Investigating English Language Teachers' Experiences of Online Teaching During COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze 93 English language teaching faculty members' perspectives of online teaching at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this study was to collect evaluative responses on online teaching experiences. This study addressed the following research question; What are teachers' perceptions of online teaching at English Language Skills Department at King Saud University in terms of: online vs. classroom teaching mode, personal factors in online teaching and students factors in online classes. This was a quantitative study where the researcher adapted a questionnaire from Nambiar (2020) to investigate the perspectives of KSU English language teachers towards online teaching at a college level. Findings show significant percentages of teachers who stated that online teaching improved their skills and boosted their confidence, at 40% and 34%. Also, most teachers found online classes convenient, innovative and improve their teaching skills. However, 14% of the teachers argued that technical issues affected learning. Moreover, most of the teachers claimed that the students lacked interest, made excuses and did not take online classes seriously. It was also noticeable that the implementation of online learning was very well valued because it helped the teachers develop their personal teaching skills. On the other hand, their students' lack of interest was what most of the teachers agreed on.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, pandemic, emergency remote teaching, teachers' perceptions, online teaching experience

INTRODUCTION

From all around the world, using the Internet in the field of education has made reaching for information more convenient than in earlier years. Online learning gradually turns out to be an essential aspect of education. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed all counties educational systems. The virus has gradually infected forced schools to resort to online learning to minimize its contagious spread. Saudi Arabia has applied effective educational means like any other developed country. The immediate shutdown of schools and universities in Saudi Arabia was a crucial response to the skyrocketing cases that the country was facing. Turning online learning into the new norm for 1.2 billion students (Rahman, R.A.; Ahmad, S.; Hashim, U.R., 2019).

Operating e-learning facilities in Saudi Arabia has cost the country more than a million Saudi Arabian Riyals (Aljabre, 2012). The United States of America and United Kingdom have both applied online education systems before the existence of Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, these countries have made the emergency shift to online learning easy and stress-free. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is still improving in this area. The country tried to implement advanced tools to easily provide students with information (Alwahoub et al., 2020).

The Saudi Arabia government has shed lights on crucial educational difficulties and complications to support and fulfill the needs of both teachers and students. Yet, being familiar with computer literacy is a necessary condition to precede learning. The modern educational system must be learned by Saudi teachers and students because they have recently been transformed. (Aldosary, 2021). Saudi teachers and students are not used to the unusual way of learning caused by the pandemic; meeting virtually with no physical connection.

Saati stated that despite the tragic consequences of the pandemic, scholars managed to practice online learning in a smooth and efficient way during the crisis (Al Arabia News, 2020). The Saudi government has helped tremendously in controlling the covid-19 outbreak, taking precautions, and necessary measures to reduce the number of cases. The decision to shift to online learning was issued by the Ministry of Education on the recommendation of the Ministry of Health. Even though the abrupt transfer seemed problematic to Elyas, educational sectors' efforts were to avail. Resulting in new and innovative learning experiences (Al-Bogami, B.; Elyas, T., 2020).

Online learning is already being used in Saudi Arabia. Thirty years ago, King Abdulaziz University implemented a home study system. This is technically considered and example of online/distance learning (Al-Mayman, H., 2020). However, Saudi teachers could still have a negative attitude and struggle towards the sudden change to distance learning.

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Hartley (2007) stated that educating students online needs to be planned, but in many unexpected cases, it is unfortunately unplanned. With the change to online learning, institutions should be ready to endure the difficulties caused by this transition. Instead of teaching face-to face, teachers had to move to teach online in a short time without preparation. Juárez-Díaz, C. (2020) mentioned that teachers with specific educational training had better teaching experiences than those who did not. Therefore, Saudi universities should train teachers to deliver high quality emergency remote teaching and to fill in the digital gap.

