

Conflicting Student Viewpoints about Online EFL Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Focus on Effective Learning and Well-being

Laura Naka¹

¹ Department of Education, University “Fehmi Agani” Gjakova, 50000, Kosovo

Correspondence: Laura Naka, Department of Education, University “Fehmi Agani” in Gjakova, 50000, Kosovo.

Received: December 16, 2022

Accepted: January 17, 2023

Online Published: January 27, 2023

doi:10.5430/wjel.v13n2p111

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n2p111>

Abstract

Due to the total shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, worldwide countries regardless of their development shifted instruction to the online learning method. This study aims to investigate the views of students in undergraduate studies about the impact of online (EFL) English foreign language learning on educational issues and well-being. Through questionnaires and focus group discussions, participants revealed their real sensitivities and views about online EFL learning, thus both quantitative and qualitative research methods are implemented in the present study. Their experiences showed the advantages that supported their needs during a certain period such as the pandemic, but also the challenges they went through during that time. The study presents social and educational implications that are directly related to technology and environmental conditions during online learning that affected the well-being of students. Results showed that shifting to online classes uncovered contradictory preferences among students regarding online learning and teaching. Finally, this study provides an overview, that in case the implementation of online or hybrid learning is requested again in the future, the necessary preparations that meet the educational and social needs of the students should be taken into account.

Keywords: online learning, EFL, digital tools, learning efficiency, well-being

1. Introduction

Online learning is becoming an increasingly important topic in the implementation of the educational process in Higher Education Institutions (HEI), along with the use of technological devices as the main part of its teaching methodology implementation. The students, but also the academic staff of HEI, were found unprepared to shift from physical to online classes. This is not only due to the fact that it was not announced in advance but also due to the fact that in the public universities in Kosovo, until the period of the pandemic, the teaching and learning process was mainly conducted in classrooms. Even though many universities had the technical support necessary to adopt online learning as an alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic, most students were not prepared for it and did not freely choose it (Curelaru et al., 2022).

Although a significant number of students claimed to feel comfortable during the online learning process, many others felt the lack of physical classes and other elements offered by classroom teaching. Learning English as a foreign language has its own specifics that must be taken into account, such as discussions, listening and speaking skills, which are prohibited for students when they are not physically in the classroom. Many benefits of online learning were discussed which were mainly self-learning, low cost, comfort, and flexibility. On the other hand, COVID-19 has in a way shaped students in the sense that it has had a substantial impact on the mental health and well-being not only of students but also of the general population as a whole. In this regard, Kebritchi et al. (2017) suggest, higher education institutions need to provide professional development for instructors, training for learners, and technical support for content development (p.4). Electronic learning (E-learning) contains several other models, all of which are based on modern technology. Online learning, blended and hybrid learning are learning processes that mainly depend on computers and the internet. However, there is a difference between the three of them. Online learning opens the doors for all those who want to get involved in the learning/teaching process through internet access regardless of their place and origin. Blended learning is physical students' presence in the classroom, where the teacher provides combined physical activities in the classroom and activities by integrating digital technologies. Whereas hybrid learning is teaching students both in the classroom and through online access, and the teacher provides the same activities and lectures that are taught remotely and in person for both groups of students.

Eventually, these approaches are based on technological issues and need the ability to use them. Especially in higher education, technology became a trend due to the fact that many initiatives are being taken to meet the needs of students and to increase the quality of learning through technology. Moreover, many higher education institutions have included online learning in their curricula. Consequently, the English language is an important and inevitable factor in using technology. Online learning as a pedagogical practice in education took on greater proportions as a result of the learning and teaching process during the pandemic, hopefully, we are getting through it. A lot of research was done during and after this period about online learning in order to understand the students' perceptions and views and if it was a suitable method for them. However, as a result of the pandemic and emergencies caused by this situation in the education field,

it is predicted that online, specifically hybrid learning may become a mandatory teaching method in the near future, and in some countries, it is even more applicable now. It is said that for a long time people will live with the virus, with no intention of prejudice. Therefore, many researchers have investigated learners' views of online learning, and in addition to many advantages, dissatisfaction has been noticed by students. Singh et al. (2021) consider it extremely important to focus on the capacity building of faculty so they become more familiar with online learning approaches, e-Learning tools, and the usage of innovative technology to facilitate teaching and learning (p.164).

