

# ELT Online Challenges during Coronavirus Time, A Case Study of Jouf University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** *The study aims at investigating the ELT online challenges at Jouf university, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during Corona virus time. A checklist of challenges was designed and delivered electronically to a sample of 30 instructors to choose a challenge or challenges from the list that they faced during online teaching at Corona virus time. The responses were collected, analysed and discussed using suitable excel tool. The study concludes that: 40% of the participants faced challenge using online teaching entity like Blackboard, zoom, Meet, Moodle. etc. 80% of the participants faced challenge with the absence of facial expression, e.g. eye contact as well as weakness of Students – students interaction and half number of the participants complained about the weakness of Students - teachers interaction, 56.6 of the participants complained about the slowdown on the internet caused by the too many users and 40% have difficulty sharing Video/audio materials. Finally the study recommended that instructors should have workshop and training on using online technical entities. Instructors should also activate the role of the students through having videos activities presentations and assignments, add to that, instructors should activate the role of students – students interaction through video sessions or activities and should have good connection to internet that capable of delivering, interacting and sharing material.*

**Keywords:** ELT Corona virus Challenges

## 1. Introduction

Corona virus pandemic has affected all people lives aspects. It has spread fast and quickly all over the world. It has a very clear impact on people health, their economy, social lives , education .etc. Governments all over the world exerted a lot of effort to overcome or decrease this significant impact of this virus on all these sides. They follow different strategies to protect societies; they started applying social distance, decreasing hours of work, partial closure, up to the total lockdown, in all sides of the life. In educational field, it is thought of continuing teaching through adopting online teaching. Applying online teaching for the first time needs to have good preparation to meet the needs and face the unexpected challenges. It also needs suitable facilities to run the job, good connection availability for implementing the session, a capable platform that meets online session requirements as well as well-prepared teachers and students that have enough skills to use these platform. Now, more than a year has been finished running online teaching at Jouf university in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and teachers can have a good idea about this experience and the challenges they faced in teaching during this period of corona virus; they can tell what challenges and problems they experienced during online sessions, so the study tries to find out these kinds of challenges and thinks of how to overcome them in the future; since the virus effects still going on, and no way of going back to traditional teaching, at least in the near future time. A checklist of some example of challenges delivered electronically to a sample of the instructors from the university to choose from, then the checklist collected, analyzed and interpreted.

### The statement of the study

Online teaching draws the attention of most of community members, especially those who are concerned with education issues. It became an alternative way to continue

teaching due to the current circumstances. However, it is faced with some challenges that might negatively affect its continuity or result in incomplete outcomes. Therefore, the study tries to find out these challenges and difficulties and suggests some solutions for them accordingly.

### The questions of the study

To brainstorm or gather these challenges the study tries to know what kinds of challenges instructors faced during online teaching; what actual challenges instructors has experienced after nearly an year of online teaching. Participants are also enquired to provide us with some suggestions as solutions for these challenges.

### The hypotheses

It is believed that there are some common challenges instructors faced during online teaching. For example, difficulty in accessing internet, poor internet or Wi-Fi, lack of interactions and others. The study also suggest according to the responses collected suggested some solutions for these challenges.

## 2. Literature Review

Online learning has recently appeared to be an important factor in learning process, and it is thought to give a unique benefits to the education in general, (Shopova,2014). As a result a lot of countries shifted from traditional classes or face to face instruction to online learning or face to computer instruction. Shifting this way is possible since the whole world is changing, add to that, gradual transformation reflects the nature of things. However, transforming to different teaching platform when you are not ready, is averse to a lot of challenges.

In spite of the advantages of online learning, students could face some difficulties which they never experience in

traditional learning, (Tsai, 2009). In the middle of the second semester of the last year, it was announced that all subjects should be taught online due to the pandemic of corona virus. Nobody thought that this experiment might touch the reality, but as it is a truth now, teachers should prepare themselves to meet the situation, think of the expectations and carry out the job.

Instructors and students are expected to face different challenges. These challenges can be cognitive, technical or learning styles. With regard to cognitive challenges, learners need to have suitable ability to deal with different aspects of learning tasks, (Tyler-Smith, 2006). Online courses normally full of different tasks, duties and exercises, students should have the ability to deal with them. They should know, how to download, reply, do assignment, give feedback, record audio and video scripts, and others. (Wang and Chen 2007, Wu Fitsegard, & Witten 2014).