Significance of the study

When any health emergency occurs, the shift to remote teaching cannot be delayed. Educational institutions need to be ready to face the challenges of online teaching to maintain their high quality of educating students. This paper will investigate teachers' previous experiences of online teaching to help pinpoint problems and thus find solutions. This study helps English teachers at King Saud University (KSU) not only deliver content, but also improve their interactions with students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Modification in Education*

Today's generation is experiencing a new approach to education. The influence of technology on communication is the result of changing its ways to digital forms. People communicate differently because of integration in a virtual world. They can communicate with other people over long distances without traveling (Alamer, O., 2020). This leads to the fact that classrooms can also be done virtually. One virtual classroom can include students from different cities or countries, which makes the class unique (Oraif, I.; Elyas, T., 2021). COVID-19 made people far away from each other, but they were digitally close. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of social media usage increased by 61% (Aldwaihi, A., 2020). Regarding education, the digital world has enabled students to communicate from different countries. Collectif de Chasseneuil defines digital education as a structured educational setting, which considers learning requirements, suitable learning conditions and accessible resources (Alfifi, A., 2020). Each student can approach the learning material differently; they can be shown as videos, audios, or texts. Teachers are required to choose what is suitable based on their students' needs.

2.2. *Education in Saudi Arabia During Covid-19*

Not every teacher and student is familiarized with the new remote form of learning and its mechanisms (Almaghasla, D.; Alsayari, A., 2020). Thus, when traditional classes were transferred to be online, teachers and students faced numerous problems with different online learning platforms because they lacked experience using them (Alsalih, K., 2020). As a reaction to the coronavirus pandemic, the Saudi Minister of Education (MoE) Dr. Hamad bin Mohammed Al Al-Sheikh had announced that distance-learning systems were modernized. MoE has presented numerous learning strategies to ease distance learning for students, such as 'Ien YouTube Channel' and other electronic educational platforms. These platforms offer 3 million learning materials, and more than 3 million virtual classrooms (AlShehri, Y.A.; Mordhah, N.; Alsibiani, S.; Alsobhi, S.; Alnazzawi, N, 2020). MoE is collaborating with online learning specialists to organize suitable ways of assessing in schools and universities during and after the pandemic. MoE had stated that distance learning was not only used during the coronavirus crisis, but also can be and effective strategic choice of learning.

2.3 *Saudi Teachers' Experiences*

There have been a short number of research studies on teachers' perception of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alwahoub et al., (2020) analyzed teachers' perspectives on online teaching through reports in Saudi Arabia. Primary and secondary school teachers stated that the distance educational system was productive, encouraging and effective. This study claimed that primary and secondary school teachers witnessed improvement in their students' achievement and efficiency. On the other hand, Mishra et al., (2020) conducted a study on 78 teachers and 260 students' perceptions of online learning at Mizoram University. Questionnaires revealed that most of their responses were about the burden of having weak Internet connections while learning. Teachers argued that Internet connection issues caused many setbacks in delivering educational resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lapada et al., (2020) examined 2300 participants' perspectives on distance learning through questionnaires in Philippine educational institutions. Philippine teachers said that even though they were ready to shift to online teaching, yet, they needed better devices to manage the learning. Also, Tufue-Dolgoy et al., (2016) conducted a study on 22 teachers' perceptions of online teaching in Samoa via questionnaires. This study claims the need for training teachers on how to properly use technological equipment that is suitable for educating students. More than 63.6% of teachers stated that they benefited from training courses about online teaching methods.

Using technology in education is developing super fast in Saudi Arabia (Alkhalaf et al., 2012). Universities in Saudi Arabia, during the pandemic, showed how education had a positive effect on teachers. The teaching staff at King Khalid University was assessed regarding their satisfaction with the traditional and the online teaching. 55.9% of teachers 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'

that it was easy to shift to online learning and that they never struggled to adapt. Besides, 57.6% of them 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that it was flexible to deliver lectures online rather than teaching face-to-face.

Saudi teachers need to be prepared for online learning to prevent facing difficulties during COVID-19. Thus, this study aims to determine Saudi teachers' preparedness for the sudden change to online learning. It was conducted to study the efficiency of online teaching not only to be used in emergencies, but also to be as effective as face-to-face teaching. This study addresses the following research question; What are teachers' perceptions of online teaching at English Language Skills Department in King Saud University in terms of: online vs. classroom teaching mode, personal factors in online teaching and students factors in online classes.

METHODOLOGY

This is a quantitative study. To answer the research question, the researcher adapted a questionnaire from Nambiar (2020) to investigate the perspectives of KSU English language teachers towards online teaching at a college level. The questionnaire consisted of questions about learning experiences in addition to feelings and actions happening from the experiences.