Therefore, we expect the results of this study to identify the educational, economic, social, and emotional needs of students in order to contribute together as a society of a developing country, together with the educators and the academic staff, to fulfil the needs of students for the use and possession of technological equipment if online learning becomes mandatory in the future.

2. Literature Review

Online teaching/learning is not a new method and is unheard of by the community that is involved in the educational field. For more, we became more familiar with this teaching/learning method when the COVID-19 virus appeared and there was an alert for a pandemic situation in the whole world. As Pokhrel and Chhetri (2022) argue "Online learning, distance, and continuing education have become a panacea for this unprecedented global pandemic, despite the challenges posed to both educators and the learners" (p.134). Some of the challenges mentioned in the study of Okyere et al. (2022) included ineffective tutorial sessions, lack of learning devices, unstable internet service, inadequate learning environment, socio-cultural practices, feeling of loneliness, anxiety, and stress, and difficulties accessing online platforms and acquiring practical skills (p.21).

Although not all countries have practiced distance learning earlier, which is carried out through the Internet and online methods, still it is a methodology that has been admired and is under development by many educational institutions around the world. However, online teaching and learning are being applied as a method of a new era that has mainly to do with a different approach from the traditional teaching and learning methodology. Actually, there are methods implemented within the same educational issues but in addition to literature and materials, there are technological tools involved.

2.1 The Impact of Online Learning Methods in the Development of Education

Within the recent 10 years, the introduction of new technological innovations filled the gap between traditional face-to-face learning and distributed learning environments (Guzer & Caner, 2014). Learning through the Internet is known by several different names, which actually lead us to approximate learning methodologies such as distance learning, e-learning, online learning, blended learning, or hybrid learning. Recently, especially since the beginning of the pandemic, online learning has become more popular that seems to be inheriting blended and hybrid learning. E-learning is defined as using online platform technologies and the Internet to enhance learning and provide users with access to online services and services (Ehlers and Pawlowski, 2006). Blended or hybrid learning, which combines face-to-face and online learning, is the most promising approach for increasing access to higher education and students' learning outcomes (Means et al., 2010). Online education turns education to be student-centred, where students take part in the learning process, and teachers work as supervisors and guides for students (Al-Salman et al., 2021). Teachers provide additional materials and different activities for students through modern technology. This has raised the quality of learning and brought the student to the centre. As well, online education platforms are designed to share information and coordinate class activities (Martín-Blas and Serrano-Fernández, 2009). According to Thorne (2003) blended learning "represents an opportunity to integrate the innovative and technological advances offered by online learning with the interaction and participation offered in the best of traditional learning" (p.2).

As (Ashraf et al., 2021) emphasize, although BL has existed for over a decade, there are still several challenges associated with it. For instance, the teachers' and students' individual differences, such as their behaviours and attitudes, might impact their adoption of BL, (p.1525). According to Garrison and Kanuka (2004) "blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences" (p.96). They have a lot discussed the potential of blended learning in higher education by considering problems faced in higher education (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). In the study conducted by Smyth et al. (2012) technological problems such as poor internet connectivity were reported (p.467). In the 21st century, with the rapid development of technology and the speed of access to information, distance education activities have been rapidly adopted all over the world, and the use of hybrid education applications that combine traditional education with distance education has come to the fore in the post-pandemic period (Kazu, & Yalcin, 2022).

Hybrid learning provides strong effects of both face-to-face and online education by gathering them in educational settings. On the other hand, implementing synchronous hybrid learning poses challenges for students and instructors (Gleason & Greenhow, 2017). A series of innovative learning methods and courses using educational technologies and theories have also been used to enhance the effectiveness of student learning (Chang, Lee, Tang & Hwang, 2021).