Concerning cognitive challenges, online learners have free choices and different opportunities to learn, (Chang's 2013). Classes and attendance are different from those of traditional ones. Although there are many ways to control their digital presence, still it is difficult to adjust it.

Another challenge involved in online learning, are the computer and internet system difficulties. Ayden (2011) stated that computer anxiety create significant effect on learners achievement. The achievements of the students might be worse due to the poor access to the internet. If the system is down learners feel disappointed and they might not finish the class. This experience might cause anxiety on the learners of poor internet skills, Ekizoglu and Ozcinar, 2010, Kira, 2009.

For teachers who have not tried, or experienced online teaching before, it would be a very tiring job and daunting task as explored by Ko and Rossen, 2010, since the job needs an experience and preparation in different aspect, the idea of being involved in the job without previous experience, it is just an adventure. In order to run an online classes Hockey and Clandfield, 2010 thought of four items that can help make online teaching to some extent possible or available, they are: tools, techniques, options and opportunities. These items are very important to ease the online teaching job. Some of challenges and fears that teacher supposed to face is the virtual platform which is supposed to suit all teachers and students all together. The system is required to allow the instructor to manage the communication and the grade of the students, at the same time it is also required to enable students from digital presence as well as doing their duties and assignments. As the sudden decision of transforming traditional teaching or face to face teaching, to online teaching, instructors and teachers together need to have enough training to do job in a good way. Experiencing similar challenge in China, Haifeng Pu, 2020 solved it by using external application to complement the system so as to enable achieving the job. The government in China also provides free access and use of some applications at the outbreak of coronavirus. On contrary here in Saudi Arabia most of institutions provide only the applications left the responsibility of accessing and subscription for the instructors and students, the issue which created some

inconveniences now and then. Additionally, one of the challenge that annoys both teachers and students is that the content of the course should fully cover all the items online. A new strategy should be applied against this fear or challenge. Ko, and Rossen 2010, had an idea to sort out this problem suggesting assembling of exercise, duties, and generating new criteria of grades to meet the circumstance and adapt the course to the new environment. There is a need seems to urge adjusting course component, students' feedback, activities and all that to comply to the online platform. Transforming teaching/ learning from traditional, face to face to online teaching / learning, raised insecurity of communication; whether the communication between instructors and students on one hand, or students to students on the other. Boettcher and Conrad 2016, says one line teaching doesn't indicates digital teaching delivery, but also means the online presence of instructors and students in order to make the interaction possible, therefore Carrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000, thought of learning society as a part of teaching online process.

### **3. Methodology**

The study is concerned of collecting as many challenges as possible that teachers face during online teaching. It is believed that a checklist technique suits this kind of studies. Hence, the researcher presented a list of challenges for participants to choose from, and enquire them write other challenges that not exist in the list. The checklist was distributed to the intended participants, a number of 30 participants from the university of Jouf university in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; it is consist of some challenges that the researcher supposed that they the instructors might face. The participants should tick the challenge or challenges they faced during online teaching. Participants are also requested to write other challenges that they faced, but they are not exists in the list. Additionally, the participants are asked to suggest some solution for the challenges they face. The collected data then arranged, sorted, and analysed using suitable excel application. The order of the collected data made randomly without following certain method to choose the challenges. The most frequent challenge might be put the first position or in the bottom of the list. Consequently, the discussion for the analysis was provided, and according to the discussion, the conclusion was thrown.

### **4. Discussion and Analysis**

The responses of the checklist delivered to the participants are categorized and organized on the tables below and the discussion as follows.

Table 1 below shows the total number of the participants who responded to the checklist, according to the age group. It is very clear from the table that male participants are bigger in number than female ones; 70% to 30% respectively. With regard to the age groups, participation rate increases when the age group increases; the total number of participants who are 25-34 are 1 male with percentage 3.3%, the total number of participants who are 35-44 are 14, (8 male and 6 female), with 46% and the total participant who are 45-60 are 15 (12 male and 3 female) with 50%.