Population and sample

The data for this current study were gathered from the population of Saudi female teachers at (ELSD) department in King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The participants were all female because of the gender separation in universities in Saudi Arabia. The sample consisted of 93 teachers from the ELSD department teaching preparatory students general English. This research paper took place in the second academic semester of 2022, and it lasted roughly for 12 weeks.

Instruments

For this paper, the researcher retrieved a questionnaire from Nambiar (2020) for the teachers. The questionnaire examined teachers' experiences with remote teaching. There were 26 questions that measured teachers' general view and experiences of online classes. The purpose of behind this method is not to gather psychometric data; thus, no psychometric tools were used. Because of the pandemic, the Questionnaire was conducted and sent to participants using Microsoft Forms. In this questionnaire, Likert questions will be used in which answers are graded from (1 Strongly agree) to (5 Strongly disagree). Teachers were requested to rate their perspectives. Items would be analyzed statistically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study's purpose was to collect evaluative responses from KSU faculty members on their online teaching experiences. The study used a descriptive approach to analyze the data. The questionnaire was conducted to acknowledge the experiences of teachers about the newly introduced way of teaching. Its items measured three dimensions: Online vs. classroom mode, personal factors of teachers and students in online classes. Participants' frequent responses were converted into percentages. The following explained the study's detailed findings.

Table 1. *Online Vs. classroom teaching mode*

Statements	Likert scale (Percentage)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Online classes are more effective than classroom mode	9.5%	18.9%	25.3%	34.7%	11.6%
Online classes are more convenient than classroom method	42.6%	21.2%	9.6%	20.2%	6.4%
There is lack of teacher- student interaction in online classes	12.8%	32%	19.1%	25.5%	10.6%
It is difficult to engage students in online classes	8.4%	27.4%	15.8%	32.6%	15.8%
Teacher- students disconnect is felt low in online classes compared to classroom method	7.3%	30.5%	31.6%	23.2%	7.4%
It is difficult to control group interaction during online classes	11.6%	21.1%	17.9%	36.8%	12.6%
Online classes help me to use innovative teaching methods	43.2%	49.5%	4.2%	2%	1.1%
Technical issues effect the flow and pace of online classes	25.3%	33.7%	16.8%	17.9%	6.3%
Online classes are fun and interactive than classroom method	18.9%	14.7%	28.4%	31.6%	6.4%
It is difficult to keep classes for longer duration during online classes	6.5%	29.3%	15.2%	34.8%	14.2%

