

Advantages and Challenges of eLearning Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic: Faculty and Student Perceptions in Saudi Education

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Abstract—Novelty and Topicality: The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the education sector, with eLearning transforming the global education system. **Research Purpose:** This study sheds light on how the English departments of King Khalid University overcame the pandemic's impact, with respect to the shift to online learning. **Motivation for the Study:** The findings of the present study are of great importance for transforming the education system, not only in Saudi Arabia but worldwide. The globalization of education will help the universities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia make borderless, cost-effective education available to the citizens of the world from the comforts of their homes. **Design and Methods:** The study seeks to identify the challenges and advantages of eLearning, based on the perceptions of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners and instructors. The data were collected through Google forms and analysed using various SPSS software tools. **Main findings:** The findings revealed that the advantages of eLearning outweigh the challenges faced by students. The advantages of teaching English online include flexibility of learning, constant availability of learning materials, time efficiency, and the upgrade of technical skills. The major challenges for students and instructors include a lack of in-person interaction and poor Internet connectivity. **Practical Implications:** Notably, the study findings can improve the efficacy of eLearning in the education field in general and Saudi English departments in particular. **Contribution:** The outcomes can help explore future possibilities for reforming the education sector, both within and outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Index Terms—COVID-19, eLearning, EFL, education, Saudi Arabia

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill by enforcing restrictions on mass gatherings, thereby impacting the education sector significantly. Learners and instructors worldwide were forced to stay at home and wait for educational institutions to implement eLearning systems. Although many universities had already adopted eLearning as a secondary mode of instruction, few had considered it as the primary mode before the pandemic. Given that the pandemic was likely to be long-term, educational institutions risked losing time on their academic calendars if they waited for in-person studies to resume. Therefore, the educational sector largely implemented eLearning, which, though advantageous, presented challenges for instructors and learners. The acceptance of this alternative to the traditional mode of teaching warrants the exploration of its challenges and advantages. Thus, this study ascertains the challenges and advantages of eLearning from the perspectives of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) instructors and learners at King Khalid University (KKU), Saudi Arabia.

According to Feeney (2001), eLearning has received scholarly attention only recently. As the integration of technology and higher education becomes an institutional imperative at universities across the world, adopting digital courses in a new eLearning environment has become an organisational goal and source of data for performance evaluation. Various studies have examined eLearning, especially during the pandemic, and many have specifically probed into its challenges and advantages. Radha et al. (2020) note that eLearning has become popular among students in all educational institutions, given the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One reason why eLearning posed challenges for instructors and learners was the sudden shift from the traditional to online mode of teaching, with little time for education policymakers to prepare for the change. Therefore, it is important to identify and overcome the challenges of eLearning to lay the foundation for transforming the global education system.

A. Motivation for the Study

The online mode of learning has opened a new window to the world of education. It will not be long before eLearning is the preferred mode of global education, especially for the tech-savvy new generation which is always glued to their screens. Considering the interests of modern learners and the growing impact of technology on the new

generation, the findings of the present study are significant and will play a pivotal role in the transformation of the education system, not only in Saudi Arabia but also worldwide.

The modern education system must be well prepared to fulfil the demands of learners who rely on technology for all information. The present study on the challenges and advantages of online learning will lay the foundation for the transformation of the education system from a 'local to global' system. Overcoming the challenges of eLearning and taking cues from its advantages to provide learners with the best online learning experience will equip Saudi universities with modern educational methods. Moreover, the findings of the present study will play a crucial role in disseminating quality education through online learning, which in turn will make it possible for the universities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to enroll global learners in its programs irrespective of geographical borders.

B. Advantages of eLearning

Previous studies have presented several advantages of implementing eLearning technologies for university education (Raspopovic et al., 2017).

