

The Challenges that Face College Stage English Language Instructors in Iraq in Distance Learning from Their Perspective¹

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges facing instructors in distance learning programs during the first semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. Participants in this study are instructors from the university of Baghdad ibn Rushd college. A descriptive method research design was used to collect the survey data and a questionnaire was used as an instrument. The study generates survey data from 40 instructors to determine teachers' perceptions of the challenges, they face. The findings of the study suggest that instructors are willing to use technology but lacked technological and pedagogical knowledge and were not prepared for making the sudden shift to distance learning. The study highlights the importance of instructors' professional development in distance learning. This study has implications for colleges and policymakers who are policymakers revert to distance learning during a pandemic.

Keywords: *Distance learning; Perspective*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers of English all over the world exert great efforts to transfer the language including all skills and abilities to their audience accurately to make them able to communicate with other nations and people. Davies & Pearse (2000) claim that language education is not only the transfer of knowledge from one language to another, but it also contains applying the real communicative use of English.

Due to the pandemic, schools and universities were locked, face-to-face learning was postponed and a change to emergency online teaching was instituted. English language training took its share in this shift and numerous studies were conducted to examine the effects of the pandemic on crisis online teaching and the learning of English (Erarslan, 2021).

During the lockout time of Covid-19, the entire educational system from elementary to tertiary level collapsed (Mishra et al., 2020). Therefore, there are many colleges or universities universal that are rapidly moving into virtual classes (Tomkins, 2020).

Most governments are considering whether to shut down schools and higher education institutions, as these normally gather hundreds or even thousands of students into small zones, in libraries, auditoriums, and canteens.

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While the temporary closing down of these institutions may be required from a national health perception, this causes enormous interruption to the teaching and learning activities taking place (Sund,2020)

The ever-changing process was different from one country to another, no none of them was seamlessly ready, however, the difficulty of ever-changing differs according to the technical side of each country.

According to Farrah & al-Bakry (2020), important universal events are considered as the purpose for any turning topic in the invitations field. COVID-19 will be the first supporter of t-learning in the future. Skulmowski and Rey (2020) stated that cooperating learning media which authorizations a responsive plan of education yet interactively has been seen as a purpose for the cognitive load. Using video technology these days can be seen as a pointer of attention in multimodal learning. As evidence, the tools and the programs that deliver online courses and the social sense are ongoing to be powerfully used after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The online learning environment is essentially different to the regular schoolroom environment, and drivers of learning, student commitment, and student satisfaction are not the same (Bignoux and Sund, 2018).

Barr and Miller (2013) stated that the technology strategies, design of the program, selections of teachers, responsive curriculum, and supportive participants are essential and important for the successful delivery of the lessons in the online situation. In that case, these support a chance for higher education institutions to expand the exercise of the teachers for online learning.

According to UNESCO (2020), more than 90% of learners all over the world were affected directly or indirectly by school closures and emergency online learning. New data reported by UNESCO (2021) shows that nearly 1.5 billion learners across the world have been affected by this unexpected conversion in instructional provision, and more than 800 million learners have experienced serious challenges in terms of trouble to their education.

Distance learning or distance education is a field of education that focuses on pedagogy/andragogy, technology, and instructional system design that are effectively incorporated into delivering education to the student teacher and the student may communicate asynchronously and synchronously.

Iraq's education sector has faced problems for periods due to multiple crises including prolonged conflict, economic crisis, expanded displacement, and consequent social and political tensions. New crises emerged at the end of 2019 and the beginning of this year, including public dissatisfaction and waves of protests that started in October 2019, and the economic impacts of COVID-19 containment measures in March 2020 coupled with a severe drop in oil values. These new crises are putting even more pressure on the education system and affecting access to teaching.

Statement of the Problem:

It is not easy to build on online education due to technical topics, particularly in rising countries. However, all humans have the right to carry on education in times of crisis, disaster, and violence, and the sudden shift in the face-to-face education to distance education confused education. Teachers and students were not ready for this rapid change; therefore it was an urgent need to find an alternative to face education. For this e-learning was the appropriate alternative, but at the same time, it will be another challenge for instructors of English and their students. This challenge is different from other challenges in teaching English, because the basis of teaching English is communication, and here communication will be missing between the instructor and student, and this leads to a gap between what the instructors expect the students to accomplish, and what they can accomplish. Furthermore, instructors exert more effort in distance teaching than face to face communication.

