The Perception of English Department Students and Faculty Members of Online Learning During COVID-19: What Courses Fit Better?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discover English Department faculty members' and students' perceptions of online learning, to identify which English courses are most suitable for online learning. The study was implemented in the English Department at Jouf University during COVID-19 crisis. The research applied quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Two open-ended/closed-ended questionnaires were designed to collect required data. The participants were 21 faculty members and 68 students in BA English program. The results of the study revealed that Literature and Reading courses are the most appropriate courses for online learning as a result of their appropriate content. Additionally, the study has discovered that both faculty members and students are satisfied with their online learning experience. Faculty members are able to deliver different courses successfully, and students are capable of preforming required skills efficiently. However, the study found that all participants thought that this mode of learning cannot replace traditional learning due to various reasons including: the lack of face-to-face interaction, students' lack of motivation, unsuitability of some courses for online learning, difficulty in assessment, and technical issues.

Keywords: Online learning; Faculty members' perceptions; students' perceptions; COVID-19

1. Introduction

Educational institutions among others have been affected by Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). According to Xhaferi & Xhaferi (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting approximately 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries in all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94% of the world's student population, up to 99% in low and lower-middle-income countries (United Nations, 2020). COVID-19, as a virus affecting human health, has started spreading worldwide in December 2019 and continued until the present day. One of the procedures that has been taken to handle this epidemic is shifting from face-face learning to online learning. The Saudi Ministry of Education declared in March 2020 a transition to online learning to apply the needed protocols for the management of this crisis. As

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demonstrated, the COVID-19 crisis transformed the learning environment into novel approaches and strategies, forcing educators and learners to adapt with these online learning methods.

Online learning represents a type of distance learning that includes a broad variety of technology implementations and learning methods, including computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration (Urdan & Weggen, 2000). These technology applications are used for delivering and monitoring courses over the Internet (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Online learning is divided into two main modes, asynchronous and synchronous delivery modes. According to Al-Nofaie (2020), synchronous software enables students and teachers to interact orally, exchange information by typing, upload presentations, share videos, and browse websites together. Whereas, asynchronous defined as an educational setting facilitated by media such as e-mail and discussion boards to support work relations among learners and teachers (Hrastinski, 2008). These two modes are complementary to each other in online learning environment, as Tunceren (2015) stated that the interaction through the synchronous learning tools overcomes the isolation of asynchronous tools.

Saudi higher education institutions have started switching from traditional teaching approaches to the alternative Blackboard Learning Management System. Many institutions have begun adopting technology in learning prior to the COVID-19 crisis. This, in turn, enabled students and educators to use full online courses during the lockdown conveniently. Meanwhile, as the success of educational innovations depends largely on the knowledge and attitudes of teachers and students, identifying their perceptions can lead to providing an ideal learning environment for language learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of students and faculty members of the English department at Jouf University of their online teaching/learning experience during COVID-19 crisis. The main objectives of the English program at Jouf University is (1) awareness of the basics of reading, writing, and critical thinking skills in the English language. (2) Introductory knowledge in the areas of English language, linguistics, literature and translation (Jouf University, 2018). Consequently, the research will explore these various aspects. To investigate what are the most suitable courses to be studied/delivered online.

The dependence on online learning process is linked to connectivism, a modern learning theory. It views learning as a network phenomenon influenced by technology and social interaction (Siemens, 2006). According to Chandrappa (2018), connectivism reflects the collaborative learning sittings and, as the name implies, it connects people from diverse geographical areas and various groups of society with information resources. Online networks and social communication environments which represent the current way of learning are the fundamental elements of connectivism. The knowledge gained based on the experience and interactions between individuals, cultures, institutions and technology that connect them to each other is clear in the current educational status (Goldie, 2016).

Furthermore, the expanding of online learning approach, even before the outbreak of COVID-19, is an evidence of its effectiveness in language learning. Nevertheless, this effectiveness in educational institutions is unachievable until teachers and students have developed a positive view of the use of technology for teaching and learning. Online learning is also related to Rogers' Innovations Diffusion Theory (IDT). According to Sahin (2006) IDT is the most suitable theory to examine the adoption of technology in higher education environments. Rogers (1995) defined innovation as an idea, or practice that is perceived as new by an individual. Whereas, diffusion is the process which convey an innovation through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. According to Agrawal & Prasad (1997), technology was considered as the innovation, and individuals accept or reject the technology depending on the assumption this innovation is shaped. Consequently, the success of using technology in language learning classrooms relies mainly on students' and teachers' perceptions of these new methods.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1 Technology and language learning:

Technology and computers are widely used currently in language classrooms. Previous studies show that the use of technology promotes the process of language learning in various ways. The technology is defined according to Isman (2012), as a way of doing a task using technical processes, methods, or knowledge. The integration of technology has become an essential part of learning (Pusuluri, Mahasneh & Alsayer, 2017). The benefits of using technology in learning and teaching are demonstrated by many studies. Al-Ahmadi & Al-Raddadi (2020) stated that incorporating technology into language classrooms contributes to enhanced teaching and learning, with a positive effect on the degree of proficiency of language learners. They stated that it is highly recommended to integrate virtual classes for language learning and teaching in the Saudi learning environment. Moreover, according to Al-Qahtani (2020), the new audio and visual effects are efficient in teaching language skills due to their immediacy and user-friendly content that are able to represent real-life situations as opposed to the conventional means that students find frustrating. Technology also has a big influence on enhancing communication and teamwork, reducing anxiety and improving motivation (Alhaj & Albahiri, 2020; Kazakos et al., 2016).

However, the use of technology in language learning in Saudi contexts faces some challenges. Freihat (2020) stated that the limited use of the Internet in language pedagogy is largely due to the shortage of resources, the high price of Internet access and the inaptitude of teachers to use it for pedagogical goals. Moreover, it was concluded that the lack of infrastructure is one of the biggest barriers to the development of e-learning (Xanthidis et al., 2013).