- eLearning provides greater and more flexible access (Yang & Cornelious, 2005); it is a web-based system that makes information or knowledge available to students, irrespective of spatial and temporal limitations (Piccoli et al., 2001).
- eLearning can benefit employees and students by providing the option to take advantage of on-demand courses, anytime and anywhere (Burgess & Russell, 2003).
- According to Ely et al. (2009), courses can be tailored to suit the various needs of learners. Moreover, the eLearning environment helps them become independent, such that instructors no longer remain the sole source of knowledge; rather, they become guides and advisers (Joshua et al., 2016).
- As per Abou El-Seoud et al. (2014), eLearning is crucial to the existing educational setting; it is one of the topics most preferred by academics for its ability to transform the education system.
- Ali et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of eLearning for university students and found that it is affordable, easy to use, and saves time.
- According to Blinco et al. (2004), the success of eLearning depends on instructors and learners possessing adequate skills for using it.
- Al-Dosari (2011) probed the perceptions of the faculty and students regarding eLearning in English departments and concluded that the eLearning environment improved learning more than the traditional method.

Some advantages pertain to the system used for imparting eLearning. Of the various systems implemented, the Learning Management System (LMS) software has been widely used. Al-Handhali et al. (2020) highlight several benefits of LMS: user-friendliness, effective time management, easy courses, teacher and facility management, and report generation. Moreover, it provides timely reminders to users, such as for submission dates, answering questions, and test dates. Aydin and Tirkes (2010) also analysed the LMS and Moodle platforms and found them to be useful.

C. Challenges and Disadvantages of eLearning

Despite the benefits, studies have also noted various challenges of eLearning. Individual and behavioural characteristics, course design, and course facilitation influence the level of engagement in an online course (Purarjomandlangrudi et al., 2016). A further challenge is the lack of in-person interaction (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). Infande (2013) claims that online learning sometimes induces incomplete studies among students, given the convenience of the anonymity associated with online platforms. For example, if students face obstacles alone, they are more likely to give up. Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) further note that eLearning assessments are generally conducted online, limiting the ability to monitor possible illegitimate activities, such as cheating and plagiarism. Moreover, lack of motivation is linked with eLearning. Students lacking self-motivation and independence had lower success rates than their counterparts (Sarkar, 2012). Raspopovic et al. (2017) believe students can easily lose motivation and sight of their original objective. They rapidly become lost during the course and, consequently, may withdraw altogether. Therefore, the motivation for self-study and continuous dedication must be examined for the successful implementation of online learning. Some other eLearning challenges are:

- Accessing information is costly; it requires an Internet connection and computing devices (Noe, 2014), as well as experience, technical know-how, and time management skills (Educause, 2003).
- Donnelly and McAvinia (2012, p. 19) argued that 'many academics have [...] no training and little experience in the use of [information and communication technology (ICT)] as an educational tool'. Tarus et al. (2015) investigated the challenges of implementing eLearning in Kenyan public universities and noted ICT and eLearning as inconvenient.
- As per Salmon (2004, p. 6), 'training on the technological features of the [eLearning] system is only the first step to success, and the real challenge is training for changes to pedagogy'. Goyal (2012) studied the importance of eLearning in modern teaching and explained its advantages and disadvantages. He compared it to Instructor-Led Training (ILT) and suggested implementing eLearning, rather than the traditional mode of teaching. Moreover, the study noted the major drawbacks of ILT in institutions and suggested how eLearning could help overcome them.

To summarise, previous studies have extensively investigated the advantages and challenges of eLearning and suggested ways to overcome the latter and improve its effectiveness. The common challenges include lack of training in the use of various technical tools and new pedagogical methods, adoption of digital courses, and lack of motivation and interaction. The advantages include time efficiency, affordability, and supplementation of instructor-led training. Nonetheless, few studies have examined such advantages and challenges within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impact on education worldwide. Thus, this study contributes to the discussion by elucidating how the KKU English department addressed the pandemic's impact on the education system, after switching to eLearning.

D. Research Questions

This study focused on various aspects of eLearning during the COVID-19 pandemic, conducted on the Blackboard LMS platform, and the traditional mode of teaching prevalent before the pandemic. It answers the following questions:

1. What are the challenges and advantages of eLearning from teachers' perspectives, regarding listening, speaking, reading, and writing?
2. What are the challenges and advantages of eLearning from students' perspectives, regarding listening, speaking, reading, and writing?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Design

Case study findings are usually shaped by educational policies and teaching practices (Duff, 2008). Thus, considering the drastic changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the education field, it is vital to explore advantageous teaching practices, the challenges of online learning, and the possible solutions for making eLearning effective during exceptional circumstances, such as a pandemic.

