

**Iraqi EFL Teachers Perspective towards Virtual Platforms in
Teaching EFL**

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Abstract

Virtual platforms are online classes used in teaching and learning EFL that let both teachers and students connect, communicate and cooperate online in real time. Learners get access to educational possibilities at home easily. Virtual classes can be conducted using a variety of techniques, including video conferencing, Google Meet, Zoom, conversations, reactions, and screen sharing. Users can access these programs on a range of gadgets, including laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic affected all educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities. Our Iraqi educational institutions have been switched to use virtual platforms in this pandemic, much as all other foreign institutions.

This study seeks to better understand how Iraqi EFL teachers feel about using virtual platforms to teach EFL. The researcher modified and altered a questionnaire originally created by (Abd Ali, 2022) in order to accomplish the study's objective. Thirteen items with a five point scale—strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree—make up this questionnaire. The consensus of the jury experts creates face validity. To determine the reliability of a questionnaire, the Alpha Cronbach formula is utilized. During the academic year 2022–2023, the questionnaire was given to 40 primary school teachers throughout our Iraqi governorates. Later, the findings are analyzed using the weighted mean score and percentages. At the conclusion, recommendations and ideas for additional research are presented.

Keywords: Teachers Perspectives, Virtual Platforms, Teaching EFL, Online Classes

Section One: Introduction

1.1 The problem of the Study

Virtual or online platforms are those online classes used for teaching and learning EFL. Students are taught by their teachers or instructors the course material, lectures, lessons online via video or audio. During Covid 19 pandemic, various online platforms have provided “teachers and students with a new online education experience. Teaching and learning through online platforms, such as Zoom and Dingding, have become a worldwide trend” (Zoue et.al , 2022, p. 46). Online learning platforms make use of various different devices (e.g. desktop, laptop, mobile devices),

network technologies (e.g. WIFI, cellular services) and software platforms (e.g. programming language and model, operating systems, network protocols and services) (Liu et al., 2013, p. 230 as cited in Linh et.al, 2021).

Van My (2021, p. 44) further claims that “integrating technology into the communicative language teaching activities to motivate learners to speak English”. His opinion is that online technologies provide tighter contacts amongst English language students all around the world. According to Ouadoud et al. (2016), an online learning platform can support a variety of pedagogical models, including content, learners, integrators, tutors, coordinators, and administrators. There are many problems and difficulties associated with the recent incorporation of technology in teaching and learning processes, even though it allows teachers and students to be more effective than before (Raed and Abdullah, 2022).

The absence of internet connectivity, power outages, lack of familiarity with digital equipment, and feelings of anxiety, in the perspective of Iraqi teachers, are the main causes of the problems and difficulties associated with online teaching, according to Banani & Abdul-Kareem (2022). Teachers also appear to favor paper-based tests over e-learning exams since they are more dependable and there is less likelihood that students will cheat on them. Adarkwah (2021) provided evidence for this claim by outlining the main problems, difficulties, and obstacles that exist, including the scarcity of energy, the users' lack of prior knowledge, the difficulty of using learning tools, and the absence of internet connection. The fact that the majority of households lack internet access, many have cellphones, but only around half have laptops, according to Ismael (2021) added to the issues.

Alsahli and Bantan (2022) identified the following difficulties that EFL instructors and students encounter when using virtual platforms:

1. Psychological Challenges: Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students may have psychological issues associated to the illness itself, which has a severe impact on students' motivation to learn.
2. Technical difficulties: poor technical support, a slow internet connection, sound interruptions, and incompatible equipment have a detrimental impact on students' online learning experiences.
3. Communication Issues: Online language acquisition presents substantial communication issues due to the lack of immediate interaction, visual signals, eye contact, nonverbal communication, and facial movements.
4. Time constraints: Because online learning and teaching take a lot of time to prepare for, problems like social media addiction, academic procrastination, and zoom fatigue or general exhaustion might arise. Teachers spend more time preparing for online lectures than for in-person lectures.
5. Assessment and feedback-related challenges: the likelihood of cheating is significant, as demonstrated by the use of several dishonest strategies and the submission of stolen work.

1.2 The Aim of the study

This study aims at investigating Iraqi EFL Teachers Perspective towards Virtual Platforms in Teaching EFL

1.3 Limits of the study

It is limited to public-school teachers (Males and Females) - Primary Stage, in Iraqi public schools, i.e., five Iraqi governorates are included (Baghdad, Babil, Al-Anbar, Tikrit and Wasit), during the academic year (2022-2023).

1.4 The Significance of the Study

According to the viewpoints of Iraqi instructors, it is envisaged that virtual platforms will play a significant role in teaching EFL in the current study. This is because the impact of such platforms on both teaching and learning during the Corona virus pandemic was as follows:

1. With the help of numerous apps like Zoom, Teams, Veev, Google Classroom, and others, online learning enables students to learn at home (Raheem and Khan 2020).
2. Virtual platforms have proven to be highly beneficial for educators, students, schools, and others; recordings, chat, and video conferences are utilized as auxiliary tools to improve the performance of EFL students.
3. Teachers and instructors stay in touch with their students even when they are in separate places.

1.5 Definition of the Key Term

A. Perspective

The definition of perspective is given as "a view or prospect, a specific way of regarding something, or an understanding of the relative importance of things" (Hughes, 2005: p.771).