1.1.2 Utilizing Blackboard in EFL teaching:

Blackboard is a learning platform utilized to administer the educational program in online learning environments, which adopts the learning activities of the traditional classroom (Hussein, 2018). It has certainly introduced a new dimension to higher education by offering various features, as it allows faculty and students to easily log in and access learning materials inside and outside class time. Many studies were done to investigate its uses, benefits and obstacles in language teaching and learning. (Alharbi, 2015; Ali, 2017; Al-Turise, 2020; El-Zawaidy & Zaki, 2014; Freihat, 2020; Hakim, 2020; Khafaga, 2021; Muhammed, 2017; Pusuluri et al., 2017; Sharadgah & Al-Meajel, 2017). It was discovered that it provides a convenient and easy communication interface with discussion boards, emails, podcasts (Pusuluri et al., 2017). In addition, it was stated that its primary benefit is the improvement of the learning-teaching procedures and methods (Adam & Deon Nel, 2009 as cited in Alamer 2020). Furthermore, the virtual classroom or Blackboard collaboration feature is a simple online conferencing platform designed for teachers and students to perform various tasks. Some studies show that use of Blackboard as a complementary tool to the traditional class as in blended learning always possesses a positive effect on students' perceptions toward online learning (Pusuluri, Mahasneh & Alsayer, 2017; Sharadgah & Almeajel, 2017).

Despite the benefits discussed, some studies have examined the challenges of using blackboard. According to Almeajel & Sharadgah (2017), the employment of Blackboard included technological barriers, institutional barriers, student barriers, and faculty barriers. One issue is that the faculty members are untrained to use Blackboard effectively. Concerning technical issues, Mayhoob (2020) mentioned that online learning might affect students' performance negatively, as a result of technological issues. While the institutional barriers include the absence of technical support (Sharadgah & Almeajel, 2017). In addition, Alamer (2020) mentioned that Blackboard is a learning management system with a huge future that needs further investigations. Therefore, further studies of using Blackboard in the field of language learning are needed to make better use of its potentials.

1.1.3. Perceptions of English department faculty members of online learning:

Faculty members play an essential role in the learning process, the effectiveness of implementing various methods and techniques primarily depends on the faculty members. In this respect, their attitude towards technology is the key determinant of the effective use of technology in any educational environment. According to Teo (2008) as cited in Freihat (2020), the success of language learning with the Internet depends chiefly on the appreciation of the teachers' attitudes towards Internet use. As instructors are the ones who transfer any innovation to the field, it is essential to recognize their role and support them to integrate technology effectively into their instruction (Pettenai et al., 2001). Most researchers found out that faculty members are satisfied with the use of the internet in language learning. A Study done by Alhaj and Albahiri (2020) shows that EFL teachers of the English department at Muhayle Assir University prefer implementing technology in language teaching. This comes Along with Alanazy's (2018) research who concluded that faculty members in Jouf University expressed a positive attitude toward online learning in general. Moreover, Alturise (2020) stated that faculty members believed that course objectives could be accomplished via the Blackboard learning system. Besides, some educators believe that virtual classrooms have an impact on improving learners' communication skills (Al-Qahtani, 2020).

On the other hand, some studies stated that faculty members faced challenges using online learning. As in Ahmed's study (2014) dealing with three different Saudi universities, which found that intensive Blackboard preparation is required to develop faculty members' understanding of online education systems. Moreover, Freihat (2020) examined the obstacles faced by English department instructors, and he found that cheating in online exams was the major barrier faculty members faced in online learning. In addition, according to Al-Shboul (2013) as cited in Sharadgah & Al Meajel (2017), many faculty members are disinclined to use blackboard because they are refusing to accept the idea of changing their teaching style. Whereas relatively very few researchers have taken various English courses into consideration (Mu'in & Amelia, 2018). Therefore, the current investigation seeks to examine the experience of English department students and faculty of learning and teaching various English courses online with the purpose of finding out which courses fit better in online learning.

1.1.4.   English department Students' perceptions of online learning

Understanding students' perceptions is a key factor for educators and university administrators to develop a high-quality learning environment. The learning environment is a critical part of encouraging students to become more motivated to learn (Rojabi, 2020). Nearly five years ago, students were unaware of online learning uses and advantages, since it was unused formally in higher education in Saudi Arabia. For instance, Puluri, Al-Sayer and Mahasneh (2017) stated that students were not totally familiar with the uses and benefits Blackboard provides. As a result, they were doubtful about their preference of learning environments. The authors recommended, that the instructors need to encourage and motivate students to use Blackboard intensively to be able to identify its real effectiveness. However, Al-Nofaie (2020) demonstrated that students are using Blackboard efficiently, as COVID-19 circumstances expedite the process of the technological adoption. Learners' perceptions toward online learning have been studied extensively. Nevertheless, it should be noted that students' perceptions of learning specific English courses online were beyond the scope of the previous studies. Most of the researchers found out that students have positive perceptions of online learning in general dealing with various online platforms (Al-Dosari, 2011; Al-Ahmadi & Al-Raddadi, 2020; Al-Mubireek, 2019; Almusharraf & Khahro, 2020; Al-Qahtani, 2020; Al-Turise, 2020; Hamouda, 2020; Rojabi, 2020; Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2020). It was found that online learning decreases the anxiety and discomfort, that students experience during speaking in a classroom setting (Satar & Ozdener, 2008) consequently, it may develop their speaking skills in more effective way (Hamouda, 2020).

In contrast, other studies found that students have negative perceptions of online learning (Al-Nofaie, 2020; Fageeh & Mekheimer 2013; Mayhoob, 2020). These Studies show that Saudi university students favored the traditional learning method over online learning, preferring physical interaction. As stated by Al-Nofaie (2020) the traditional classroom instruction and discussion cannot be totally replaced by online learning. Moreover, Moawad (2020) mentioned that the reason behind their negative perception is the difficulties they face when taking online exams, as they experience various factors affecting their performance such as the technical issues.