The study employed a detailed questionnaire on in-person and online modes of learning, designed to explore instructors' and learners' perceptions of both modes. It broadly covered the following aspects:

1. Students' perceptions of the challenges and advantages of eLearning.
2. Instructors' perceptions of the challenges and advantages of eLearning.
3. A comparative study of EFL instructors' and students' perceptions of the challenges and advantages of eLearning.
4. Suggestions to overcome these challenges and make online education more effective.

B. Research Ethics

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they could take part in the study. Ethical approval was received from the university.

C. Data Collection

Data were collected using a Google-forms questionnaire survey in two phases. First, a pilot survey was conducted; the link to the form was sent to students enrolled in the English Programme at various KKU campuses, irrespective of gender. The pilot study questionnaire sought to elicit students' perceptions of the pandemic's impact on the education sector, and their manner of adapting to eLearning. Based on the responses, the questionnaire was updated with more specific questions on the challenges and advantages of eLearning. It was then sent to EFL instructors across KKU, to understand their perceptions of online teaching. The second phase questionnaire included sections on (a) demographic information, (b) overall experience with eLearning, and its challenges and advantages, and (c) students' and faculty members' perspectives of eLearning.

Random sampling was the most suitable method for obtaining a representative sample (Gay et al., 2008). Thus, responses were collected randomly from English departments across KKU. Since the researchers were also instructors of some of the online courses, they were well placed to make reliable inferences about student and faculty member perceptions.

D. Data Analysis

Overall, 38 students and 30 instructors submitted their responses. The questionnaire included open-ended questions for qualitative analysis and statements for quantitative analysis, which were all scored on Likert scales. Descriptive statistics were analysed using the SPSS statistical package. These included numerical, relative, average, and standard deviation distributions for measuring dispersion. The statistical results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses were then correlated. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the perceptions of teachers and students was also conducted to improve the reliability of the findings.

The Cronbach's alpha test was employed to assess the reliability and validity of the research. The results showed that all study axes were stable, with the internal consistency of all dimensions reaching 0.86. Almost all the items yielded a ratio close to 1. The closer the Cronbach's alpha value is to 1, the more stable the internal consistency of the study tool (Sekaran, 2003).

III. RESULTS

Table 1 presents a statistical analysis of the major challenges faced by students, according to faculty members. These challenges are as follows:

- Internet connectivity: 40% of the faculty members do not consider it an issue, 30% are neutral, and 30% agree that it is a problem.
- Faculty missing face-to-face interactions: 70% of the faculty members either agree or strongly agree, 3.3% disagree, and 26.7% are neutral.
- Students' lack of motivation for studying at home: 60% of the faculty members either agree or strongly agree, 26.6% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 13.3% are neutral.
- Students missing in-class interactions: 66.6% of the faculty members either agree or strongly agree, 16.6% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 20% are neutral.
- Students are unable to easily understand course content in the eLearning mode: 33.4% of the faculty members either agree or strongly agree, 53.4% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 13.3% are neutral.
- eLearning is comparatively more passive than face-to-face learning: 40% of the faculty members either agree or strongly agree, 23% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 36.7% are neutral.
- Students are less enthusiastic about attending online lectures: 36.6% of the faculty members either agree or strongly agree, 36.7% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 26.7% are neutral.

In summary, students are less motivated for eLearning, both students and faculty members miss in-class and face-to-face interactions, and eLearning is passive. According to most faculty members, internet connectivity is not a challenge.

Overall, items 1.8–1.10 indicate that technical issues do not affect online teaching. However, an equal proportion of faculty members both agree and disagree that they face technical issues, while 60% either disagree or strongly disagree that technical issues hamper the teaching process. Moreover, 40% of faculty members either disagree or strongly disagree with students not having good devices to attend online classes, 26.6% of faculty members either agree or strongly agree that they face technical problems, 23.3% either agree or strongly agree that technical problems on Blackboard hamper teaching, and 26.6% either agree or strongly agree to students not having good devices.