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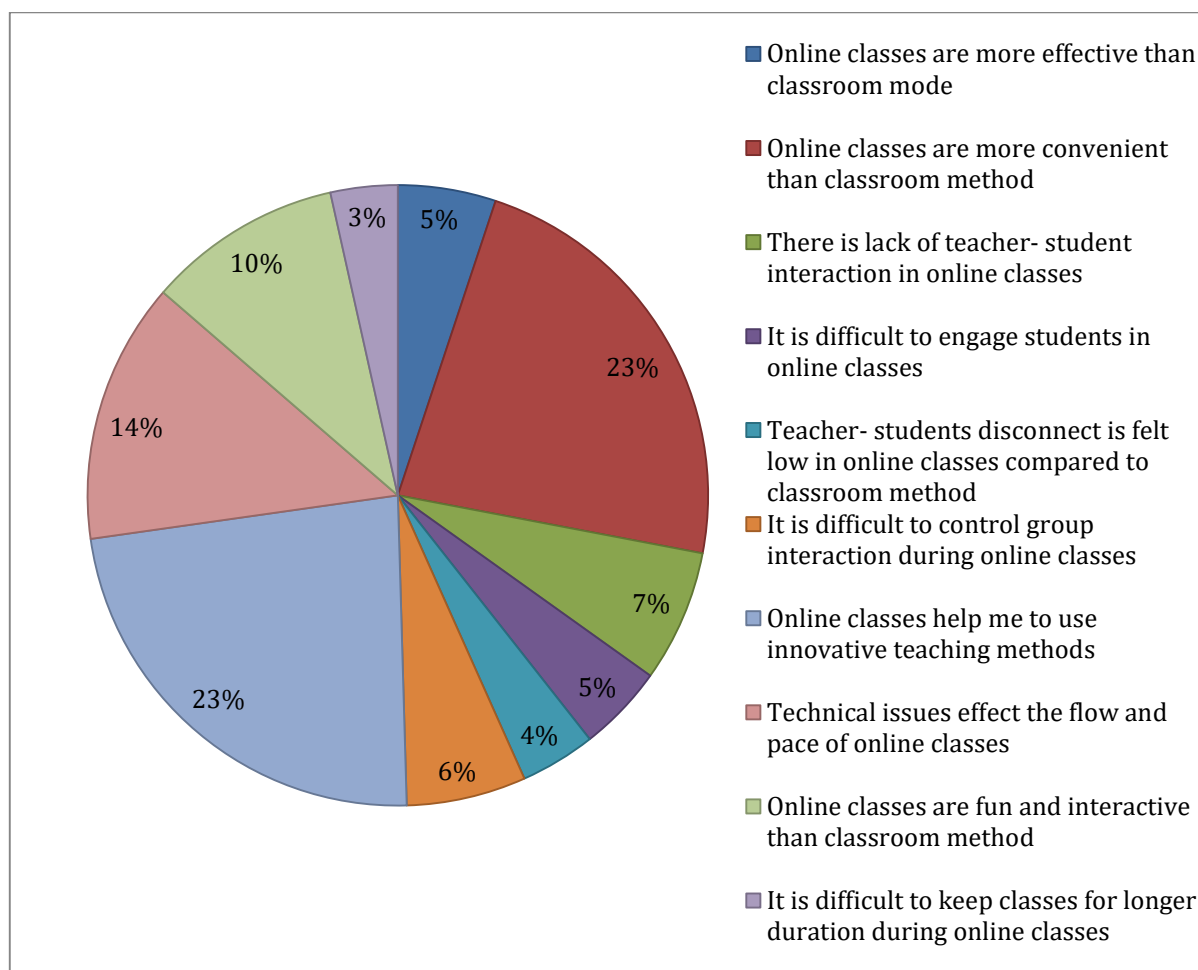

Figure 1: Online Vs. classroom teaching mode

Out of 93 responses, the results of the survey revealed that 23% of teachers think that online classes are convenient, and they helped them use innovative methods. Actually, more than half of the teaching staff at King Khalid University said that it they never struggled to adapt to online teaching. However, 14% of teachers claimed that technical issues effect the pacing of the online classes. Similarly, Mishra et al., (2020) explained that most teachers who were participants of the study complained about learning obstacles caused by poor Internet connection throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

As from a students' perspective, Yang and Cornelius (2004) reported similar findings. Students dissatisfied when their teachers couldn't provide technical support. Therefore, technical issues can detemine the satisfaction of both teachers and students with online classes. Teachers should improve their technical skills to make online classes more effective.

One-tenth of the teachers reported that online classes are more interactive than an actual classroom, whereas 7% of the teachers believe that there is lack of teacher-student interaction in an online class. 6% of the teachers said that it is hard to control group interaction in an online class. On the other hand the percentage of the teachers who believe that online classes are more effective than a classroom mode was 5%. The category of teacher- student disconnect is felt low compared to online classes also reached 5%. The lowest percentage was that it is difficult to keep an online class for a long time, at 3%.

Table 2. Personal factors in online teaching

Statements	Likert scale				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Lack of computer skills makes it difficult for me to use the online teaching method effectively	7%	18.6%	7%	21.1%	46.3%
There is lack of work satisfaction while taking online classes	0%	14.7%	21.1%	37.9%	26.3%
Online classes make me conscious about my teaching skills [SEP]	13.7%	38.9%	19%	13.7%	14.7%
I feel lack of motivation to take online classes	1%	9.5%	13.7%	42.1%	33.7%