While the attitudes of English department faculty members and students toward online learning have been investigated, their perceptions toward online learning of specific university English courses have not received enough focus. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of students' and faculty members' perceptions of online learning dealing with various English courses during COVID-19 circumstances.

1.2. Research questions

1.2.1. What are the perceptions of English department faculty members of online learning during COVID-19?

1.2.2. What are the perceptions of English department students of online learning during COVID-19?

2. Method

To collect the data needed for this research, the study employed a mixed-methods approach. The research approach entails the compilation and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions. Open-ended/closed-ended questionnaires were used.

2.1. Participants

A total of 21 faculty members and 68 students at the English Department at Jouf University participated in this study. Both females and males were included, 10 (47.6%) of the faculty were females, and 11 (52.4%) of them were males. The majority of the participants (76.2%) had over than 6 years' experience in teaching English courses. Furthermore, 46 (67.6%) of the students were females, and 22 (32.4%) of them were males. They were undergraduate students; the majority of the students (41.2 %) were in their sixth level.

2.2. Instrument

Two questionnaires were designed, one for students and the other for the faculty members. Both were divided into four dimensions: linguistics, literature, language skills, and overall perceptions, ordered as shown in table 1 & table 2.

Table1. Students' questionnaire dimensions

Dimensions	Items
Linguistics courses	1-12
Literature courses	13-25
Language skills courses	26-34
Overall perceptions	35-38

Table 2. Faculty members' questionnaire dimensions

Dimensions	Items
Linguistics courses	1-9
Literature courses	10-19
Language skills courses	20-28
Overall perceptions	29-32

The percentage was calculated for closed-ended questions. Whereas, open-ended questions are descriptively analyzed to obtain general perspectives. Since this research was conducted in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 lockdown, the questionnaires were prepared via Google Form website and distributed to the participants online. Furthermore, the students' questionnaire was translated to their native language (Arabic), so students of diverse levels of English can clearly understand and respond to the questions.

To ensure the questionnaires' content validity, both were reviewed by five experts in the field of applied linguistics. Their comments aided in the improvement of some elements of the chosen questions. In addition, the questionnaires were piloted. The reliability coefficient was measured by Cronbach alpha by means of the SPSS program. The results presented in the following table (table 3) indicate that both questionnaires are reliable.

Table 3. The Cronbach alpha results

The Cronbach alpha result of students' questionnaire	0.954
The Cronbach alpha result of faculty members' questionnaire	0.857

Simultaneously, the statistical validity test of the questionnaires was carried out using the Pearson correlation method using the SPSS program. The data in (table 4 & table 5) reveals that the results are greater than 0.05, which demonstrates the two questionnaires are valid.

Table 4. Faculty members' questionnaire correlation result

Questionnaire dimension	Correlation
Linguistics	0.546
Literature	1.000
Language skills	0.544

Table 5. Students' questionnaire correlation result

Questionnaire dimension	Correlation
Linguistics	0.954
Literature	0.934
Language skills	0.844

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The data from students and faculty members' closed-ended items were statistically computed to find out the percentage of each statement and then interpreted descriptively. In addition, the open-ended items were classified and analyzed in order to address the research questions.

3. Results

The data gathered from participants are classified and presented below under the main dimensions of the questionnaires.