**Table 1:** Percentage of age groups among study group

Age groups	Male (n=21)	Female (n= 9)	Total	%
25-34	1	0	1	3.30%
35-44	8	6	14	46.70%
45-60	12	3	15	50%
Total	21	9	30	100%
%	70%	30%	100%	

Table 2 below shows the distribution of the participants according to their qualifications. While no BA holders participated in responding to the check list, the total participants are 30, 18 MA holders and 12 Ph.D. holders; with percentage 62.1% to 37.9% respectively. Male participants again are more than female ones in the two categories; 13 male MA holder to 5 female MA holders 20% to ; as well as 7 male Ph.D. holders to 5 female. This indicates that, the majority of ELT instructors in the institution are MA holders while no instructors with BA degree.

**Table 2:** Percentage of qualification level among study group

Qualification level	Male (n=20)	Female (n= 9)	Total	%
BA	0	0	0	0%
MA	13	5	18	62.10%
PhD	7	5	11	37.90%
Total	20	10	30	100%
%	66.60%	33.30%	100%	

Table 3 below shows the distribution of the participants according to their experience. Four male instructors have 1-5 years of experience compared with one female instructor, the percentage of both, male and female in this range is 16.7%, more in total than those who have 5-10 years of experience which ranges from one male instructor to three female instructors, the percentage of both is 13.3%. Unlike 1-5 years of experience group, female instructors are bigger in number than male ones. Furthermore, in group of 10-15 years of experience, there are seven male instructors which is more than twice in number compared with female ones. The biggest group in terms of year of experience are 15 – 20; male instructors are more than four times compared with female ones. Overall, years of experience of male are higher than those of female; 70% to 30%; this might indicate that female instructors don't stay very long in teaching unlike male instructors who stay for a long period of time.

**Table 3:** Percentage of experience level among study group

Experience	Male (n=20)	Female (n= 9)	Total	%
01-May	4	1	5	16.70%
05-Oct	1	3	4	13.30%
Oct-15	7	3	10	33.30%
15-20	9	2	11	36.70%
Total	21	9	30	100%
%	70%	30%	100%	

Table 4 below shows the score of the participants with regard to challenges they face. The challenges are discussed in details, one after another.

**Using online teaching entity like Blackboard, zoom, Meet, Moodle,...etc.** 12 out of the 30 participants faced challenges using online platform like Blackboard, zoom, etc., the result represents 40% which to some extent shows a

real challenge since the number is near half of the participants.

**Lack of basic computer literacy and skills.** A few number of participants lack computer literacy and skills. 23 participants are computer literate and skillful, they represent 67% which means the majority of participants have no problem using computers.

**Adaptability to the computer based instruction in a virtual classroom.** A third of the total number did not adapt to the instructions of the virtual class, they are 10 participants representing 33.3%. It creates considerable challenge which it needs to have more attention.

**Absence of facial expression, e.g. eye contact:** it is considered a significant challenge for the most of the participants responded to the checklist survey. 24 participants out of 30 which represents 80% complained about the absence of facial expression. Facial expression is an important factor in traditional classes; it is a way of communicating messages between students and instructors, but the instructors lost this merit in online teaching, the issue makes the interaction between instructors and students very weak.

**Weakness of Students – students interaction:** like absence of facial interaction, weakness of students - students interaction scored high result, 24 participants out of 30 which is 80%. This result confirmed the importance of interaction in teaching process. It is considered a primary factor for a comprehensive teaching; If the students – students interaction is weak in teaching process, it will not happen in a proper way and the process will be affected negatively.

**Weakness of Students - teachers interaction:** although students – teachers interaction is very important in teaching process, but 15 participants out of 30 don't consider it a challenge for them. It could be due to the nature of the online teaching or the courses, but still the same number faced challenge teaching in an environment with a weak interaction.

**Difficulty in accessing network:** 19 participants out of 30 didn't face difficulty accessing to the network. They didn't have problem accessing to the platform they use in teaching. They have good connection, therefore, the point didn't create a problem for them, as they easily got access to the platform and do their job in a proper way.