Definitions of Terms

Distance teaching according to Hodges, et al (2020)is a temporary transferal of instructional transfer to an alternate delivery type due to crisis circumstances, which includes the use of fully distant teaching solutions for education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the emergency has ended. In this study, distance learning refers to the online classes which instructors in college stage EFL in Baghdad give to their students during the academic year 2020-2021.

Perspective is defined as the ability to view things in their true relations or relative importance according to assessors. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). In this study, perspective refers to the point of view of instructors of the English language department /college Ibn Rushd in universities of Baghdad.

LITERATURE REVIEWS :**Theoretical Background**

Teaching in a distance learning system is related to using technologies to construct the system's substructure with sufficient performance (Lee, 2009). According to Coombs (2010), the development of online teaching is also the consequence of the recent development in information technology.

Empirical Studies

Awadhiya, & Miglani, (2016) conducted a study at the National Open University in India to discover the challenges that face their instructors through using mobile education with their students. The instructors were surveyed to categorize the intensity of several challenges. Nevertheless, the outcomes showed that out of the thirteen challenges presented the most three vital ones were the absence of support, the absence of institutional policy, and the absence of technological and infrastructure provision.

Khan (2016), conducted an empirical study on the structures of e-learning in EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia. His study samples were both teachers and students, and the results showed that e-learning could be highly advantageous due to all of the resources available for virtual classes.

In another study, Gawad and Masaud (2014) indicated several advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. They found e-learning to be efficient, effective, and less pricey than in-class teaching. However, they also noted that e-learning has its disadvantages. Among them were “technological issues, employee acceptance, and lack of motivation from teachers and students.”

Utama et al (2020) in their study on viewpoints about distance learning throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, discovered several challenges, although the participants were eager about the online classes at the beginning. It was problematic for teachers to identify the students' engagements. Additionally, poor internet connectivity and technological information among the students and teachers were other challenging issues.

Another study conducted by Mohammed (2020) in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic aims to explore the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language online and to assess whether the teachers are satisfied with online English language learning classes. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used with the help of a self-administered online questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed among English as a foreign language college member of several universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia using diverse online tools, such as WhatsApp group, and email. 50 members voluntarily from the college participated. Analysis was carried out using SPSS 26. The results revealed promising results that indicate that teaching English as a foreign language online can be very useful if suitable training and direction programs for teachers and students are applied and online language teaching platforms and tools are up to date.

Haidar & Al-Salman (2020) conducted a study to survey the reactions of university-level faculty instructors in Jordan towards their experience with the emergency online learning model. It investigates the advantages of switching to online learning, the challenges faced, and suggestions for improving the teaching-learning process. The study is based on empirical data compiled from the responses of 432 instructors in six Jordanian public and private universities. The data collection instrument consists of a questionnaire that discusses three elements: challenges, advantages, and suggestions for improving the process of teaching. However, e-learning enabled instructors to use new effective teaching tools and acquire new skills to be used. The challenges were mainly related to technology and the Internet connection, assessment, interaction, and lack of clear vision and regulations by policymakers. Instructors suggested providing better technical support to guarantee that teachers deal perfectly with the platforms, there should be more training courses, and improving the assessment tools as well as designing new ones.

Sikwibele & Mungoo (2009) shown a study in Molepolole College of Education (MCE) in Botswana. However, this study aims to measure the quality of using the distance learning method with in-service teachers and their instructors, data were collected through interviews, surveys, and data analysis and the population of this study was 350 in-service teachers and 60 instructors. This study stated that instructors have experienced some technical challenges and problems with their students such as failing to meet the proposal deadlines, the requirement to cover the courses within a short period, the absence of resources, and some problems in communicating.