3.1. Faculty members' perceptions

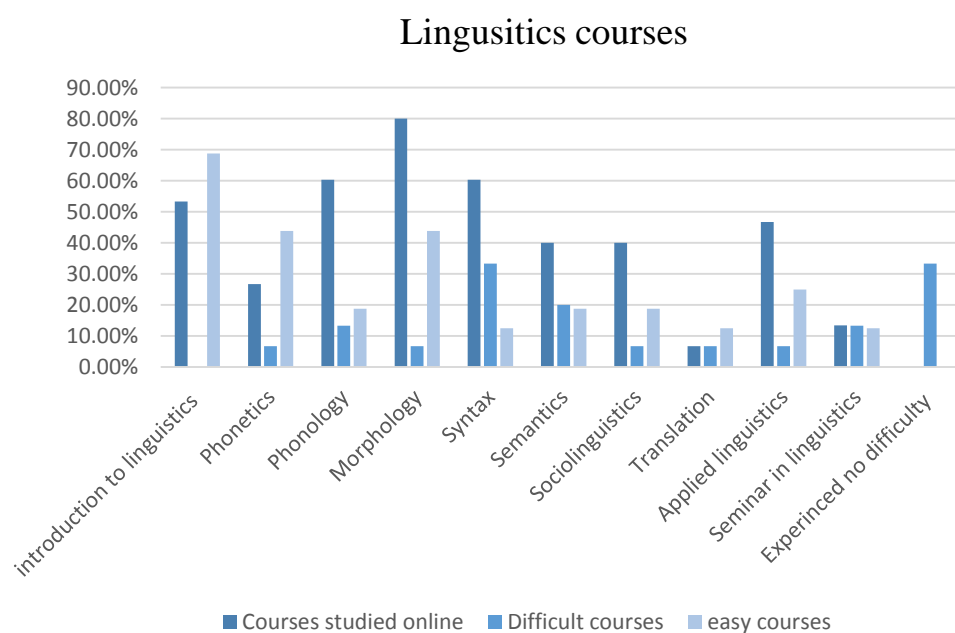#### 3.1.1 *Linguistics courses*

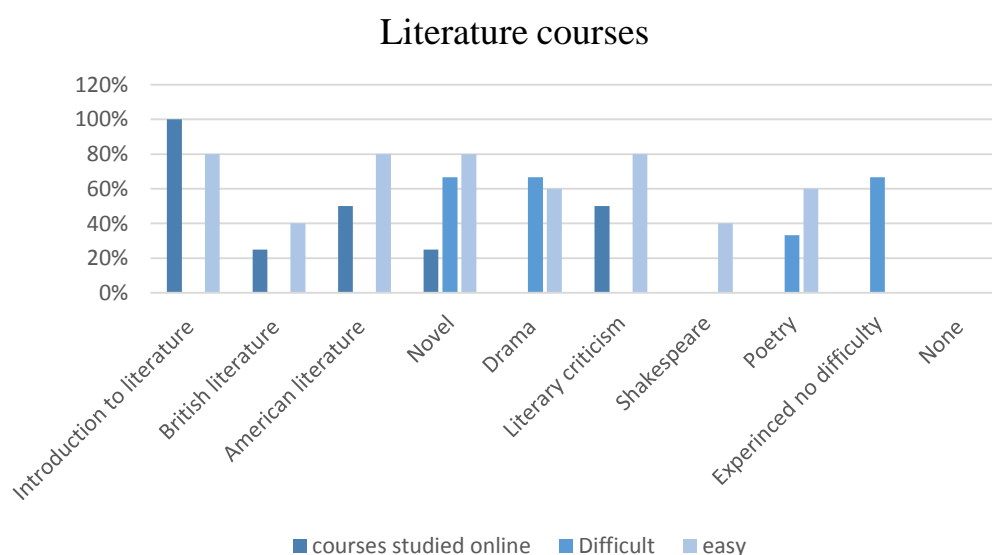**Figure 1.** Linguistics' courses result of the faculty questionnaire

The first dimension of the questionnaire was related to the Linguistics courses that faculty members have taught online. According to figure 1 above, the majority of faculty stated they did not experience any difficulty in teaching linguistics courses online. Although, the equivalent number pointed out that syntax was the most challenging course (33.3%). Depending on the data obtained, there various factors behind the difficulty of these courses, the most daunting challenge they experienced was a lack of face-to-face interaction. Also, many of them indicated they faced difficulties in keeping students motivated, and some of the faculty experienced challenges in determining students' actual participation. On top of that, they mentioned that the reason behind the difficulty of syntax is that it is full of diagrams. Based on their responses, they indicate the simplest course was the introduction to linguistics. The reason behind the easy courses according to their responses is that the nature of the course is theoretical and could be delivered online easily. Moreover, they reported the Blackboard system, used in delivering courses, was flexible which makes teaching English courses effortless, and it was easy to use visual aids like PowerPoint slides.

Table 6. Five-points Likert scale of faculty members' questionnaire (linguistics courses)

Items	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	total
1. I believe that online classes are suitable to deliver different linguistics' courses.	29.4%	35.3%	23.5%	11.8%	0	N=16
2. I am able to explain and discuss different linguistics' concepts efficiently through online classes.	29.4%	41.2%	23.5%	5.9%	0	N=16
3. Students are able to respond efficiently to my interpretation of different linguistics courses.	12.5%	50.0%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	N=15
4. I feel that students have achieved the objectives of linguistics' courses efficiently.	5.9%	52.9%	23.5%	17.6%	0	N=16

Table 6 shows that most respondents in the study (Strongly Agree = 29.4%, Agree = 35.3%) agreed that online classes are suitable to deliver different linguistics courses. The faculty members also (Strong Agree = 27.5%, Agree = 52.5%) believe that they are able to explain and discuss different linguistics concepts efficiently. In addition, the majority of the respondents agreed (Strongly Agree = 12.5%, Agree = 50.0%) that students are able to respond efficiently to their interpretation of different linguistics courses. Moreover, a high percentage of faculty members (Strongly Agree = 5.9%, Agree = 52.9%) agreed that students have achieved the objectives of linguistics courses efficiently. Despite the fact, there is a considerable number of the faculty members who were uncertain (Neutral = 23.5%) about items (1), (2), and (4).

3.1.2. Literature courses

Figure 2. Literature's courses result of the faculty questionnaire

As clear in figure 2, most of the faculty did not faced any difficulties in teaching literature courses. However, the similar number pointed that Novel and Drama were the hardest (66.7%). The majority of faculty members stated that the reasons for the difficulty of these courses were mostly the lack of face-to-face interaction and the difficulty in maintaining students motivation. Whereas some of them stated they had difficulties in measuring students' real participation. Concerning the easy courses, Introduction to literature, American literature, Novel and Literary criticism were the easiest according to the faculty experience (80%). These courses were easy because of their theoretical nature and materials were easy to be expressed. Besides, there is plenty of aids that could be used to support the delivery these courses.

Table 7. Five-points Likert scale of faculty members' questionnaire (literature courses)

Items	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	total
1. I am able to deliver the course content easily through online classes.	33.3%	50.0%	16.7%	0	0	N=6
2. I am able to express and discuss different literary texts through online classes.	66.7%	33.3%	0	0	0	N=6
3. I am satisfied with students responding and interpretation in different literature texts in online classes.	33.3%	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	0	N=6
4. Students are able to read, analyze and discuss different literature texts through online classes.	33.3%	50.0%	0	16.7%	0	N=6
5. The objectives of teaching different literature courses are achieved in online classes.	66.7%	33.3%	0	0	0	N=6

