

COVID-19 and Online Education in Lebanon: Teachers' Perceptions

Pascale Hajal^{1*}, Anthony Chabarekh² and Maikel Hajj²

¹Faculty of Humanities, Arts, Sciences and Technology University, Lebanon

²Department of Education, Arts, Sciences, and Technology University in Lebanon, Beirut, Lebanon

*Corresponding author: pascale.hajal@aul.edu.lb (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8635-0540)

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has devastated the world and affected all aspect of our daily life. As teachers in Lebanon, the researchers' concern was its effects on the Lebanese education system, which has a weak infrastructure and in the middle of an economic crisis, including teachers' perspectives on the sudden shift from traditional classroom to online classes as well as the future of online classes. The purpose of this study is to investigate the teachers' perception of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several concerns will be the center and main points of this research, which will examine the three research questions. This study utilized a quantitative methodology. It employed the use of a questionnaire as the research instrument. The data collected from the questionnaire distributed to the respondents served as the primary instrument for the study. This study investigated online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the teachers' perception on the matter. It was found that almost all the respondents hold negative attitudes towards online learning in Lebanon though it is mostly due to the weak and underdeveloped internet and electricity infrastructure in the country however other issues were present such as students' reliability, and book availability. Several recommendations were suggested at the end of the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

- COVID-19 has devastated the world and affected all aspect of our daily life.
- The Lebanese education system has a weak infrastructure and in the middle of an economic crisis, including teachers' perspectives on the sudden shift from traditional classroom to online classes as well as the future of online classes.
- Change is constant and inevitable, and intelligence lies in the ability to adapt to change.
- With the growing number of online education programs, faculty should possess skills specific to the online learning environment.
- Finding effective teaching strategies including collaborative activities such as discussion boards, instructor presence, and using a variety of instructional methods.

Keywords: COVID 19, Online Education, Teacher perception

In December 2019, the first outbreak of the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 was recorded and within a few days, the virus spread in unimaginable ways around the world. According to Kulal and Nayak (2020), change is constant and inevitable, and intelligence

lies in the ability to adapt to change. This has created

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new challenges for the whole world (Alhumaid *et al.* 2020). Alhumaid *et al.* (2020) mention that to combat the virus, healthcare organizations introduced many safety measures such as wearing face masks, social distancing, self-isolation, and even complete lockdown in many countries. In addition, Todd (2020) stressed on the importance of social distancing as a crucial defense against the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although lockdown and social distancing brought positive outcomes, they also led to the immediate closure of educational institutions, bringing the educational activities of more than 80% of young students to a complete halt (Alhumaid *et al.* 2020). Yang (2020), who also agrees, stated that the sudden closure of schools was to ensure the safety of teachers and students from the virus. Todd (2020) has added that the pandemic has caused a rippling effect on education as educational institutions were forced to move from classroom learning to online learning with little to no warning. Alhumaid *et al.* (2020) mentioned that institutions have encountered major problems when faced with the challenges set by the pandemic and they had to resort to distance learning systems. Consequently, primary, and secondary school students have been engaged in a super large-scale online learning program (Yang, 2020). Online learning became a useful tool to overcome educational challenges (Alhumaid *et al.* 2020). Alhumaid *et al.* (2020) have also mentioned, that besides online sources, many countries launched television broadcast to support distance learning during the pandemic. At present, more than 3 billion users are using the e-learning platform (Kulal & Nayak, 2020). Especially during the current Covid-19 outbreak, e-learning has replaced the traditional classroom environment worldwide (Alhumaid *et al.* 2020). Kulal and Nayak (2020) defined e-learning as the use of technology and network communication for teaching and learning. Alhumaid *et al.* (2020) added, that virtual learning and ease of access to internet services facilitated the learning system. According to Heng (2020), this transition to online education was abrupt, posing a lot of challenges for students, teachers, school administrations, and even parents. The challenges along with the perception may vary from one country to the other. However, it is still a controversial matter to whether online classrooms can