Based on previous studies, it was understood that hybrid learning had a large effect on the academic achievement of the students. The result of the study conducted by Erliza and Septianingsih (2022) confirmed that students had the same positive opinions toward the method and the way of teaching provided by the lecturer during hybrid learning (p.238). For this reason, the use of hybrid learning in educational environments should be encouraged and the necessary infrastructure and facilities should be provided. Mahmud (2018) reported that hybrid learning affected academic achievement positively. Hwang et al., (2020) reached that the students educated with hybrid learning exhibited higher performance in science rather than the ones with traditional learning.

2.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how was online learning perceived by undergraduate students and to derive from the research their perceptions about the impact of online learning on the educational process and on their well-being. Also, from the present research, we can get an overview of the possibilities in the future, and how to help students to have the most suitable conditions to attend online classes. Therefore, the following research questions were developed:

- (1) What are students’ perceptions of online learning?
- (2) How has online learning affected the social well-being of students during the pandemic period?
- (3) What are the benefits and side effects of online learning in the educational process?

3. Research Methodology

This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Interpretative analysis of the qualitative research method aims to investigate in depth the participants’ view on online learning which data are taken from the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire and from focus group interviews with students. The quantitative method was carried out through the SPSS program to analyse the data.

3.1 Participants and Instruments

The data were obtained from the study respondents who are students of the Department of Education and Department of Philology at the University "Fehmi Agani" in Gjakova (UFAGJ), Kosovo. The respondents of the study are 127 undergraduate students to whom the questionnaire was delivered. While, 12 students from the Department of Education, and 10 students from the Department of Philology voluntarily responded to the invitation to participate in the focus group interviews. All students have the English foreign language as a compulsory course in the study curriculum, and mainly their concerns are focused on the English language class. As instruments, the study used both a questionnaire and two semi-structured focus group interviews for discussions in order to get in-depth and provide data from the answers gained by respondents. At the results session, the data extracted from the discussions with the focus group interview participants, to ensure their anonymity, were presented with initials, such as 12 participants from the Department of Education (DE1 - DE12) and 10 participants from the Department of Philology (DPh1 – DPh10). Participants represented different gender and different departments in the UFAGJ, as presented in the table below.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants (N= 127)

Gender	Female	99	78%
	Male	28	22%
		127	100%
Department of ...	Education	57	44.9%
	Philology	70	55.1%
		127	100%

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

First, pre-piloted questionnaire questions presented to respondents were used to design the questionnaire. Distributed questionnaires were collected and completed by respondents over 7 working days. The data were divided into two components, specifically, to get the respondents’ positive and negative perceptions of educational perspective and well-being. This categorization was done according to the questions, which were considered valid to get the right data. While the data from the focus group interviews were based on pre-determined questions. In order to extract the data as effectively as possible without interrupting the discussion during the focus group interviews, the author was helped by an assistant moderator who took the notes carefully. Written notes were considered sufficient to get the views of the respondents.

Therefore, immediately after the focus group interviews, the data were collected. Some of the most important views that occurred during the focus group interviews have been taken into consideration and presented and summarized in the findings. The data of the questionnaires were analysed through the statistical platform SPSS to derive the results. Mean and standard deviation are presented in tables divided into positive and negative views on education and well-being. On the other hand, the data that were extracted from the interviews in the form of descriptive analysis are summarized in the findings section. Both methods of the study have also presented the other side of the findings, taking into account that the participants expressed themselves more freely and discussed in a deeper way.

4. Findings

The pre-defined questions for the questionnaire were designed to obtain respondents' views on the online learning they underwent during the pandemic period. To extract data on how online learning affected the educational process and the well-being of students during this period, the questions were divided according to these two categories, while the data were collected based on the positive and negative perceptions of the respondents for these two categories. As shown in the following tables, there are selected questions to present positive and negative respondents’ opinions according to educational and well-being issues that online learning entails.