Islam, et al. (2015) showed a study to discover the demerits of e-learning and the most common challenges that teachers may face. The researchers explored that there are five challenges: pedagogical e-learning, technology, learning styles and culture, technical training, and time management challenges. In another study, Jones (2015) explored that the biggest challenge was related to the lack of interaction between the students and the teachers who feel confused because of the difference between face-to-face meetings and online assemblies. Other challenges included: class size and time pressure, using technology.

Rababah (2020) conducted a study to investigate the obstacles and challenges faced by English language students at Jadara University in Jordan while using e-learning programs during school suspension. To achieve the aim of the study, this qualitative investigation has made use of a convenience sample. Twelve students were chosen for a focused group interview where they were requested to answer questions to discuss the factors that they experienced while learning through online platforms. The findings show that students' responses revealed three themes, namely, lack of effective training, lack of accessibility, and inconsistent teaching styles of instructors.

The Significance of the Study

This study was intended to explore the challenges that face English language instructors at Ibn Rushd college while using distance teaching. Therefore, the finding of this study may provide college-stage instructors with some insights into the possible challenges they may face. This may help them explore suitable solutions for each of these challenges.

Purpose and questions of the Study

This study aims to investigate the challenges that face college stage English instructors in higher education institutions when using distance teaching from their perspective. More specifically, the following two questions were addressed:

- 1- What are the challenges that face college stage instructors at the college of Ibn Rushd/department of English during distance education?
- 2- Are there any statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) between instructors regarding the challenges they face during distance education, which can be attributed to their Academic Rank?

Limitations of the Study:

- 1- The participants of the study will be 40 instructors of the English language in the college of Ibn Rushd/department of English language teaching in the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023.
- 2- This questionnaire was developed by the researcher and it is the only research instrument used to collect data for the study.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Study Design:

This is a descriptive study that aimed to investigate the challenges that face college stage EFL teachers in Iraq during distance teaching. Therefore, a domain questionnaire was developed by the researcher to collect data for the study

The Population of the Study:

The population of this study consisted of (40) college-stage English instructors at the university of Baghdad College of Ibn Rushd in the Academic year 2022-2023. All instructors were included in the study. The distribution of this sample is shown in Table 1:

Table 1: The distribution of the sample of the study in the light of the Academic Rank:

Academic Rank	No.
Professor	8
Assistant professor	12
Instructor	13
Assistant Instructor	7
Total	40

Research Instrument

The researcher developed a questionnaire based on the related literature Sikwibele & Mungoo (2009), Awadhiya, & Miglani, (2016). The questionnaire consists of two parts: Part one (4 items) which elicited demographic information and part two (14 items) about the challenges that the college -stage may face during distance teaching.

Validity of Questionnaire

To ensure the validity of this questionnaire, it was distributed to a panel of seven experts (six university professors in Education and EFL and one supervisor). Experts were kindly requested to provide their notes on the relevance of the questionnaire items, lucidity of expressions, accuracy language used, comprehensiveness, or any other suggestions they may have. Therefore, some of their suggestions included: double-checking the accuracy of the items, rephrasing certain items for clarity, being more specific in some items, and deleting and adding some other items. Those notes were utilized to write the final version of the questionnaire.

Reliability of the Questionnaire:

The questionnaire was distributed to a pilot group of (20) EFL instructors from the population of the study as a pilot group to measure Cronbach's Alpha correlation coefficient. As for, Alpha was (0.75); and for the entire questionnaire, it was (0.58). These values were considered appropriate to distribute the questionnaire to a sample of the study (40) instructors.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

The researcher used the four-point Likert scale to measure the degree to which instructors agree on the item of the questionnaire. "Strongly agree" was given a score of (4), "Agree" a score of (3), "Disagree" a score of (2) and "Strongly disagree" a score of (1). Mean scores were calculated out of 4. Therefore, degrees of consensus among instructors were divided into three: low degree (1-1.99); average degree (2 -2.99) and high degree (3-4).

Responses from instructors were collected and analyzed statistically by using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) which involved means and standard deviations. These means were also ranked from highest to lowest in the tables that represented them. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also used to account for the differences in the mean scores of the respondents concerning the variables of the study.