The standard deviation ranges from the lowest (0.949) for missing face-to-face interactions with students, with a significance of 83%, to the highest (1.235) for students not understanding the content easily, with a significance of 54%. The overall result shows a standard deviation of 1.132 from a mean of 3.22, with a significance of 65%.

TABLE 1
MAJOR CHALLENGES TO eLEARNING—INSTRUCTORS' PERSPECTIVES

		Valid					Mean	Std. Deviation	Importance	
Items		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree				
1.1	Students have poor Internet connectivity at home	Frequency	3	9	9	5	4	2.9	1.201	58%
		Percentage	10	30	30	16.7	13.3			
1.2	I miss face-to-face interaction with students	Frequency	0	1	8	6	15	4.17	.949	83%
		Percentage	0	3.3	26.7	20	50			
1.3	Students don't feel motivated when they study at home	Frequency	1	7	4	11	7	3.53	1.195	71%
		Percentage	3.3	23.3	13.3	36.7	23.3			
1.4	I miss in-class interaction	Frequency	1	2	6	7	13	3.93	1.172	79%
		Percentage	3.3	6.7	20	23.3	43.4			
1.5	Students can't understand the content easily in the eLearning mode	Frequency	5	11	4	8	2	2.70	1.235	54%
		Percentage	16.7	36.7	13.3	26.7	6.7			
1.6	eLearning is more passive than face-to-face learning	Frequency	1	6	11	7	5	3.3	1.088	66%
		Percentage	3.3	20	36.7	23.3	16.7			
1.7	I face technical problems while using Blackboard	Frequency	6	9	7	7	1	2.6	1.162	52%
		Percentage	20	30	23.3	23.3	3.3			
1.8	Technical problems on Blackboard take time to resolve, which hampers my teaching	Frequency	5	13	5	6	1	2.5	1.106	50%
		Percentage	16.7	43.3	16.7	20.0	3.3			
1.9	Students have less enthusiasm to attend my online lectures	Frequency	2	9	8	7	4	3.7	1.172	74%
		Percentage	6.7	30.0	26.7	23.3	13.3			
1.10	Students don't have a good device to attend my online lectures	Frequency	2	10	10	6	2	2.9	1.041	58%
		Percentage	6.7	33.3	33.3	20	6.7			
Overall mean							3.22	1.132	65%	

Table 2 shows instructors' perspectives of the major advantages of eLearning.

In summary, Table 2 indicates that most faculty members either agree or strongly agree with students being able to learn at their own pace, listen to the recorded lecture any time and as many times as they want, and access study materials. Moreover, they agreed that eLearning saves time for students, and upgrades the technical skills of both students and instructors.

The standard deviation ranges from the lowest (0.889) for the upgrade of students' technical skills, with a significance of 80%, to the highest (1.165) for students learning at their own pace, with a significance of 72%. The overall result shows a standard deviation of 1.003 from a mean of 4, with a significance of 80%.

TABLE 2
MAJOR ADVANTAGES OF ELEARNING—INSTRUCTORS' PERSPECTIVES

Major Advantages of Learning – Instructors' Perspectives										
	Items		Valid					Mean	Standard Deviation	Importance
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree			
2.1	Students can learn at their own pace	Frequency	2	3	8	10	7	3.6	1.165	72%
		Percentage	6.7	10	26.7	33.3	23.3			
2.2	Students can listen to the recorded lecture any time and as many times as they want	Frequency	1	0	5	13	11	4.1	.922	82%
		Percentage	3.3	0.0	16.7	43.3	36.7			
2.3	Students have easy access to all study materials	Frequency	1	0	4	10	15	4.3	0.944	86%
		Percentage	3.3	0.0	13.3	33.3	50			
2.4	It saves students' time	Frequency	1	4	4	11	10	3.8	1.147	76%
		Percentage	3.3	13.3	13.3	36.7	33.3			
2.5	Students' technical skills were upgraded	Frequency	1	0	5	15	9	4.0	0.889	80%
		Percentage	3.3	0.0	7.3	50	30			
2.6	My technical skills as an instructor were upgraded	Frequency	1	0	5	11	13	4.2	0.949	84%
		Percentage	3.3	0.0	16.7	36.7	43.3			
Overall mean							4.0	1.003	80%	