replace face to face traditional learning. According to Alam (2020), prioritizing online education, primarily through online systems, is a “paradigm shift in education”. The sudden inability to have access to education highlighted the importance of technology in our lives. In this matter, Lean (2020) considered that online learning is an effective path to overcome the educational challenges that coronavirus forced on teachers, students, administration, and parents. Adnan (2020) argues that the existing predicament is not a normal shift but rather an educational crisis as well. Thus, if this crisis is held deliberately, it can bring various positive outcomes to both scholars and instructors. Nayak (2020) specified, that an online class is where students can learn subjects, discuss issues with fellow students and instructor as well as share material and check academic progress with help from internet-oriented technologies. Schools, colleges, universities, and instructors instantly adopted online sources to continue their educational journey through video conferencing applications and modules. Especially, with the increase cases of COVID-19 worldwide has also urged the shift to online classes (Kulal & Nayak, 2020). According to a study conducted by Alghamdi and Aldossari (2021), teachers faced changing roles shifting from traditional teaching to a more nontraditional teaching approaches where the teacher became a facilitator, guide, coach, and leader. Given that the shift to online learning was sudden its impacts are likely to be far-reaching. Therefore, Todd (2020) insisted on the importance to understand what happened in the shift to online learning and why this happened to be able to identify directions for the future which could increase the likelihood of successful online learning. Generally, both students and teachers are equally responsible to accept online learning as a substitute to classroom learning to help continue the learning process. Todd (2020) argued that online learning may be less effective than classroom learning as students are less engaged, Todd also added that face-to-face learning is more effective than online learning. Alhumaid *et al.* (2020) have also shared Todd concerns, for the current crisis forcing the shift from formal to informal education causing an educational crisis as well. However, according to Alghamdi and Aldossari (2021), their study suggested that for online education to achieve

its goal, teachers must gain new respect for differential learning. Studying virtually enables learners to acquire self-motivation, self-reliance, and self-reflection. Online education can help students gain the opportunity to become independent learners where they can practice their communication and collaboration skills and enhance their technology. Moreover, according to Khalil *et al.* (2020), the use of online learning is more productive within the context of subject matter. Some teachers and some students preferred online learning for their future and agreed that online learning are an efficient method for the acquisition of knowledge.

Thus, the need to tackle it strategically to get positive outcomes for both the students and the instructors. Frazer *et al.* (2017) mentioned that with the growing number of online education programs, faculty should possess skills specific to the online learning environment. As well as finding effective teaching strategies including collaborative activities such as discussion boards, instructor presence, and using a variety of instructional methods. For Todd (2020), this issue is especially important for a subject like English language which relies on teacher-student interaction to a greater extent than most other subjects at universities. In this scenario, the role played by teachers ultimately leads to the acceptance of online learning and helps reap its benefits (Kulal & Nayak, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the teachers' perception of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims:

- ❖ To investigate the consequences of COVID-19 on online learning.
- ❖ To explore teachers' approaches to online learning.
- ❖ To uncover the future of online learning.

Significance of the Study

COVID-19 has devastated the world and affected all aspect of our daily life. As teachers in Lebanon, the researchers' concern was its effects on the Lebanese education system, which has a weak infrastructure and in the middle of an economic crisis, including teachers'

perspectives on the sudden shift from traditional classroom to online classes as well as the future of online classes. These concerns will be the center and main points of our research, which will examine the following questions:

1. How COVID-19 flipped our views on the education system?
2. How did teachers perceive online learning?
3. Will online learning be integrated in the future curriculum?

Literature review

This study tackles the sudden shift to online classes as the result of a pandemic. It will provide an insight on the effects of this rushed transition on teachers and the way they perceived it. The research will also tackle the new educational developments that occurred due to the pandemic such as e-learning acceptance, as well as its adoption and integration. As the COVID-19 began to spread across the globe, it has left the whole world in shock with devastating impacts on all aspects of life. To combat the virus, many steps were taken from wearing masks to total lockdown. Faced by the new challenges educational institutions had to rely on online learning, placing new pressures on teachers, who were not prepared for the sudden shift.