Table 2. Students' positive view on the educational perspective

Questions in appendix	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2	Online assignments are helpful in understanding the course content.	127	3.17	1.12
4	The connection between what I do online and in the classroom is clear.	127	3.40	.99
10	I would recommend taking an online course to a friend.	127	3.30	.96
Valid N		127		

The largest number of participants, exactly 40.2 % of them, declared that the tasks they received during the online lesson were encouraging to understand the content of the course. However, the opinions are spread out as 28.3% of them do not agree and 16.5% have no opinion. The connection between online and physical learning is significant, as 52% of respondents agree while 24.4% disagree that they receive the same knowledge of a respective module both during online and physical learning. However, the willingness of the students to recommend online learning to others is not enough, as it has been observed that almost 40% of them do not have an opinion on this question.

Table 3. Students' positive view on well-being perspective

Questions in appendix	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	I like online classes better because it is less expensive.	127	3.41	1.11
7	I don't have any difficulty managing my time for the online part of the course.	127	3.33	1.09
8	I prefer online classes rather than physical classes because I am sometimes ashamed to speak in front of others.	127	3.06	1.24
13	I can control the pace of my own learning.	127	3.90	.86
Valid N		127		

From the perspective of well-being, respectively of expenses, the opinions of the students are different considering that their largest percentage is distributed in the option I agree with 31.5%, while about the options, I disagree and have no opinion, affirmed for each by about 23% of the respondents. The same disproportion is also observed in the responses regarding time management and planning during online learning, as well as the students' preference for online learning in relation to physical learning. Meanwhile, the students have mainly declared they can control their own pace during online learning.

Table 4. Students' negative view on the educational perspective

Questions in appendix	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The online course materials are difficult to follow.	127	3.59	.96
3	The time I spent online would be better spent in class.	127	3.81	1.10
9	I am unable to share ideas with other students on a regular basis.	127	3.05	1.06
11	I would take another course that incorporates blackboard.	127	3.40	.90
Valid N		127		

Questions in the table above and below bring out the results of the respondents who express their negative views regarding the educational issue and their well-being. About 74% of the students think that online time would be better spent in class (45.7% agree and 28.3 % strongly agree). Regarding cooperation, students would better share ideas in the classroom and if the students were given the chance to choose between online and physical learning, about 42% would choose the course which is attended physically in the classroom

Table 5. Students' negative view on well-being perspective

Questions in appendix	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
5	I find participating in the online discussion useless for my learning.	127	3.05	1.20
12	I wouldn't like to take online classes again because of the noise in my home.	127	3.33	1.25
14	I can't cooperate with other students when we have group projects in online courses.	127	3.46	1.16
15	I find myself more motivated and I improve my social skills in class.	127	3.85	.95
Valid N		127		

Even though the largest percentage of respondents agree that online discussions during the lesson are not useful and that the noise at home does not provide adequate comfort to have the effect of the online lesson, there is a considerable number of participants who give their opinions scattered in other options. Almost half of the respondents agree that they cannot cooperate with each other when they have projects that require group work, while 81 % agree and strongly agree they are more motivated and feel sociable in the classroom.

4.1 Open-ended Question Findings in the Questionnaire

Not all participants answered the open-ended question in the questionnaire, however, sufficient responses were provided, which are presented in table 6.

Question: Give a brief statement that shares your opinion about online learning. Your responses will be listed as thoughts on the effectiveness and challenges of online learning!