Table 7 illustrates that the majority of faculty members (Strongly Agree = 33.3%, Agree = 50.0%) said they were capable of delivering the course content easily through online classes. Besides, as the table presents, none of them disagree with the statement. Additionally, all of the faculty members agreed (Strongly Agree = 66.7%, Agree = 33.3%) that they were able to express and discuss different literary texts online. Furthermore, the table reflects that faculty members (Strongly Agree = 33.3%, Agree = 33.3%) were satisfied with students' responses and interpretations in different literature sources in online classes. Besides, the majority of the faculty members (Strongly Agree = 33.3%, Agree 50.0%) agreed that students are able to read, analyse and discuss diverse literature texts online. Lastly, according to their responses, all of them agreed (Strongly Agree = 66.7%, Agree = 33.3%) that the objectives of teaching different literature courses are achieved in online classes.
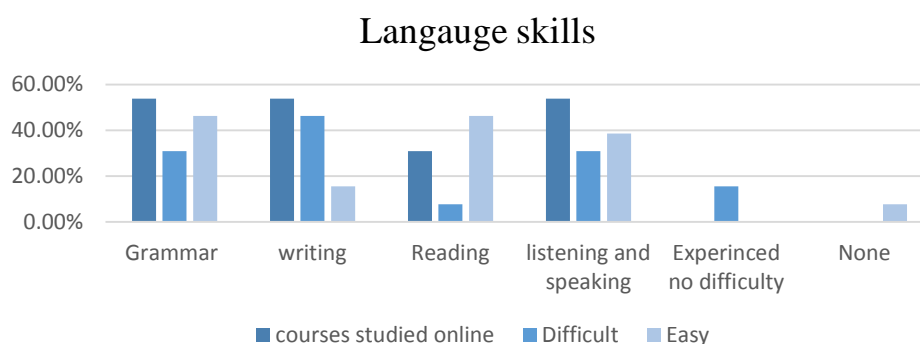
3.1.3. *Language skills courses*

Figure 3. Language skills courses result of the faculty questionnaire

As shown in figure 3, Writing was the most difficult course that has been taught online (46.2%). Based on the results obtained, the lack of face-to-face interaction and the difficulty in maintaining students' motivation are the most common obstacles faculty have faced in online teaching. In addition to the difficulty of measuring students' real participation. According to figure 3, Reading and Grammar represent the simplest courses based on the faculty experience (46.2). The greatest number of faculty stated the simplicity of the materials and activities seems to be the main reason for their ease.

Table 8. Five-points Likert scale of faculty members' questionnaire (language skills courses)

Items	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disa gree	Strongly disagree	to tal
1- Students participate in online classes as they do in face-to-face classes.	7.7%	38.5 %	7.7%	46.3 %	0	N =13
2- Students are able to improve their language skills through online classes.	7.7%	76.9 %	7.7%	7.7 %	7.7%	N =13
3- Learners' language skills can be assessed efficiently through online classes.	0	53.8 %	23.1%	15.4 %	7.7%	N =13
4- Teaching language skills' courses through online classes requires more effort.	46.2%	46.2 %	7.7%	0	0	N =13

Table 8 shows, faculty members cannot agree on whether students participate well in online learning as face-to-face learning. However, the majority believes that students are able to improve their language skills through online classes (Strongly Agree = 7.7%, Agree = 76.9%). A high percentage of faculty (Agree = 53.8%) agreed that learners' language skills can be assessed efficiently through online classes. Although some of them were neutral about it (Neutral = 23.1%). The result of the last statement indicates that faculty members agreed (Strongly Agree = 46.2%, Agree = 46.2%) that teaching language skills courses through online classes requires more effort.

3.1.4. Faculty members' overall perceptions:

Regarding the open-ended questions where faculty members declared their experience, concerns, and preference for online learning. The results show, the primary worry of the faculty was the students' lack of motivation and commitment. Another concern is the assessment of students. Furthermore, (38.4%) of faculty members consider online learning as a successful experience. Whereas (14.4%) stated that online teaching is only suitable in exceptional circumstances. Additionally, a lesser number of the faculty (9.6%) said it was a negative experience. Concerning their preference, the highest number (38%) did not want this form of learning to continue, for various reasons. Although (28%) preferred this type of learning and desired it to remain. Whereas other faculty members expressed diverse opinions, some of them (14.4%) believed it depends on the situation or the level of the students. Moreover, small number of the respondents (9.6%) suggested the blended learning mode, instead of online learning.

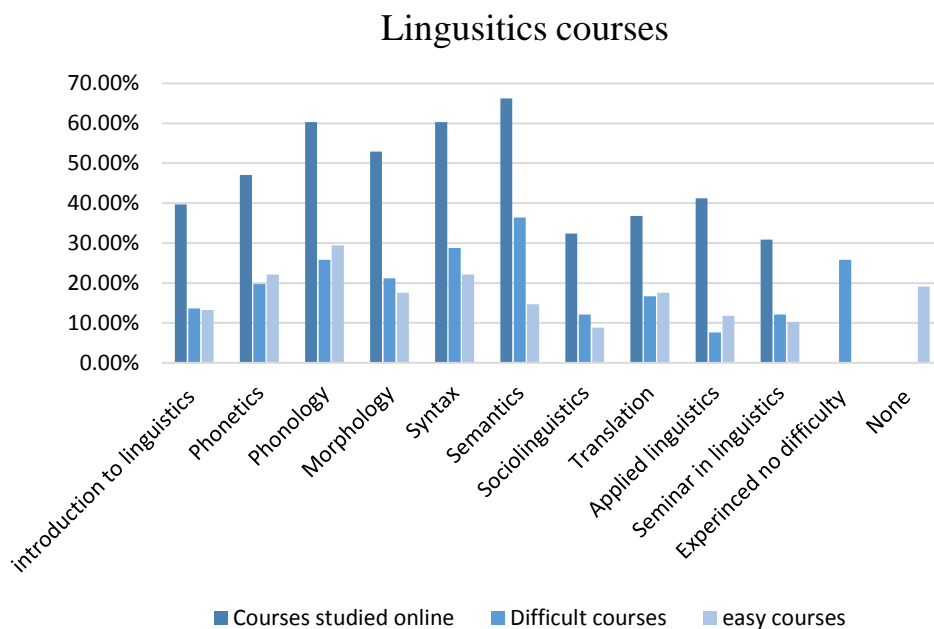### 3.2. Students' perceptions

3.2.1 Linguistics courses:

Figure 4. Linguistics courses results of the students' questionnaire

Similar to the faculty members' questionnaire, the students' questionnaire also started with the linguistics courses that students have studied online. As shown in figure 4 above, which is based on the results extracted from the students' questionnaire. The hardest course according to students' experience was Semantics (36.4%). The difficulty of this course resulted from the lack of face-to-face interaction, and that learning becomes concentrating on tasks and homework. Also, they stated that course content is unsuitable for online learning. The easiest course according to students' responses is Phonology (29.4%). They stated, the reason behind that is mainly related to the course content and faculty members' efforts.