Results of the Questions:

Results related to the first question:

1-What are the challenges that face college stage EFL instructors at the university of Baghdad (college of Ibn Rushd) during distance teaching?

To answer the first question, means and standard deviations were calculated. Results are presented in Table 2

Table 2: Means and Standard deviations about items of variables presented in rank order.

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Distance learning needs computer information and IT skills to conduct virtual lectures.	3.6	0.54537684	High
Lacks eye contact as well as body language	3.525	0.5986095	High
In distance learning, there are some difficulties in teaching some skills (such as Writing).	3.25	0.669864127	High
Distance learning helps me earn useful online teaching experience throughout my e- practicum.	3.25	0.588348405	High
Distance learning deals with the e- practicum efficiently during Covid 19 Pandemic.	3.15	0.662164284	High
In distance learning, I cannot use all the teaching strategies I usually use in regular classes.	3.125	0.686406473	High
It is stimulating to keep discipline in a large class during teaching English online.	3.025	0.73336247	High
Distance learning helps me gain a good experience in online assessment of student-teachers during e- practicum.	3	0.640512615	High
The tools of distance learning are easy to use when conducting lectures online.	2.9	0.54537684	Average
It is difficult to get immediate feedback on what was being taught in virtual classes.	2.87	0.686406473	Average
I do not have enough experience in distance learning	2.525	0.750640752	Average
Distance learning makes e- practicum as active as real classroom practice	2.52	0.72547625	Average
Collaboration between student-teacher during online learning is more effective.	2.45	0.814924882	Average
Teaching the English language online is more effective than teaching it in a classroom.	1.925	0.729857731	Low
All items combined	2.93		

Low (1-1.99); average (2.00- 2.99); and high (3.00-4.00)

As Table 2 shows, the mean scores of the domain of the questionnaire range between (3.6 and 1.92 out of 4). This indicates that there is an average degree of consensus among EFL instructors on the challenges they face while using distance teaching). More specifically, the highest 25% of these mean scores were related to the following three items: the highest of these mean scores were related to the following three items “Distance learning needs computer information and IT skills to conduct virtual lectures ” (M=3.6), “Lacks eye contact as well as a body language”(3.52), “Distance learning helps me earn useful online teaching experience throughout my e- practicum” (M =3.25).

On the other hand, for the lowest 25%, the two related items were: “Teaching the English language online is more effective than teaching it in a classroom” (M=1.92),” Collaboration between student-teacher during online learning is more effective” (M= 2.45).

Results related to the second question

Are there any statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) between instructors regarding the challenges they face during distance education, which can be attributed to their Academic Rank?

To answer this question, means and standard deviations for each variable were calculated. Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of teachers’ challenges point of view due to their academic rank:

Academic Rank	No.	Standard Deviation	Mean
Professor	8	0.59	3.035
Assistant professor	12	0.62	2.960
Instructor	13	0.63	2.880952
Assistant Instructor	7	0.80	2.887
Total	40		2.94

Tables 3 show that there are differences in the mean scores of instructors due to their academic rank. To test whether these differences are statically significant or not ($\alpha=0.05$), **one-way ANOVA tests** were applied. The results are presented in Table 4-5

Table 4- 5:one -way Anova tests the statistically significant differences ($\alpha= 0.05$) in the points of view of instructors, which can be attributed to their rank.

*Statistically significance at ($\alpha =0.05$) ANOVA

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Instructor	13	38.00549	2.9235	0.031143
Professor	8	24.71429	3.089286	0.046283
Assistant Instructor	7	20.07143	2.867347	0.230321
Assistant Professor	12	34.76923	2.897436	0.03511

Table 5:
ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	0.24048	3	0.08016	1.170302	0.334541	2.866266
Within Groups	2.465824	36	0.068495			
Total	2.706304	39				

Table 5 shows that there are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha= 0.05$) between teachers' points of view which can be attributed to rank since the value of significance was greater than ($\alpha= 0.05$).

Discussion related to the first question:

What are the challenges that face college stage EFL instructors at the university of Baghdad (college of Ibn Rushe) during distance teaching?