Table 6. Effects and challenges of online learning

Effective	
Department of Education	Department of Philology
Flexible studying hours.	It was a new experience and we learned differently from the way we learned in class. I found it interesting.
I was not afraid that I would miss the bus.	I didn't worry about waking up very early and rushing to class. Also, what to wear.
The good thing about online learning is that I developed my skills in using technology.	I liked it when we were allowed to individually refer to the teacher and provide the necessary information. They better considered our demands.
During the pandemic, as long as the lectures were online, I didn't have to pay for the dormitory.	I felt safe at home against the virus. I ate healthy, homemade food, I consumed endless juices and tea, fruit and vegetables all the time, and I maintained my body hygiene regularly.
Online learning made it possible not to miss the academic year. Being an opportunity that created the continuation of education, online learning was welcomed by teachers, students, the community, and the whole of society.	Learning online and being at home offered everyone comfort and peace.
Savings for bus travel from the village to the university, also for a meal and coffee.	Everything happened without pressure and without effort considering that I woke up without having to rush and get ready.
Challenging	
Department of Education	Department of Philology
I missed the needed help from my classmates and the teacher.	Doing tasks without a schedule, as a result of staying up late and getting up late. Everything was done without a schedule and without planning.
I felt totally isolated.	Stressed by the pressure to use technology for things I have not experienced before.
Not wearing the right clothes and not looking good, gave me the sense that everything will not be the same as before.	My worst experience was when I had lectures at the same time as my sister and we have only one PC at home.
The concern when we heard the news about the loss of many lives caused by the virus. I lost the motivation to learn.	It was the most depressive time I ever experienced, without a friend, and no pub, no traveling.
I felt uncomfortable when I was asked to answer any activity and turn on the camera, I didn't like being the centre of attention, because of my poor English.	I was less interested in learning than I was in the classroom face-to-face with others.
During the online lesson during the pandemic, I was very sleepy, not at all active in class.	Not being able to discuss the lessons with my friends, made me completely de-motivated.
The inability to use technology for learning.	I missed of a lot the practical work in the laboratory.
The weak internet network has caused me a lot of stress because I was not able to attend all the lessons.	I had a problem finding a quiet place at home, with everyone, doing learning and working online.
I had my own PC and my room, but emotionally I was not feeling well at all.	The fear that my parents could be infected with the virus and the thought that I could lose them totally distracted me from studying.
Online learning limited us to many things that we usually do during physical learning.	There was no interaction among students nor between students and teachers.
I was often interrupted by family members and I felt uncomfortable.	There was rarely given feedback on our assignments.
I hope it never happens again. Learning is more effective in the classroom.	I lack working in groups and getting help from other classmates.
The schedule changed during the online lesson. The lessons we attended either too early or too late, were at inappropriate times.	Seriousness was lower during online learning. The reasoning for private and personal issues took us a lot of time. Like, I have to go out early, I'm not feeling well, I have a cough and I might disturb you, etc.

4.2 Findings of Focus Group Interview Discussions

Students from the Department of Education and the Department of Philology at UFAGJ were invited to participate in the focus groups on a voluntary basis. Focus groups were held separately by each department, with 12 students from the Department of Education and 10 students from the Department of Philology. The discussion was based on the semi-structured interview questions prepared in advance.

Respondent's statements are described in the original form quoted below, identifying them through codes, such as DE1.....DE12 responding students of the Department of Education, and DPh1.....DPh10 of the Department of Philology. Students' perceptions have been collected and then divided into two categories: Students' positive perceptions who support online learning and those who have concerns about or oppose online learning.

4.3 Positive Perceptions of Online Learning

"during online learning, we had no expenses, and it was a great help to my family as it saved the cost of the bus and a meal during the day" - DE7.

"I learned a lot of new information technology knowledge while learning online, it was a very good experience, at least for those with

whom we have discussed this issue”- DPh3.

“We learned how to learn differently from physical education, new methodologies and computer use in a more advanced way”- DPh6.

“It was a very good feeling, to wake up without rushing, prepare coffee and open the computer”- DPh9.

“Online learning during the pandemic was a very good experience. I felt comfortable, staying at home without the stress that I will miss the bus and classes” – DE11.

“I preferred being in class without being exposed and talking freely without a camera. When I'm in class, I rarely have the courage to speak” – DE1.

“I learned new things from technology during the online course. Something that helped us a lot was the manual that the IT office sent us on the first day, and we receive instructions on how to enter online classes. Therefore, for every difficulty we had, we referred to the manual” - DPh6.

“During the online lesson, I liked the way we were able to communicate together through the Internet, even after the teacher left the online class. Everyone commented on their own notes and we had things clearer by discussing them together” – DE5.

“Online learning is a time saver for me, as I think I had more time to learn. I never got tired of the road, so I used that time to study” – DPh2.

“Online learning has lower costs. We have everything we need at home, water, coffee, food, and no bus costs, but, still, I prefer face-to-face learning” – DE4.

“Had no need for make-up and choose clothing for school” – DPh3.

“Best experience, when I open the laptop, coffee in front and without having to get dressed and take the bus” – DPh7.