Table 3 shows students' perspectives of the major challenges of eLearning. According to items 3.1–3.6, the major challenges that students face can be summarized as follows:

- Internet connectivity being an issue: 18.4% of students disagree, 47.4% are neutral, and 34.3% agree.
- Missing face-to-face interactions: 42.1% of students either agree or strongly agree, 18.4% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 39.5% are neutral.
- Missing peer-to-peer interactions: 23.7% of students either agree or strongly agree, 23.7% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 52.6% are neutral.
- Lack of motivation to stay at home: 23.7% of students either agree or strongly agree, 33.6% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 44.7% are neutral.
- Easy understanding of eLearning content: 15.8% of the students agree, 44.7% either disagree or strongly disagree, and 39.5% are neutral.
- eLearning being more passive than face-to-face learning: 15.8% of the students either agree or strongly agree, 47.4% disagree or strongly disagree, and 36.8% are neutral.

Overall, items 3.7–3.9 indicate that technical issues do not affect the online mode of teaching, and 36.9% of the students either agree or strongly agree that they face technical problems using Blackboard, and 34.2% either disagree or strongly disagree. Meanwhile, 21.1% either agree or strongly agree that Blackboard issues take time to resolve, and 23.7% either disagree or strongly disagree. However, 55.3% are neutral, meaning that they may or may not face technical problems. Moreover, 60.5% either disagree or strongly disagree that they do not have devices to attend online classes, 13.1% either agree or strongly agree, and 26.3% are neutral.

The standard deviation ranges from the lowest (0.898) for face-to-face interaction, with a significance of 78%, to the highest (1.149) for eLearning being more passive than face-to-face teaching, with a significance of 53%. The overall result shows a standard deviation of 1.132 from a mean of 3.89, with a significance of 78%. The standard deviation indicates that the results are within the range of acceptability.

In summary, students miss in-class and face-to-face interactions, but not peer-to-peer interactions. Moreover, most of them do not find eLearning passive. Internet connectivity is a challenge for some students, but most had a neutral opinion, indicating that connectivity might or might not be an issue. Most students either disagree or are neutral about being less motivated for eLearning. The same holds true for not understanding content during online teaching, with most students either disagreeing or being neutral. Moreover, technical issues are not a hurdle for them.

TABLE 3
MAJOR CHALLENGES TO eLEARNING—STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

			Major Challenges to Learning - Students' Perspectives								
Items				Valid					Mean	Std. Deviation	Importance
				Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree			
3.1	I have poor Internet connectivity at home	Frequency	3	4	18	8	5	3.86	0.945	77%	
		Percentage	7.9	10.5	47.4	21.1	13.2				
3.2	I miss face-to-face interaction with instructors	Frequency	3	4	15	7	9	3.91	0.898	78%	
		Percentage	7.9	10.5	39.5	18.4	23.7				
3.3	I don't feel motivated when I study at home	Frequency	4	8	17	4	5	2.95	1.138	59%	
		Percentage	10.5	21.1	44.7	10.5	13.2				
3.4	I miss peer interaction	Frequency	4	5	20	4	5	3.76	1.102	75%	
		Percentage	10.5	13.2	52.6	10.5	13.2				
3.5	I can't understand the content easily in the eLearning mode	Frequency	7	10	15	4	2	2.58	1.081	52%	
		Percentage	18.4	26.3	39.5	10.5	5.3				
3.6	eLearning is more passive than face-to-face learning	Frequency	6	12	14	2	4	2.63	1.149	53%	
		Percentage	15.8	31.6	36.8	5.3	10.5				
3.7	I face technical problems while using Blackboard	Frequency	3	10	11	9	5	3.78	.998	76%	
		Percentage	7.9	26.3	28.9	23.7	13.2				
3.8	Technical problems on Blackboard take time to resolve which hampers my learning	Frequency	4	5	21	3	5	3.0	1.090	60%	
		Percentage	10.5	13.2	55.3	7.9	13.2				
3.9	I don't have a good device to attend my online lectures	Frequency	12	11	10	1	4	2.32	1.254	46%	
		Percentage	31.6	28.9	26.3	2.6	10.5				
Overall mean							3.89	1.132	78%		

Table 4 presents students' perspectives on the major advantages of eLearning.