The results of the first question presented that the mean score of EFL teachers' point of view regarding the challenges they face during distance teaching is (M=2.93) as shown in Table 2. This indicates that English instructors agree that they face challenges to an average degree while using distance teaching.

This result is consistent with those of other studies, Sikwibele & Mungoo (2009), Utama et al (2020), Awadhiya, & Miglani, (2016). For example, teachers agreed that Distance learning needs computer information and IT skills to conduct virtual lectures (M=3.6). Instructors need to learn and be trained for using computers and techniques in order to use them in distance teaching. The two items (Lacks eye contact as well as body language) with a mean score (of 3.52), (In distance learning, there are some difficulties in teaching some skills (such as Writing) with a mean score (of 3.25) in line with Jones (2015), Gawad and Masaud (2014), Sikwibele & Mungoo (2009) who claimed that losing the interaction between the students and instructor, the communication barriers and using a proper teaching strategy are the main challenges that instructor should take into consideration in this transition. The actual challenge of distance teaching is that instructors need to immediately adapt themselves to new strategies by taking training courses and self-preparation in order to conduct their classes satisfactorily.

On the other hand, for the lowest 25%, the two related items were: (Teaching the English language online is more effective than teaching it in a classroom) with a mean score of (1.92), (Collaboration between student-teacher during online learning is more effective) with a mean score of (2.45) in line with

Rababah (2020), Utama et al (2020), and Mohammed (2020) claimed difficult to apply any kind of group or pair working in distance teaching due to the fact the students don't interact with each other the same way they do in traditional classes. Maybe this low score in this study is because the students don't take online learning seriously and there is an absence of interest in this style of learning is the main reason why students don't pay attention to the classes in distance learning.

Discussion of the results related to the second research question

Are there any statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0 .05$) between instructors regarding the challenges they face during distance education, which can be attributed to their Academic Rank?

The results of this question showed that there are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha= 0.05$) between teachers' points of view which can be attributed to rank since all values of significance were greater than ($\alpha= 0.05$) as shown in 5. This result is in line with Haidar & Al-Salman (2020) who found that teaching experience and the academic rank of the instructors have no effect on views about the challenges during using distance learning but there are other reasons that cause the challenge in distance learning. Moreover, instructors spent more time after graduating learning the most important theories in teaching to be utilized in such circumstances.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the results of this study that English instructors for college stages at the college of Ibn Rushed (university of Baghdad) face many challenges while using distance learning, some of which, maybe a new experience for students and some instructors. Weak internet and a lack of interaction in virtual lessons compared to face-to-face lessons, but distance learning has become a necessity of life, especially after scientific development, it is necessary in times of crisis, as happened in Covid as it is an alternative good to face-to-face lessons.

The incapacity to use all teaching strategies that help instructors to motivate their students and achieve the goal of the lesson and the difficulty of keeping all students focused and concentrating in distance learning which demands the instructors to spend big efforts in following up with students who don't participate in the class efficiently.

It can be concluded that teachers are not comfortable with distance learning. This infers that instructors may prefer face-to-face classes to distance learning. However, instructors are expected to take the responsibility of discovering alternative methods to make distance learning less challenging.

RECOMMENDATION

- The quality of online education must be raised and made to appear on par with conventional Face-to-Face (F2F) classroom-based instruction. This will get credentials to guarantee that online education is valued equally with traditional education. In the end, any type of educational system should be equivalent.
- Blended or flipped education can help to strike the best balance between e-education and traditional education. This will help a healthy balance between hi-tech and hi-touch in e-education.
- One common issue that emerges from almost all countries is the failure of the "one model fits all" approach. We require the optimum marriage of localization, cultural adaptation, and technology that includes a learning management system because some parts of the world lack resources and organization.
- Training the instructors and end users about technology appears to be a recurrent issue across nearly all such studies.
- Teachers should use a variety of plans and techniques to attract students' attention and encourage their motivation to learn EFL.
- More studies should be conducted to inspect the challenges that face students and instructors in online classes in the college stage.

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