerned Course and syllabus designing is one of the most important issues in such conditions. The course designer should modify the courses in terms of activities and evaluations for a better understanding of the contents. The syllabus should be shorter for the lockdown period than the normal period.

When we talk about the internet or social media then we talk about privacy. While working on the internet, the privacy problem has always been a very big challenge. While sharing applications and e-tools we can't be sure about the safety of our data whether it will be saved or not. But students can reduce the risk by not using suspicious apps, distrustful links, etc. Students should not entertain unknown messages, emails, and links that are not familiar to them. They should update their e-tools regularly.

Students should focus on the tasks and assignments which they receive from their respective teachers and complete them on time. They should use self-management skills all the time to keep track of what they are doing.

A sudden change from F2F learning to completely online learning is one of the challenges as students found the lack of F2F interaction and lack of immediate feedback. Students should involve themselves in taking online classes as if they are taking F2F classes and instructors should interact with the students as if they are in real-time. Students should not work through lectures and material at their own pace but they should work according to the pace set by their instructors.

6 Conclusion

This study investigated the experiences of Post-Graduate EFL learners toward online learning strategies which were implemented in addition to the challenges they faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. The three significant strategies results were recorded as 48.8% for “creating a regular study space and organizing required material”, 34.9% for “memorization” 46.5% for “practice and monitoring.” While the most frequently used strategies were “critical thinking in writing” and discussion in virtual class/forum” (53.5% and 46.5%) respectively. The syllabus designing, technical support, styles, lack of organization, course designing, learning styles, self-monitoring skills, incongruous administrative support, and time management were the major factors that influenced the learning strategies. The outcomes of the study also revealed that the online learning challenges of participants varied in terms of type and extent, whereas, their learning experience, mental health, interaction, and flexibility were among the most significant challenges that were intensified by the pandemic. However, the learners perceived no adverse factors that influenced learning strategies contrary to the researchers' hypothesis. Based on the participants' responses to the research questions and analysis and discussion, this study recommends future studies be conducted to investigate the learners' experiences of postgraduate and under-graduate learners in online vs face-to-face classroom contexts.

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