Table 9. Five-points Likert scale of students' questionnaire (linguistics courses)

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total

1. Learning environment in online class helps me to understand the materials easier	29.2%	29.2%	16.9%	12.3%	12.3%	N=65
2. The online courses were delivered in a manner that helped me understand the underlying concepts in linguistics.	35.4%	24.6%	16.9%	18.5%	4.6%	N=65
3. I am able to understand the basic knowledge of the structure of sound systems in the language through online classes.	24.6%	43.1%	20.0%	7.7%	4.6%	N=65
4. I am able to practice linguistic analysis, including analysis of sound, word, and sentence structures effectively through online classes.	32.3%	40.0%	15.4%	9.2%	3.1%	N=65
5. I am able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of linguistic diversity and variability across societies through online classes.	27.7%	32.3%	23.1%	12.3%	4.6%	N=65
6. I am able to understand how sounds are produced, how they are transmitted, and how they are perceived through online classes.	34.4%	42.2%	14.1%	4.7%	4.7%	N=65
7. The way I was assessed online was a fair test of my learning outcomes	27.7%	33.8%	20.0%	7.7%	10.8%	N=65

From the results presented in Table 9, most of the students agreed (Strongly agree = 29.2%, Agree = 29.2%) that learning environment in online classes helped them to grasp material easily. In addition, the majority of participants agreed (Strongly Agree 35.4%, Agree 24.6%) that online course was delivered in a manner that helped them understand the underlying concepts. Moreover, most of the students agreed (Strongly agree = 24.6%, Agree = 43.1%) they are able to comprehend basic knowledge of linguistics courses. Although some of them (Neutral = 20.0%) were unsure. In addition, most of them agreed (Strongly agree = 32.3%, Agree = 40.0%) that they were able to practice linguistic analysis, including analysis of sound, word, and sentence structures effectively. In addition, as shown in the table they agreed (Strongly agree = 27.7%, Agree = 32.3%) that they were able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of linguistic variability across societies through online classes. Moreover, they believe (Strongly Agree = 34.4%, Agree = 42.2%) they could understand how sounds are produced, how they are transmitted, and how they are perceived in online classes. Finally, a high percentage (Strongly Agree = 27.7%, Agree = 33.8%) of them were satisfied with the way they were assessed online.

3.2.2.   Literature courses
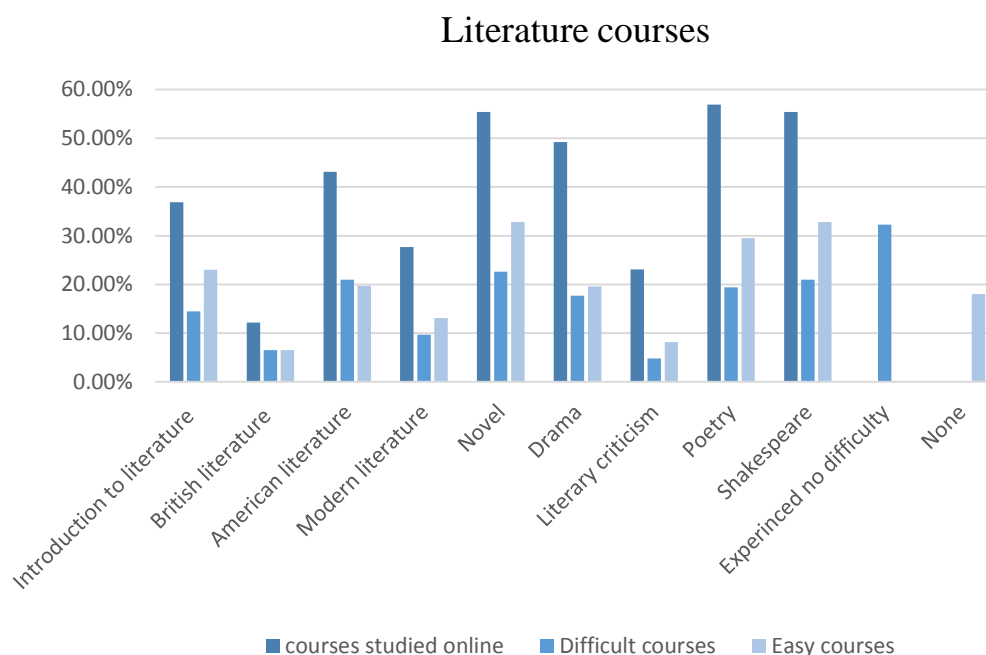
Literature courses

Figure 5. Literature courses result of the students' questionnaire

Figure 5 above indicates that most participants did not experience any difficulty in learning literature courses online. However, according to them novel was the most difficult course to study online (22.6%). The reasons for this were absence of face-to-face interaction, and that course content is unsuitable for online learning. Surprisingly, the easiest courses for students were Novel and Shakespeare (33.3%). The reasons behind their easiness were mostly that the nature of these courses was easy, and they were suitable to be studied online. In addition, faculty members were good about delivering information.