The standard deviation ranges from the lowest (0.991) for the upgrade of students' technical skills, with a significance of 77%, to the highest (1.131) for easy access to study materials, with a significance of 73%. The overall result shows a standard deviation of 1.289 from the mean of 3.81, with a significance of 76%.

Table 4 indicates that most students either agree or strongly agree with being able to learn at their own pace, listen to the recorded lecture any time and as many times as they want, access all study materials, save time, and upgrade their technical skills.

TABLE 4
MAJOR ADVANTAGES OF ELEARNING—STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

			Valid					Mean	Std. Deviation	Importance
Items			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree			
4.1	I can learn at my own pace	Frequency	2	3	9	13	11	3.74	1.131	75%
		Percentage	5.3	7.9	23.7	34.2	28.9			
4.2	I can listen to the recorded lecture any time and as many times as I want	Frequency	1	1	8	12	16	4.08	0.997	82%
		Percentage	2.6	2.6	21.1	31.6	42.1			
4.3	I have easy access to all study materials	Frequency	3	0	14	12	9	3.63	1.101	73%
		Percentage	7.9	0.0	36.8	31.6	23.7			
4.4	It saves my time	Frequency	4	0	11	111	2	3.71	1.228	74%
		Percentage	10.5	0.0	28.9	28.9	31.6			
4.5	My technical skills were upgraded	Frequency	1	0	15	9	13	3.87	0.991	77%
		Percentage	2.6	0.0	39.5	23.7	34.2			
Overall mean								3.81	1.289	76%

Table 5 shows an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the main challenges and problems faced by teachers during eLearning.

For the main challenges faced by instructors, there is a statistically significant relationship at an alpha level ($\alpha = 0.05$, where $F = 5.601$ is statistically significant, and $P - \text{value} = 0.004 < 0.05$). Thus, there are statistically significant differences across the four skills, with teaching writing skills being comparatively more challenging. For the main advantages, there is a statistically insignificant relationship at an alpha level ($\alpha = 0.05$, where $F = 1.564$ and $P - \text{value} = 0.222 > 0.05$).

TABLE 5
MAJOR CHALLENGES AND ADVANTAGES OF ELEARNING FROM INSTRUCTORS' PERSPECTIVES—ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Major challenges	Between Groups	532.899	3	177.633	5.601	.004
	Within Groups	824.567	26	31.714		
	Total	1357.467	29			
Major advantage	Between Groups	32.902	3	10.967	1.564	.222
	Within Groups	182.298	26	7.011		
	Total	215.200	29			

Table 6 shows a comparison of the main challenges and problems faced by students during eLearning.

For the main challenges faced by students, there is a statistically significant relationship at an alpha level ($\alpha = 0.05$, where $F = 3.726$ and the level of statistical significance $P - \text{value} = 0.020 < 0.05$). There are statistically significant differences across the four skills, with writing skills being most favoured. For the main advantages too, there is a statistically significant relationship at an alpha level ($\alpha = 0.05$, where $F = 4.504$ and the level of statistical significance $P - \text{value} = 0.009 < 0.05$); i.e., there are statistically significant differences across the four skills with reading skills being the most favoured.

TABLE 6
MAJOR CHALLENGES AND ADVANTAGES OF ELEARNING FROM LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES—ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Major Challenges	Between Groups	390.813	3	130.271	3.726	.020
	Within Groups	1188.688	34	34.961		
	Total	1579.500	37			
Major Advantage	Between Groups	365.842	3	121.947	4.504	.009
	Within Groups	920.500	34	27.074		
	Total	1286.342	37			

Findings from Instructors' Perspective

Challenges

- Students are less motivated in the eLearning mode.
- Students and faculty members miss in-class and face-to-face interactions.
- eLearning is passive.

- Internet connectivity is not a challenge, as per most faculty members.
- Writing skill poses major challenges.

Advantages

- Students can learn at their own pace.
- Students can listen to the recorded lectures any time and as many times as they want.
- Students have access to all the study materials.
- eLearning saves time for students.
- Students' and instructors' technical skills were upgraded.
- There are major advantages for reading.