COVID-19 and the shift from traditional to online classes

Many countries are currently in a state of health emergency because of the deadly disease COVID-19 (Alhumaid *et al.* 2020). Alhumaid *et al.* (2020) added that to counteract the disease, governments took different defensive and regulatory measures including social distancing, quarantine, and self-isolation. These steps according to Todd (2020) enforced online learning on educational institutions. Kulal & Nayak also stated that after the outbreak of COVID-19 in the entire world, the online classes became compulsory for education institutions. However, they (2020) mentioned that in recent years, online classes were increasing in numbers as a modern tool for handling issues during the learning process. Online teaching back then created environments where students actively engage with the material and

build new knowledge, with the help of the internet who has enabled the delivery of instruction. In addition, due to current events online classes have gained so much importance all over the world, and it shifts the thought of colleges that “Online class is an Optional” to “Online class is necessary” (Kulal & Nayak, 2020). Nonetheless, Todd (2020) had many concerns regarding the suddenness of the shift to online learning, expecting most teachers to initially encountered numerous problems.

Teachers’ perception of online learning

Kulal and Nayak (2020) mentioned, that teachers are having mixed opinions about online classes. Todd (2020) also stressed the several types of problems faced by many teachers, when they initially moved to online classes. Besides, Yang (2020) stated the numerous concerns of teachers about the learning and teaching anxiety produced by online teaching, as well as the decreased learning efficiency and study goals. However, teachers’ perception of the usefulness of technology integration and adoption is a primary determinant in improving the pedagogical learning and education process of online classes (Alhumaid *et al.* 2020). Although online teaching programs were hastily implemented and makeshift as a response to epidemic prevention, most teachers appear willing to work alongside their students and school administrators in ensuring a systematic online learning environment (Yang, 2020). Alas, according to Kulal and Nayak (2020), many teachers were not satisfied with the training and support given by the institution. Especially considering that many teachers had not received any training in online learning prior to COVID-19. As extensive training and full adaptation of online teaching methods were only implemented to counteract and control the spread of the epidemic (Yang, 2020). Todd (2020) on the other hand, mentioned that many teachers had a healthy attitude towards seeking support where needed and experimenting with different approaches to improve their online teaching skills.

Many teachers are not supporting the implementation of online classes without proper training and proper infrastructure facilities (Kulal & Nayak, 2020). Yang (2020) also cited some of the difficulties of online teaching

including, teachers’ unfamiliarity with new technology, and the limited emotional attachment between teacher and student. For Todd (2020), the main issues were the amount of time required for contacting the students, the teachers prolonged exposure to a screen for checking assignments, which created health and eyes problems, and the needs to find new ways to stimulate students especially when they are surrounded by many distractions. However, Yang (2020) revealed, that when teachers gained more experience in teaching online, their skills has improved, particularly the application of live streaming technologies, multimedia slide show techniques, information search, resource integration skills, and online teaching strategies and methods.

Teachers resolved many of their issues by relying on communication and tone to attract their students to the online learning system (Alhumaid *et al.* 2020). Teachers communicated with their students regularly and set guidelines to engage the students and made sure no student misuses the online platform (Kulal & Nayak, 2020). According to Alhumaid *et al.* (2020), the teachers’ positive perception of online learning helped the students to adopt technology for educational purposes. They (2020) added that teachers used e-Learning to provide extra study material to improve the students’ academic performance. Frazer *et al.* (2017) stated that when teachers adopted effective online practices, they reduced the stress of their students, improved students’ work and critical thinking. Teachers also relied on feedback from their students to maximize the benefits of online classes.

The future of online learning

According to Yang (2020) the platforms used by teachers provided them with more convenient and varied functions, such as group meetings, personalized accounts, and online live broadcast capability. The platforms were thus considered suitable for most online teaching applications and able to provide a stable technological approach. However, to Kumal and Nayak (2020), online classes are modern techniques for the modern education system with potentials in the future. Many teachers and students do not believe in this aspect, or they are not comfortable in an online class. Todd (2020)