Table 10. Five-points Likert scale of students' questionnaire (literature courses)

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1. Learning environment in online class helps me to understand the materials easier	28.8%	34.8%	18.2%	9.2%	9.2%	N=66
2. I am able to read different literary texts with good understanding through online classes.	29.2%	41.5%	15.4%	6.2%	7.7%	N=66
3. I am able to analyze, interpret and describe the critical ideas, values, and themes that appear in literary texts through online learning.	28.8%	33.3%	24.2%	6.1%	7.6%	N=66
4. I am able to develop my literary knowledge and skills through online classes.	35.9%	39.1%	15.6%	1.6%	7.8%	N=66
5. I am able to apply critical and theoretical approaches to the reading and analysis of literary texts through online classes.	27.3%	42.4%	12.1%	10.6%	7.6%	N=66

6. I am able to develop critical writing that engages with a literary text and its critical interpretation through online classes.	30.3%	39.4%	12.1%	9.1%	9.1%	N=66
7. I am able to think critically and to express ideas orally and in writing	33.8%	36.9%	13.8%	7.7%	7.7%	N=66
8. The way I was assessed online was a fair test of my learning outcomes	27.3%	33.3%	19.7%	10.6%	9.1%	N=66

Table 10 presents that the majority of students agreed (Strongly Agree =28.8%, Agree = 34.8%) that online learning environment helps them to understand literature courses. They also agreed (Strongly Agree = 29.2%, Agree = 41.5%) that they are able to read and understand different literary texts. Additionally, most of them felt they are able to analyze and describe the critical ideas online (Strongly Agree = 28.8%, Agree = 33.3%). Although, some of them were uncertain about it (24.2%). In addition, they agreed (Strongly Agee = 35.9%, Agree = 39.1%) they were able to develop their literary knowledge and skills. The participants also approved (Strongly Agree = 27.3%, Agree = 42.4%) they can apply critical and theoretical approaches to the reading and analysis of literary texts online. In addition, most of them agreed (Strongly Agree = 30.3%, Agree = 39.4%) that they were able to develop critical writing that engages with a literary text and its critical interpretation. Additionally, a considerable percentage agreed (Strongly Agree = 33.8%, Agree = 36.9%) that they were capable to think critically and to express ideas orally and in writing. Lastly, most of them were satisfied (Strongly Agree = 27.3%, Agree = 33.3%) with the way they were assessed online.
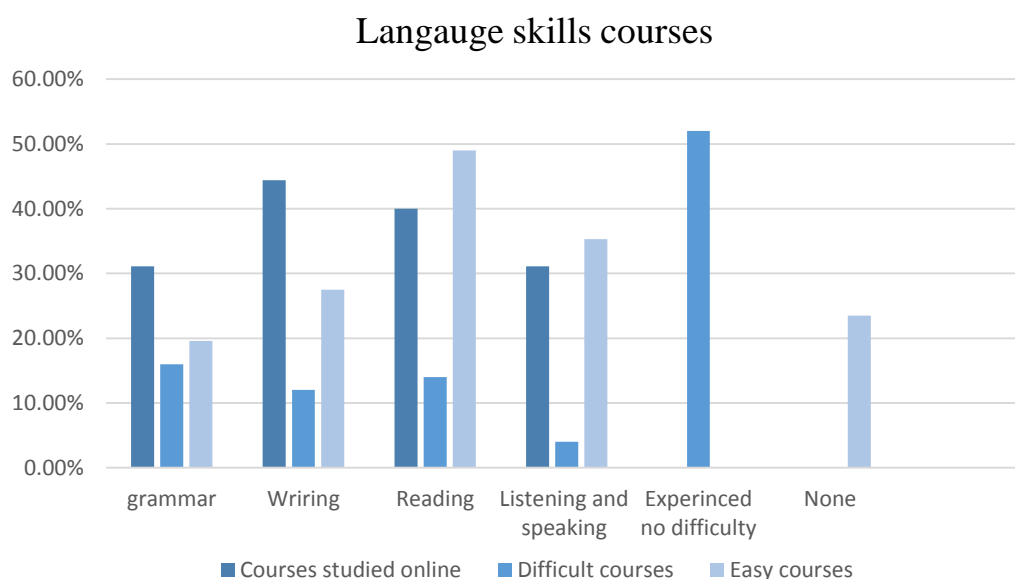
3.2.3. Language skills

Figure 6. Language skills courses results of the students' questionnaire

As clear in figure 6, the majority of students did not face difficulties in learning language skills online. However, the most difficult course according to their experience was Grammar course (16%). According to their responses, lack of face-to-face interaction, unsuitability of the course and high focus on tasks instead of explaining were the reasons. The figure indicates that reading (49%) was the easiest course for the students. Students said that language skills courses are easy to be studied online in general.

Table 11. Five-points Likert scale of students' questionnaire (language skills courses)

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1. Learning environment in online class helps me to understand the materials easier	28.6%	41.1%	23.2%	5.4%	1.8%	N=56
2. I am able to learn and practice different language skills normally through online classes.	28.6%	44.6%	21.4%	3.6%	1.8%	N=56
3. I believe improving language skills online requires more effort and time.	33.9%	33.9%	25.0%	3.6%	3.6%	N=56
4. The way I was assessed online was a fair test of my learning outcomes.	32.1%	37.5%	25.0%	3.6%	1.8%	N=56

The table above presents that the majority of students agreed (Strongly Agree = 28.6%, Agree = 41.1%) that online learning environment aids them to interpret the materials easier. In addition, a high percentage of participants (Strongly Agree = 33.9%, Agree 33.9%) indicate that they were capable to learn and practice different language skills online. While some of them, (25.0%) demonstrated their uncertainty about it. Moreover, most of them agreed (Strongly Agree = 32.1%, Agree = 37.5%) that online assessment was a fair test of their outcomes. Though some students were neutral (Neutral 25.0%).