“When I wake up late, I do not have the stress to hurry, but I immediately log in online, the most beautiful experience for me” – DE11.

“I learn better online because when I didn't know something at the same time I searched on google” – DPh1.

“Online learning has helped me to gain new knowledge in the use of IT” – DE2.

“It is the best model of learning English because I am shy to speak in front of others, so online learning is stress-free for me. I practice my English not looking at others' reactions while I speak” – DE12.

4.4 Disadvantages of Online Learning

“Even though there are many advantages, the concerns we had during online learning in pandemic time have been even greater” – DE10.

“Sometimes I could not connect to the online class, because of the weak network” – DPh5.

“Technical problems were the biggest concern for online learning. We are all aware that our country has many problems with electricity, and it happened that during the lesson we had power off, sometimes for up to five hours during the day. Without electricity, we didn't even have a network” – DPh8.

“Although online learning had its advantages, one thing I missed was face-to-face participation in the classroom. I missed my friends a lot” – DE3.

“I encountered the biggest problem when, due to technical problems, the teachers wanted to replace the lecture. And in order not to interfere with the schedule of other lectures, the only way to replace it was to have classes very early. Some lectures started very early, and still without changing the environment or leaving the house for coffee or without walking even a little, we had to enter the online class” – DE8.

“the most difficult period of my life, because I felt forgotten by the world, closed in myself and without any social activity. Even today, it seems that our mood and desire to be happy has not yet returned” – DPh4.

“There was a lack of interactivity and creativity during online learning” – DE6.

“My biggest concern during online learning is the lack of privacy. During the winter while it was very cold, and my whole family was in the living room, the hottest room inside the house, it was very annoying for me to connect on Google classroom in the presence of family members. For example, once my grandfather wanted to watch the news on TV and didn't consider my learning and its importance, so I had to move to another room for an hour and a half, in a very cold environment” – DE9.

“Noise bothers me, in cases when the class is not well managed by the professor, where everyone keeps their microphones on and talks without the professor's permission, the lecture is not effective at all”- DPh10.

“Online learning prevents me from meeting physically with both professors and friends. Student life has its beauties during studies in the classroom atmosphere” – DPh8.

“The lectures were not attended according to the schedule, so it was difficult to arrange or plan anything during the day” – DPh5.

“The practical work was something that we lacked a lot, such as the implementation of professional practice as future teachers in the elementary schools of the municipality, which is considered as a preliminary experience and application of learned theories in practice” –

DE3.

“Students’ joining time by time and not at the appointed time, hindered the lesson, and also leaving the online classroom earlier lost the seriousness of the lesson” – DE6.

“I was de-motivated by the fact that some professors started and ended the class by engaging only a few students who were more active or volunteer, while leaving other students too passive” – DE10.

“cameras off didn't allow me to understand if my classmates are following the lesson or not and this confused me. This situation created the possibility for the teacher to consider all of us irresponsible, whether we are such or not” – DE8.

“Teaching by using slides of power point presentations throughout the lecture, prevented me from taking needed notes, as I am usually used to” – DPh4.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to research the opinions of students about the experience they had during online learning during the pandemic when they were obliged to attend lectures away from the university premises. Something that was noticed from the results is the contradictory responses of the students. While, many students think that online learning was the only and very welcome way to continue their studies, save money, where they felt safe avoiding the environments in which they could be infected with the virus spread at that time, on the other hand, a considerable number of respondents claim that online learning caused them a lot of difficulties, both in learning and in their well-being. As for the responses that gave a positive perspective on the impact of online learning on educational issues, it turns out that a large number of students affirmed that online learning provided a comfortable environment and, above all, enabled learning to be uninterrupted.

The advantage of online learning was mainly the comfort that this method of learning offered students. It is about comfort in the sense of non-stressful time to get ready for college, not being in a hurry to catch the bus and time they had to sleep more. As students discussed among themselves, it was noticed the experience they had during the online learning when they had coffee while listening to the lecture and turned the camera off. An advantage that was mentioned by the students for online learning was also the savings offered during this period. The families who have to pay for their children's travel bus to the university were freed from this expense during the pandemic time. Also, parents were free from the dormitory monthly payment and money for a meal they had to provide for their children. Online learning also provided protection from the virus and the anxiety that students had during this period was less.