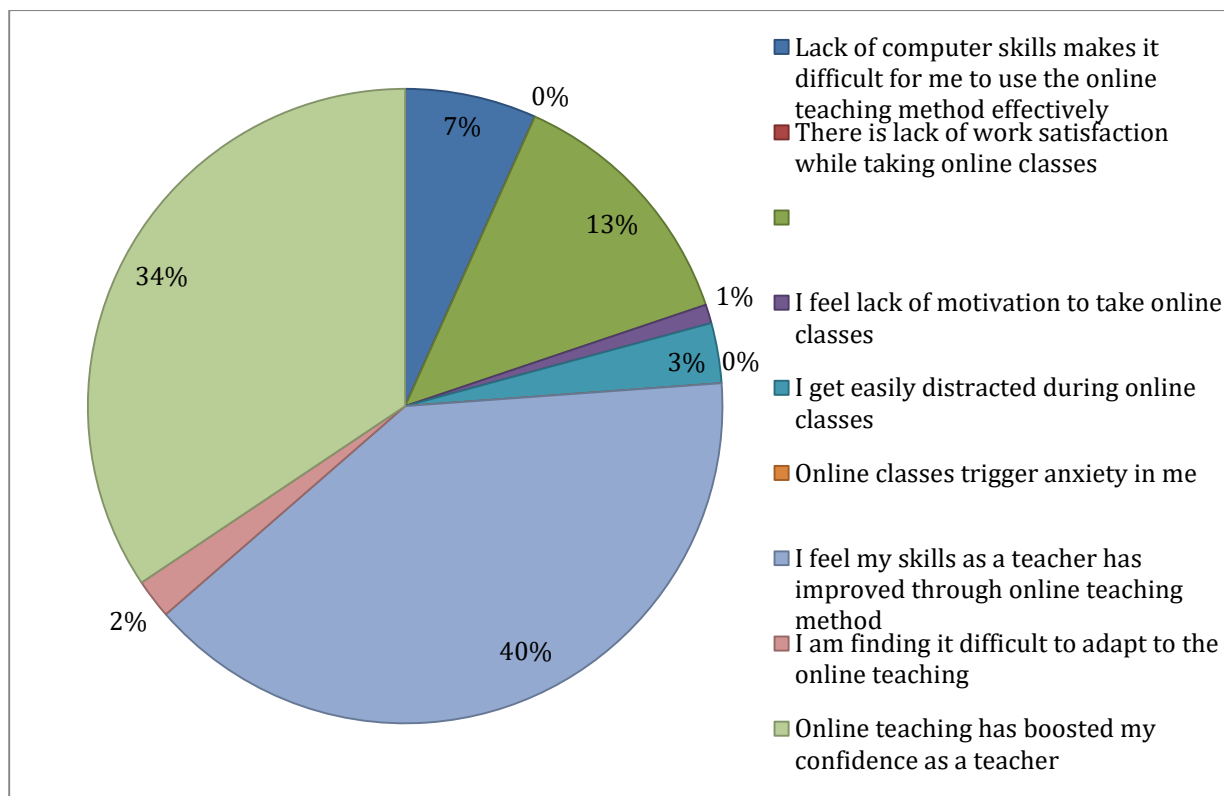|					
I get easily distracted during online classes	3.2%	3.2%	9.7%	44.1%	39.8%
Online classes trigger anxiety in me	0%	5.3%	17%	29.8%	47.9%
I feel my skills as a teacher has improved through online teaching method	41.5%	33%	12.8%	10.6%	2.1%
I am finding it difficult to adapt to the online teaching	2.1%	2.1%	5.3%	34.7%	55.8%
Online teaching has boosted my confidence as a teacher	35.9%	40.2%	15.2%	5.4%	3.3%

Figure2: Personal factors in online teaching

This pie chart illustrates the percentages of the teachers who had strongly agreed on some personal factors in online teaching. Significantly, high percentages of teachers who claimed that online teaching improver their skills and boosted their confidence, at 40% and 34% respectively. 13% of the teachers claimed that online teaching made them conscious about their skills. 7% of them believe that the lack of computer skills prevent them from using online teaching effectively. Tufue-Dolgoy et al., (2016)'s study indicate the importance of training teachers on how to properly use technology in education. A number of teachers on that study demanded more practice on how to use cue computers effectively because they had benifited from certain training courses on online teaching. In addition, 3% of the teachers get easily distracted durning an online class. Low percentages of the teachers who claim that online teaching was hard for them to adapt and that it lacks movivation, at 2% and 1%.