mentioned that most of the advantages of online learning from the teachers' perspective were leaning towards organizational rather than pedagogical. Todd (2020) insisted that frequently cited advantages were flexibility and accessibility. In addition, Kumal and Nayak (2020) agreed with the idea that many students prefer online classes because of its time and location flexibility and broad knowledge base. Nonetheless, they also (2020) pointed out that teachers consider traditional method of teaching as a more effective approach for teaching and learning. Besides, some teachers do not feel secure in private online tools. Todd (2020) expanded on that idea, by stating that even though online teaching offered flexibility for students that may be needed in the future but now teachers and students are benefiting from a structured classroom and the idea of online classes may seem intimidating. Todd (2020) added disadvantages including technical issues, low-income people who will be left behind, and the heavy reliance on technology can be less private and exclude large groups from participating due to bandwidth/software limitations. Some students feared online classes due to their inability to reach them either due to internet or status issues (Kumal and Nayak, 2020). Besides Todd (2020) revealed that teachers consider face-to-face learning to be far superior to online learning in all instances especially oral communication courses. Teachers also believe that in an online class it is challenging to have an emotional attachment with students (Kumal & Nayak, 2020). Finally, Todd (2020) mentioned that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions for online teaching, but that there is a wide variety of possible strategies which allows the teachers to have a broad range of solutions available for improving their online teaching in the future.

In Conclusion, the effects of COVID-19 on the educational systems left many teachers unprepared and not ready to the sudden shift to online classes. Many institutions and schools were not able to provide enough training for their staff which led to many problems and caused a lot of negative feedback from online classes. Online classes may have been the only solution which assured continuation of the learning process during the pandemic. They are still in many countries in their infancy stage and still have a long road ahead to be

considered a replacement to traditional classrooms which mean the future of online classes so far seems undetermined and bleak.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study utilized a quantitative methodology. It employed the use of a questionnaire as the research instrument. The data collected from the questionnaire distributed to the respondents served as the primary instrument for the study. The questionnaire was designed to accumulate enough information about the consequences of COVID-19 on education, teachers' perceptions of online learning, and the future of online learning in Lebanon.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 19 teachers holding a degree and from different schools in Lebanon. Teachers were selected randomly and from a variety of academic fields like arts, science, language, and math to show a diversity in the points of view. The population also diversified in demographic profiles like age, years of experience, and education level.

Research Instrument

The study used the survey method to collect the data on teachers' perceptions of online learning and its future in Lebanon. The prepared questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part 1 asked about the demographic features such as age, teaching experience, education, and teaching level. Part 2 was designed to learn about the consequences of COVID-19 on education and contains 11 questions. Part 3 was intended to gather information on teachers' perceptions of online learning and included 16 questions. Part 4 consisted of 3 open-ended questions to better understand the future of online education. Excluding parts 1 and 4, the questionnaire was based on five points Likert scale, with 1 strongly agreed and 5 strongly disagreed.

Data Analysis and Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed on social media

to participants using Google Forms, and participants were aware that all opinions provided by them were kept confidential (see appendix A). The data were collected over two weeks in May 2021 and recorded systematically. The data collected were categorized into demographic information, consequences of COVID-19 on online learning, teachers' perception, and the future of online education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Background

Most of the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 30 and represented 63.6% of all participants. In addition, 36.4% of the respondents were between the ages of 31 and 45. Most teachers held a master's or a Ph.D. constituting 45.5% of the participants. And a lower percentage of 27.3% represented both participants who had a diploma and a BA. As for the participants' teaching experiences, the data showed that 45.5% had 3 years or less, 27.3% between 3 to 6 years, and 27.3% had been teaching for more than 6 years. The majority of the respondents who taught at the intermediate level comprised 54.5%, with 27.3% who taught at the secondary level. However, both preschool and first cycle teachers had the lowest percentage with only 9.1%. Surprisingly, 72.7% of the respondents were familiar with online learning before COVID-19. However, out of the 27.3% who never taught online before, 100% of them would not have chosen to use online classes.

Research Question 1: How COVID-19 flipped our views on the education system?