However, it is worth noting that there are contradictions in the students' opinions. Although more than half of the students claim that online learning is compatible with classroom learning and that the tasks during online learning are helpful, still a considerable number circled the option 'I don't know when asked if they would recommend online learning to their friends. Further, the students mainly express their dissatisfaction with the problems encountered during online learning, which were mainly technical difficulties. The lack of technological equipment considering that the family has one computer while there are more than two students/learners have made participation and attendance in all lectures difficult. The other difficulty that all students have experienced during online learning was the power outage, as well as the disconnection of the Internet network from time to time. This caused students to miss part of the lecture or even the entire planned lecture which affected the loss of necessary learning information. According to focus group discussions, online learning was generally welcomed by students during the pandemic. At first, students were sceptical if they would be able to succeed because to join the classes it was needed the necessary level of IT knowledge. However, this process was overcome due to the help of the university's IT officers who immediately provided manuals for the process of accessing online classes.

6. Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to provide data about students’ perceptions of online learning during the pandemic period. There are explored common problems, differences, and similarities among learners bringing contradictions among students’ views. The students learned new things from these challenges that they can benefit from in the future in terms of self-confidence. Improving the use of technology and other models learned during the online course is added value for them. Continuing the learning was considered a success for the students. Saving time to travel and other daily savings students had during physical education seems to be helpful for parents and those who were responsible for these expenses. Free time for many students during Covid-19 became extra time to study.

For another considerable number, online learning was a challenge never experienced before. The lack of technological equipment made them feel inadequately prepared for learning new concepts in their field of study. The frequent lack of electricity and the interruption of the network from time to time was the failure to fulfil the tasks that were offered in the classroom compared to before. The environment where the students had to attend classes was not suitable for the students who lived in big families. According to students, the lack of their own room violated their privacy. The feeling of being isolated at home without contact with friends made students feel depressed, neglected by the world, and not supported by society. Online education can lead to a sense of isolation, which can be detrimental to student success (McInerney & Roberts, 2004). The fear of infection with the virus affected their motivation to learn. Although online learning as the only option in a pandemic time was an option that helped to continue the learning process, it could not replace face-to-face learning.

7. Implications for Further Research

The study aimed to share students' experiences regarding online learning during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The attitude that emerged from their experiences shows how ready students are for online learning in the near future. While hearing that 'we have to learn to live with the virus', educators around the world started considering the implementation of hybrid and blended learning as the topic in their written and spoken discourse. Whether it would be implemented or not, probably depends on the policymakers of the countries. However, in the post-pandemic period under normal circumstances when the virus seems to have weakened, not all students prefer hybrid learning. Despite all the advantages that the students listed for online learning, most of the students were against it when the discussion about online learning was opened. As Kintu, Zhu & Kagambe (2017) mentioned "Learners are important partners in any learning process and therefore, their backgrounds and characteristics affect their ability to effectively carry on with learning and being in blended learning, the design tools to be used may impinge on the effectiveness of their learning" (p.2). From the results of this study, students do not seem ready for online learning anymore especially since the fear of virus infection has gone. The lack of learning in the classroom and socializing with friends was a depressing feeling for them. Many of the respondents emphasized that being close to each other helps not only in our daily social life but also in cooperation for lessons and preparation for assessments. They hope that something like the pandemic will not be repeated and they will continue learning in the classroom because well-being is the most important, despite many advantages.

Therefore, the study recommends that hybrid/blended/online learning be discussed taking into account effective learning, well-being in society, and the economic and social development of countries. Moreover, it recommends that in such an emergency situation that brings sudden changes in education, for some countries it is necessary a careful treatment in the preparation of many elements that can be implemented in the post-pandemic period.