Table 3. Student factors in online classes

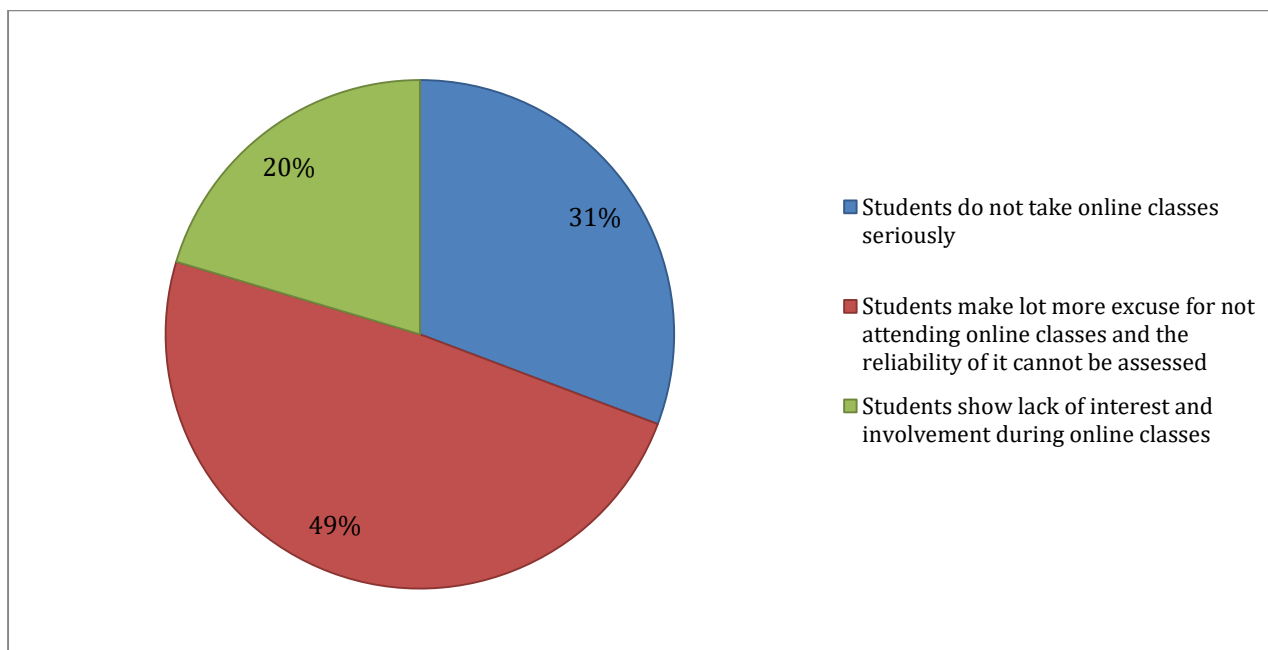| Statements	Likert scale				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students do not take online classes seriously	9.5%	31.6%	24.2%	24.2%	10.5%
Students make lot more excuse for not attending online classes and the reliability of it cannot be assessed	15.1%	25.8%	17.2%	25.8%	16.1%
Students show lack of interest and involvement during online classes	6.3%	36.2%	14.9%	26.6%	16%

Figure 3. Student factors in online classes

This pie depicts the percentages of the teachers who had strongly agreed on student factors in online teaching. It is noticeable that teachers who said that their students make more excuses for not attending than actual classroom, at 49%. Moreover, 31% of teachers claim that students do not take online classes seriously, and 20% of the teachers said that students show lack of interest in an online class.

O'Malley & McGraw (1999) stated that students, at first, feel incompetent to learn online because they are not used to it. This might affect their learning process. One possible solution is for educational institutions to offer their students chances to be familiarized with the medium before taking a required online class. Results of this study show that teachers' insights are valued to help adapt online teaching in the future. This questionnaire has its limitations though. The sample of this study is considered small to represent the majority of teachers giving online classes.

CONCLUSION

This study claims that most teachers in Saudi Arabia have a positive view of online teaching during the pandemic. However, there has to be suitable training for teachers to improve there technical skills. It is also noticeable that the implementation of online learning is very well valued because it helped them develop their personal teaching skills. On the other hand, their students lacking of interest is what most of the teachers agreed on.

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