Findings from Students' Perspective

Challenges

- Students miss face-to-face interactions with instructors.
- They struggle with their Internet connection.
- Though many students reported facing technical problems, it cannot be considered a challenge as most agreed that these problems did not take long to resolve, indicating that it did not hamper their learning process.
- Writing skill poses major challenges.

Advantages

- Students can learn at their own pace.
- They can listen to the recorded lectures any time and as many times as they want.
- They have access to all the study materials.
- eLearning saves time for students.
- Students' technical skills are upgraded.
- There are major advantages for reading.

Comparisons Between Both Perspectives

The findings show that instructors posited students as being less motivated for eLearning; however, this was not validated through the statistical analysis of students. Both instructors and students agreed that they missed face-to-face interactions. While students faced Internet issues, it cannot be considered a challenge, as the recorded lectures were constantly available. Technical issues constituted another challenge faced by some, but most participants also agreed that Blackboard issues did not take much time to resolve. Regarding the advantages of eLearning, both students and instructors stated that it gave students greater flexibility for learning, made learning materials easily accessible, and upgraded their technical skills. In addition, instructors and learners found that it presented challenges for both teaching and learning writing skills, while benefitting reading skills.

IV. DISCUSSION

The pandemic made it imperative that educational institutions implement online teaching and learning. However, addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic introduced various possibilities for teaching and learning methods. The implementation of online education during the pandemic was a learning experience for instructors and learners both within and outside Saudi Arabia. This study sheds light on perceptions of both instructors and learners, from the KKU English Department, and ascertains the advantages and challenges of eLearning for teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. Apart from linguistic, literature, and translation courses, undergraduate students study courses on listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) skills in the first two years of the programme. This is when they require more intensive training for learning these skills, as they come from different schools where English is not the primary language of instruction.

Therefore, it is crucial to consider the challenges and advantages faced by learners and instructors in learning LSRW skills, before and after the pandemic. The present study helps researchers understand these challenges and advantages, in comparison with those of the traditional mode of learning.

The statistical analysis (Figure 1) indicates the contrasts between the learners' and instructors' perspectives of the advantages and challenges of learning LSRW skills. Overall, when these challenges and advantages are correlated, it is found that the online mode presents advantages for reading and challenges for writing. Writing requires greater typing speed and knowledge of other technical aspects.

Moreover, both students and instructors agree that the advantages of eLearning include more flexibility in learning, constant availability of learning materials, and the upgrade of technical skills. Previous studies (Yang & Cornelious, 2005) had found that eLearning provides more flexible access as a web-based system that makes information available to students, regardless of spatial and temporal time limitations (Piccoli et al., 2001). Furthermore, Ali et al. (2018) argue that eLearning has the advantage of being time efficient, and is supported by students for its ease of use, time-saving quality, and affordability. Learners and instructors stated that their technical skills were upgraded, a result that contrasts with prior studies, which found the lack of technical skills to be a challenge.

Educause (2003), a non-profit that uses information technology to advance higher education, recommends the following for enhancing technical skills: computer experience, computer ownership, ability to resolve technical

problems, and time management. Furthermore, lack of motivation is a concern for instructors. Accordingly, Raspopovic et al. (2017) found that students can lack motivation and easily lose sight of their original objective. However, this could not be verified by the students' perspectives, as they did not consider lack of motivation to be a disadvantage. Though both students and instructors face challenges, the advantages of the online mode outweigh the challenges. Considering advantages like flexible learning and availability of content, eLearning can revolutionise the field of education. Further research is required to ascertain the challenges to eLearning, especially regarding teaching and learning LSRW skills, by building upon the finding that writing poses a challenge in eLearning.