References

- Al-Salman, S., & Haider, A. S. (2021). Jordanian University Students' views on emergency online learning during COVID-19. *Online Learning*, 25(1), 286-302. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i1.2470>
- Ashraf, M. A., Yang, M., Zhang, Y., Denden, M., Tlili, A., Liu, J., Huang, R., & Burgos, D. (2021). A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews on Blended Learning: Trends, Gaps and Future Directions. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 14, 1525-1541. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S331741>
- Chang, C. Y., Lee, D. C., Tang, K. Y., & Hwang, G. J. (2021). Effect sizes and research directions of peer assessments: From an integrated perspective of meta-analysis and co-citation network. *Computers & Education*, 164, 104123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.104123>
- Curelaru, M., Curelaru, V., & Cristea, M. (2022). Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Approach. *Sustainability*, 14(13), 8138. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14138138>
- Ehlers, U. D., & Pawlowski, J. M. (2006). *Quality in European e-learning: an introduction*, in *Handbook on Quality and Standardisation in E-Learning*. https://doi.org/10.1007/3-540-32788-6_1
- Erliza, S., & Septianingsih, P. A. (2022). Undergraduate Students' Perception of Hybrid Learning: Voices from English Language Education Students in Pandemic Era. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 7(1), 231-243. <https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v7i1.782>
- Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended Learning: Uncovering Its Transformative Potential in Higher Education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 7, 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2004.02.001>
- Gleason, B., & Greenhow, C. (2017). Hybrid learning in higher education: The potential of teaching and learning with robot-mediated communication. *Online Learning*, 21(4), 159-176. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v21i4.1276>
- Guzer, B., & Caner, H. (2014). The Past, Present and Future of Blended Learning: An in Depth Analysis of Literature. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 4596-4603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.992>
- Hwang, R. H., Lin, H. T., Sun, J. C. Y., & Wu, J. J. (2019). Improving learning achievement in science education for elementary school students via blended learning. *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design*, 9(2), 44-62. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJOPCD.2019040104>
- Kazu, I. Y., & Yalcin, C. K. (2022). Investigation of the Effectiveness of Hybrid Learning on Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis Study. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 18(1), 249-265. <https://doi.org/10.29329/ijpe.2022.426.14>
- Kebritchi, M., Lipschuetz, A., & Santiago, L. (2017). Issues and Challenges for Teaching Successful Online Courses in Higher Education: A Literature Review. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 46(1), 4-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239516661713>
- Kintu, M. J., Zhu, C. H., & Kagambe. (2017). Blended learning effectiveness: the relationship between student characteristics, design features and outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 14(7), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-017-0043-4>
- Mahmud, M. M. (2018). Technology and language – what works and what does not: a meta-analysis of blended learning research. *The*

Journal of Asia Tefl, 15, 365-382.

- Martín-Blas, T., & Serrano-Fernández, A. (2009). The role of new technologies in the learning process: Moodle as a teaching tool in physics. *Computers & Education*, 52(1), 35-44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2008.06.005>
- McInerney, J. M., & Roberts, T. S. (2004). Online Learning: Social Interaction and the Creation of a Sense of Community. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 7(3), 73-81. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jeductechsoci.7.3.73>
- Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jones, K. (2010). Evaluation of evidence based practices in online learning: A meta-analysis and review of online learning studies. *U.S. Department of Education*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505824.pdf>
- Okyere E, Salusalu M, Goundar R., & Marfoh K. (2022). What do university students say about online learning and the COVID-19 pandemic in central Fiji? A qualitative study. *PLOS ONE*, 17(8), e0273187. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0273187>
- Pokhrel, S., & Chhetri, R. (2021). A Literature Review on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 133-141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>
- Singh, J., Steele, K., & Singh, L. (2021). Combining the Best of Online and Face-to-Face Learning: Hybrid and Blended Learning Approach for COVID-19, Post Vaccine, & Post-Pandemic World. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 50, 140-171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472395211047865>
- Smyth, S., Houghton, C., Cooney, A., & Casey, D. (2012). Students' experiences of blended learning across a range of postgraduate programmes. *Nurse Education Today*, 32, 464-468. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2011.05.014>
- Thorne, K. (2003). *Blended Learning: How to Integrate Online and Traditional Learning*. London: Kogan Page.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).