**Lack of necessary equipment at home.** Most of the participants faced no challenge having necessary equipment for online teaching at home. Necessary equipment for online teaching is available, therefore, 21 participants out of 30, which represents 70% think they don't have problem having the equipment and have no problem delivering their job.

**Experiencing technical issues or unexpected digital troubles:** 18 participants out of 30 which represents 60% experienced technical and digital trouble when accessing to the platform. It is a considerable number indicating a clear challenge for online teaching process.

**Weakness of platform m e.g. Black board:** The majority of the participants responded to the checklist survey, face no challenge using the platform. 22 out of 30 didn't complain about the accessing to the platform which implies that they didn't have problem delivering their sessions.

**Weakness/Lack of experience:** the checklist survey shows a very high level of experience for the participants. 23 out of 30 have a good experience of using the platform and know how to deal with it. The survey proves no challenge with regard to this point.

**Slowdown on the internet caused by the too many users:** However, most of the participants face no challenge access to the platform they use, 17 out of 30 complained about the slowdown of the internet. It may be due to the package they use or the weakness of the connection in the areas where they live.

**Arranging assignments according to updated plan:** with regard to this point, most of the participant face no challenge

arranging the assignment according to the updated plan. 23 out of 30 have no problems achieving this.

**Insecurity of communication:** the majority of the participants think that their communication is secure and have no problem with interaction and delivering their sessions.

**Sharing Video/audio materials:** although 12 participants only have problem sharing videos/audio materials, still 18 participants out of 30 is considerable figure. Therefore, it is considered to some extent a challenge that can affect the delivery of online sessions.

Overall, most of the challenges participants faces according to the checklist survey, is that, they mostly faced difficulty with student-students interaction and students – teachers interaction. In addition to that, most of the participants faced difficulty accessing to the platform they use due to the slowdown of the internet. They also have experienced digital and technical troubles as well as difficulty with sharing video/audio materials.

**Table 4:** Percentage of question among study group

Question	Applicable		Not applicable	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Using online teaching entity like Blackboard, zoom, Meet, Moodle,...etc,	12	40%	18	60%
Lack of basic computer literacy and skills .	7	23.30%	23	67.70%
Adaptability to the computer based instruction in a virtual classroom.	10	33.30%	20	66.70%
Absence of facial expression, e.g. eye contact.	24	80%	6	20%
Weakness of Students – students interaction	24	80%	6	20%
Weakness of Students - teachers interaction	15	50%	15	50%
Difficulty in accessing network	11	36.70%	19	63.60%
Lack of necessity equipment at home.	9	30%	21	70%
Experiencing technical issues or unexpected digital troubles.	12	40%	18	60%
Weakness of platform m e.g. Black board.	8	26.70%	22	73.30%
Weakness/Lack of experience	7	23.30%	23	67.70%
Slow down on the internet caused by the too many users	17	56.70%	13	43.30%
Arranging assignments according to updated plan	7	23.30%	23	67.70%
Insecurityofcommunication	6	20%	24	80%
Sharing Video/audio materials	12	40%	18	60%
Total	21	9	30	100%
%	70%	30%	100%	

## 5. Conclusion

Depending on the result of the checklist of the survey and the above mentioned discussion, they study revealed that, although in a way or another participants faced challenges with most of the points delivered, there are some challenges have high scores. Consequently, the study concludes that: 40% of the participants faced challenge using online teaching entity like Blackboard, zoom, Meet, Moodle. etc. In addition, 80% of the participants faced challenge with the absence of facial expression, e.g. eye contact as well as weakness of Students – students interaction. Half number of the participants complained about the weakness of Students - teachers interaction, 56.6 of the participants complained about the slowdown on the internet caused by the too many users and 40% have difficulty sharing Video/audio materials.

## 6. Recommendations

According to the results above, the study recommends the following:

- 1) Instructors should have workshop and training on using online technical entities.
- 2) Instructors should activate the role of the students through having videos activities presentations and assignments.
- 3) Instructors should activate the role of students – students interaction through video sessions or activities.
- 4) Instructors should have good connection to internet that capable of delivering, interaction and sharing material.
- 5) Institution should promote the platforms used as well as providing good connection choices accessing network.
- 6) Instructors should prepare necessity and sufficient equipment for online teaching at home.



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