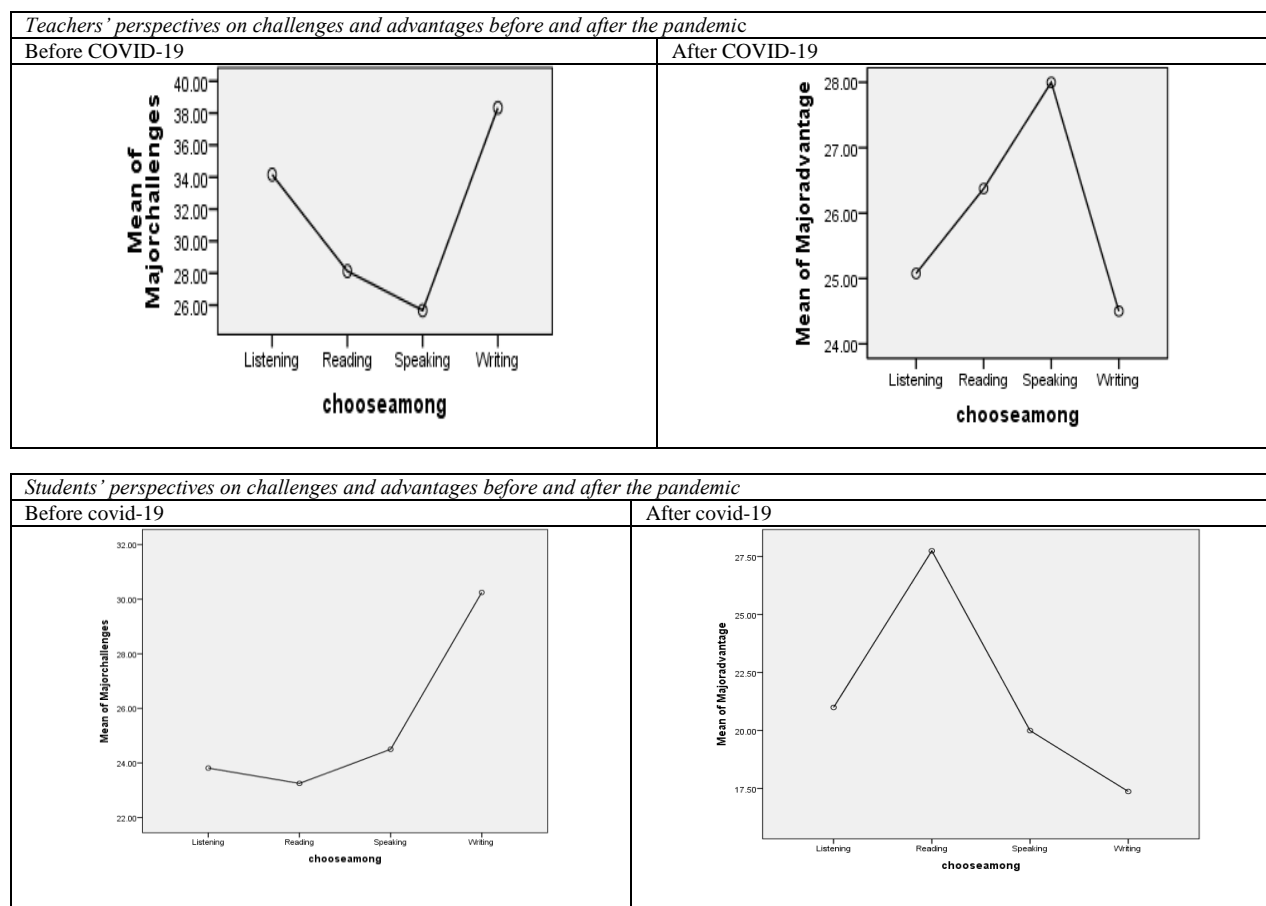


Figure 1 Teachers' and Learners' Perspectives of the Challenges and Advantages, Before and After the Pandemic

V. CONCLUSION

The advantages of eLearning outweigh the challenges faced by students. The major challenges faced by both students and instructors include the lack of in-person interaction and poor internet connectivity. To fill this void created by the lack of in-person interactions, audio and video can be used during lectures, with greater emphasis on interacting with students using various teaching methods and educational tools. Future studies can explore ways of increasing teacher-student and peer interaction in eLearning, and improving the teaching and learning of LSRW skills.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

As the number of study participants was limited, the sample does not accurately represent the EFL community of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the future, an in-depth study can be conducted across Saudi Arabia to ascertain the needs of EFL learners, such that a comprehensive education plan can be prepared to teach English online. Detailed research can help improve the online teaching of LSRW skills to overcome the challenges faced by learners and instructors in eLearning.

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