Each item was rated from Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Disagree (4), and Strongly Disagree (5). Table 1 presents the results of the respondent's preparedness for the sudden shift to online learning due to COVID-19. It seemed that teachers had mixed opinions, with the majority having a neutral stand (neither agreeing nor disagreeing). The results related to the availability of the tools needed for online sessions ranged from 27.3% to 45.5%, who agreed on having the necessary devices, while 9.1% were neutral. The rest of the teachers, who either disagreed or strongly disagreed

both were 9.1%. However, when it came to the students having the necessary devices, most of the teachers, with 63.6% did not agree nor disagree. In addition, 18.2% represented both participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results could be interpreted as follow, teachers had the necessary devices for online education, but their students did not seem to have the essential tools. When it came to training and preparation, three criteria were measured: (1) attendance of training sessions, (2) preparation time, and (3) conversion of lessons to remote learning. Most of the participants were neutral in their answers, with 18.2% of teachers opted not to agree or disagree on attending training sessions, 27.3% on having enough preparation time, and a high percentage of 54.5% on easily converting their lesson to online learning. On average, the participants who agreed or strongly agreed was a lower percentage than those who disagreed or strongly disagreed on all three criteria. The results were as follows, 18.2% for both agreed and strongly agreed, with respectively 18.2% and 27.3% representing the participants who disagreed and strongly agreed on attending training sessions. In addition, a low percentage of 0% for both agreed and strongly agreed opposed by 54.5%, and 18.2% disagreed and strongly disagreed for having enough time to prepare for distance learning. For easily converting lessons teachers, who agreed and strongly agreed were both represented by 9.1% whereas teachers, who disagreed and strongly disagreed were represented by 9.1% and 18.2%. The data showed that teachers were not well trained or properly prepared to teach online and had to face many difficulties such as lack of training sessions, limited time, and struggling to convert their lessons to be adaptable to online learning. This goes in line with Kulal and Nayak (2020), Yang (2020), and Todd (2020). Finally, the support and help provided by the administration were based on two principles: 1- helped in the conversion of lessons and 2- gave a detailed schedule to be followed. When it came to helping the teachers with the lesson conversion, the average of teachers who disagreed (9.1%) and strongly disagreed (36.4%) was higher than the teachers who agreed (18.2%) and strongly agreed (9.1%). When it came to giving a detailed schedule to follow, the average of teachers who agreed (18.2%) and strongly agreed (36.4%) was higher

than the teachers who disagreed (18.2%) and strongly disagreed (9.1%). The results indicate a lack of support from the administration towards their staff by only providing a schedule without helping the teachers with lesson preparation and conversion.

Research Question 2: How did teachers perceive online learning?

This section is related to the teachers' perceptions of online learning, and it was divided into three categories: (1) Parents' interference, (2) Classroom management, and (3) Evaluation and Communication. The results for this section on the perception of teachers. Regarding parents' interference to help in distance learning, most participants (45.5%) chose not to agree or disagree, followed by 36.4% of teachers who agreed, which was higher than the 9.1% of teachers who disagreed or strongly disagreed. When it came to the parents' disturbing interference, the majority of teachers (36.4%) agreed, with 9.1% strongly agreed followed by 36.4% of teachers who stayed neutral, and 9.1% of teachers who both disagreed or strongly disagreed. A high percentage of 36.4% of teachers strongly agreed on being contacted by parents outside of the session, and 18.2% agreed, which is higher than the teachers who did not agree or disagree (27.3%) and strongly disagreed (9.1%) or disagreed (9.1%). These results showed that the parents' interferences were more harmful and disruptive to the online learning process and teachers' private life, hindering and undermining the remote education process. On average, the responses related to classroom management showed the highest percentage of teachers agreeing (27.3%) and strongly agreeing (29.3%), with only 17.2% of teachers opting not to agree or disagree and the lowest percentage of teachers disagreeing (10.1%) and strongly disagreeing (16.2%). These results showed that teachers were able to manage their classroom, including the absence and attendance of students, communication time, and keeping the students engaged and motivated by adopting different methods. Finally, for evaluation and communication, participants were asked about the importance of recording sessions and administrative references in case of a problem. In addition, to the efficiency and the fairness of the online assessments. 36.4% of teachers strongly agreed that