3.2.4.   Students' overall perceptions
Regarding students' concerns of online learning, students have various concerns about online learning. According to their responses, a technical issue was the main concern they had. In addition, they had worries about understanding the courses efficiently. However, a considerable number of the participants did not have any worries about the online learning mode. In light of their online experience during COVID-19, the majority of participants found it as a great experience (47.5%). Whereas some of them stated, it was a bad experience (20.5%). Besides, some students consider it acceptable (19.2%). In consideration of their preference of this learning mode, based on the result obtained (44%) replied "Yes" acknowledging that it is flexible and saves their time. Whereas (41.3%) of them answered "No" since they encountered difficulties in understanding some courses, believing that online learning could cause academic failure.

4. Discussion

Covid-19 generated an uncommon mode of education, transforming learning from traditional learning settings into online learning mode in a short period of time. Consequently, students' and faculty's perceptions of these rapid changes were investigated. Generally, the study has discovered that students and faculty viewed online learning under COVID-19 circumstances as a beneficial experience. This reflects their positive attitude toward taking English courses entirely online, which is in line with the previous studies (Alanazy, 2018; Alsaied, 2016; Al-Turise, 2020). As the results presented, faculty declared that students are capable of performing and developing the required skills for learning, therefore they have successfully achieved the course objectives. On the other hand, students stated that they were able to practice and develop their skills in linguistics, literature and language skills through online classes. These results show that online learning have achieved the goals of learning successfully, and it could be a part of the formal learning system in higher education.

According to the faculty experience, language skills' courses were the hardest to be taught online followed by linguistics courses. Whereas Literature courses were considered the most suitable courses to be delivered online as students and faculty have confirmed. In consideration of various courses, faculty members and students rarely agreed. For instance, Syntax, Drama, and Writing represent the most challenging courses for the faculty. Whereas Semantics, American literature, and Grammar were the most difficult courses for students. Faculty found the easiest courses to deliver online were Grammar, Reading, Introduction to literature, Literary criticism, Introduction to linguistics. While students believe that Reading, Shakespeare, and Phonology were the easiest. Along with the literature courses, they both agreed that the Reading course was easy to be learned and delivered online. This indicates that faculty and students have different angles through which they assess the success of the teaching learning process. Additionally, both faculty and students stated a contradiction, where they considered the Novel course as the easiest and the most difficult at the same time. The contradiction represents the course's ambiguity, and further research is required within this course to clarify its case. As presented previously in the result section, there is no significant difference between the difficulties and easiness reasons of the courses among the three tracks.

Before stating the reasons, it is important to point out that this study had some limitations, as the current research had a relatively small sample size, so the findings should be approached with caution. Moreover, the lack of prior studies that have examined various English courses in the higher education caused some shortage of the information. This research, on the other hand, has provided insight into faculty members' and students' perceptions of online learning. As the results represented, the difficulty and easiness of the courses were a result of various reasons; the lack of face-to-face interaction seems to be the most significant problem for both faculty and students in all the tracks, which comes along with Al-Nofaie's study (2020). This indicates physical interaction is essential for the success of the educational process in higher education institutions. In addition, the faculty mentioned that they found it hard to maintain students' motivation in online learning in all tracks. Which is similar to Ahmed and Karim's study (2021) as they found that one of the biggest concerns during online learning was maintaining students' engagement and motivation for the whole class. As students' effort, academic achievement, and enjoyment of learning are all influenced by their motivation, it plays a central role in their language learning (Nicholson, 2013). Thus, it is critical for the faculty to find the causes that decrease their motivation and seek to overcome these reasons.

Faculty also, felt they were unable to measure students' real participation in online classes of all tracks. Therefore, the assessment was one of the major problems that faculty members have faced during online learning. This is consistent with Al-Ahdal, Aldhali and Bahari (2020) who stated that there are concerns with assessment in online learning. As Cheating becomes more undetectable, they added that educators should use alternative assessment methods. However, in the current study, students were satisfied with online assessment. This could be due to the relevant easiness of online assessment and their ability to achieve high scores. The study also has discovered that the reasons behind the easiness of some online courses is related mainly to the nature of their content. Besides course content, students stated that faculty collaboration and efforts make online learning easier. It was also detected that online learning added flexibility to the area of learning.

In view of their concerns, the faculty's main concern was the assessment, they claimed that assessing students' participation online was intractable and requires more effort. In addition, the lack of motivation among students, as the faculty stated that students do not perform in online classes as well as they do in traditional classrooms. Which means that online learning cannot completely replace traditional learning environment. This does not go along with Hamouda's findings (2020), who stated that students in online classes outperformed those in traditional classrooms. However, students expressed their worries in the technical issues, which agrees with Mayhoob's study (2020) as he found

that technical issues affected learners' outcomes. In addition, understanding course content sufficiently was one of their fears as they believed this might lead to academic failure. Although faculty gain positive attitude toward online learning, they do not desire this form of learning to remain. While students favored online learning over traditional one and prefer it to continue.

5. Conclusion

This study offers a viewpoint of the perceptions of students and faculty toward online learning, examining various English courses during COVID-19 crisis. The study was done in the English Department at Jouf University. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that both students and faculty developed a positive attitude toward online learning. However, faculty do not prefer learning to continue in this manner. Faculty preferred traditional learning over online learning, as online learning might not be appropriate for all English courses. Literature and Reading courses, according to the findings, are the most suitable courses for online learning due to their theoretical content. On the other hand, the main obstacles perceived by the faculty were (1) insufficient assessment, (2) lack of motivation, and (3) poor outcomes. Whereas, for students, they were the (1) unsuitable course content, (2) technical issues, and (3) insufficient delivery of information.

Practically, this study may help the educational institutions and instructors in higher education to reconsider online learning policies and practices in order to improve the educational systems in the future and overcome the challenges. In addition, as online learning may become a part of the higher education system in the future, identifying the suitable courses will be helpful in designing the study plan of the English program. Some issues need further investigation. For instance, there is a need to investigate the Novel course to figure its suitability since it caused a contradiction for both faculty and students. Furthermore, the study recommends future researchers to expand the student sample, including diverse group of students and applying this study to various Saudi universities.

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