recording the session is essential, followed by 9.1% agreeing, 36.4% not agreeing or disagreeing, and 9.1% for both disagreeing and strongly disagreeing. Most participants agreed (36.4%) on communicating with the administration when a problem occurred, with 18.2% agreeing, whereas strongly disagreeing and disagreeing had a lower percentage of 9.1% and 27.3% did not agree or disagree. However, when it came to the fairness and efficiency of online assessment, most teachers strongly disagreed (36.4%) and disagreed (18.2%), but 27.3% agreed that it was fair and efficient, with only 18.2% of teachers who opted on not agreeing or disagreeing. These findings go in line with the review of this study where Alhumaid *et al.* (2020), Kulal and Nayak (2020), Yang (2020), and Todd (2020) indicated that teachers are making sure all students can access the lessons. In addition, the findings of this study indicated that teachers could rely on management to help with any problem. Unfortunately, according to the participants, an online assessment was not considered fair or efficient.

Research Question 3: Will online learning have a future in Lebanon?

In this section, the study deals with the future of online learning and used open-ended questions. The results were measured by analyzing the frequency of some words and categorizing them in groups. The first question deals with the additional problems faced by the teachers, and the results showed that the majority of difficulties were related to technical issues, with four answers mentioning "internet problem" and "problem with the electricity." Then three answers were related to the lack of material such as, "not having books" and "lack of access to the geometric set." Three other responses were concerned with the reliability of students when "parents are out of reach" and "lack of feedback from students." Finally, two participants did not seem to have a problem. The second question was related to the opportunity offered by online education. The results were placed in four categories: (1) helping students, (2) using ICT tools and different methods, (3) flexibility and safety, and (4) nothing. In the first category, five teachers used words such as "new ways of helping students," and "easy access to everyone." The second category had

three answers related to gaining new skills and contained words such as “using technology” and “methods that can’t be applied in schools.” The third category had two answers emphasizing flexibility and safety. The last section showed that two teachers saw no opportunity for online learning. The final question was concerned with the future of online education in Lebanon, and the answers varied between “yes,” “no,” and “maybe”. Five participants out of twelve saw no future and backed their answers by using words such as “no internet in Lebanon,” “no electricity in Lebanon,” and “our system is not ready for distant learning”. However, another five participants answered with maybe stressing on “we should try” and “depending on how it will be applied.” The last two participants answered with yes without justifying. These findings indicated that the main problem faced by the teacher during their online session is the weak and underdeveloped infrastructure in Lebanon, which caused a shortage in both internet and electricity. However, many teachers found that online learning provided new opportunities including, exploring ICT tools and testing new teaching strategies. Unfortunately, with the weak internet and electricity in Lebanon and some educators’ inability to use ICT tools, the future of online learning in Lebanon is bleak and unclear.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study investigated online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the teachers’ perception on the matter. It was found that almost all the respondents hold negative attitudes towards online learning in Lebanon though it is mostly due to the weak and underdeveloped internet and electricity infrastructure in the country however other issues were present such as students’ reliability, and book availability. These challenges reported by the teachers should be taken into consideration if online learning persisted and even replaced live teaching.

The findings of this study were lacking in numbers of participants but there is a possibility that the implications of this study have significant effects on Lebanese online education. The results showed that not only the government had failed to provide a good

quality internet and stable electricity but also, the school administration had not shown any efforts to support and properly train their teachers, which had led to a devastating online experience. As for some suggestions, first and foremost, the internet and electrical issues, which have weakened and disrupted online education, need to be reevaluated to reach everyone without interruptions or suddenly going off. Second, even though the shift to online learning was rushed schools’ administration should have taken the time to better equip, train, and provide support to their teachers. In addition, they should have implemented different ways for communicating and collaborating between teachers-parents and management. Finally, it is worth noting that the Ministry of Education should have provided the schools with electronic books and better plans or approaches to help them deal with distance learning.

Since this study was a purely quantitative study, by just utilizing a questionnaire as the method to collect the data, it’s suggested that future research could employ other data collection instruments like interviews and observations to collect more in-depth information regarding the teachers’ perceptions and attitudes to better understand the challenges that they encountered in online learning.

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