Perspective is described in another way by Longman (1990: p. 767) as "the way in which a situation or problem is judged, so that (proper) consideration and importance is given to each part" (in other words, "the way in which a situation or problem is judged"(as cited in Pettersson, 1996).

B. EFL Teachers Perspective

The researcher's definition of this term is that it refers to the assumptions and beliefs that teachers have about EFL instruction in order to motivate students to give their best effort throughout instruction.

C. Virtual Classes in EFL Learning

A virtual classroom is an “online learning application that allows for live interaction between the educator and the learners as they are joining in learning training” Alkathir, 2021: p. 166).

According to Anthasayanam, Rajathi and Tamilselvi (2009), a virtual classroom is a “system that creates an environment designed to facilitate teachers in the management of educational courses for their students, especially a system using computer hardware and software, which involves distance learning”.

Section Two: Literature Review

2.1 Virtual Platforms

Due to the Covid19 pandemic, a lot of institutions and schools have switched to virtual classrooms. Being online while students learn how to manage the availability of digital resources is crucial for their effective involvement in online education (Cleofas & Rocha, 2021).

According to Alharbi and Khalil (2022), virtual classes "provide users with exceptional ease and liberty." Students "eagerly participate in the tasks, learning activities, and home assignments" as a result of this being clearly observed during the pandemic. E-learning has been shown to be the "ideal method for learning how to manage their time and save energy and resources in the learning process."

Alharthi (2021) says that virtual classrooms are viewed as an interactive learning environment that allows students to complete particular tasks collectively. The success of online classes depends on both the teacher and the student. Virtual classrooms are a part of rich environments that facilitate visual learning through digital multimedia.

Online learning environments with a variety of apps, such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, and others, can give learners free and adaptable access to learning (Linh et al., 2021). Because these apps require a very high internet access, thus, teachers prefer to use WhatsApp and YouTube as the digital platforms that facilitate online learning. (Kristina, Syahrial, and Yunita, 2021). Mobile device media is another tool utilized in e-learning that provides students flexibility in their study times and locations. Empirical researches make it abundantly evident that technology improves students' engagement and skills (Amin and Sundari, 2020).

Teachers used to upload resources for college students in online classes, facilitate discussion, assess students' progress, and use a variety of activities, including note-taking, tests, quizzes, and projects (Al-Obaydi, 2020). According to Santi, Gorghiu, and Pribeanu (2022), after two years of using virtual classrooms for teaching and learning, students' motivation and involvement have increased, and there has been a noticeable improvement in the methods and style of instruction.

Despite all the benefits of using virtual platforms in the teaching and learning process during the Covid19 pandemic that have already been mentioned, previous studies have claimed that there are still many difficulties that teachers and students must overcome, including technical issues, assessment issues, issues with poor internet connectivity, psychological issues, and communication issues (Alsahli and Meccawy, 2022).

Section Three: Procedures

3.1 Population and Sample

Primary public school teachers (both male and female) selected from five Iraqi governorates for the academic year 2022–2023 make up the study's population. There are 74 teachers in the entire population.

The study's sample consists of 40 teachers, (15 men) and (25 women) of whom were randomly selected from the aforementioned demographic and had EFL teaching experience ranging from one year to 30 years. See Table (1)

Table (1) Population of the Study distributed among Iraqi Provinces

Iraqi governorates	Number of Ts
Baghdad (Al-Karah)	11
Baghdad (Al-Rasafa)	15
Babil	10
Anbar	8
Salah Al-Deen	20
Wasit	10
Total	74

3.2 Main Instrument

A questionnaire from (Abd Ali, 2022) was modified and changed by the researcher to fit the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was then administered to 40 Iraqi instructors using "google form" after that. 13 questions on a five-point scale make up this questionnaire. The application period runs from 20 February 2023 to 25 February 2023.

3.3 Description of the questionnaire

Thirteen items in the questionnaire of this study are about how EFL teachers feel towards using virtual platforms for EFL instruction. Strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree are all given a five-point scale.

Teachers' responses were ranked from 5 to 1, with 5 being the highest (fifth level strongly agree), 4 being the next highest (fourth level agree), 3 being the highest (third level undecided), 2 being the second highest, and 1 being the lowest (first level strongly disagree).

As a pilot sample, thirty four teachers (20 men and 14 women) were randomly selected from among the five governorates in Iraq stated above. These educators are not included in the primary sample. Teachers started to respond to the questionnaire electronically; the items were understandable to them, but it took them 20 to 40 minutes to complete it all due to a slow internet connection and some email issues.

The questionnaire items are handed to a jury of specialists in order to achieve face validity; the juries are cordially requested to read, change, and modify the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was administered to the teachers once they had given their assent.

The Alpha-Cronbach formula is employed to achieve reliability, and it is discovered that the questionnaire reliability is 0.95.

Section Four: Results

4.1 Presentation of Results

Results of the current study have been achieved by calculating the weighted mean scores and percentages of each item as presented in table 2.

Table (2) Items Weighted Mean Scores and Percentages

<i>Item Rank</i>	<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Weighting Mean</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1.	8	Some pupils lack access to computers, tablets, and smartphones for learning.	4.681	93.636
2.	10	Virtual testing frequently involves unreliable and inconsistent evaluation and assessment	4.431	88.636
3.	9	Accessibility to the network is poor.	4.386	87.727
4.	13	colleagues Teamwork deficit	4.136	82.727
5.	2	Teachers can provide feedback more quickly using virtual instruction.	3.97	79.545
6.	3	It's convenient to have easy access to my lesson wherever I am and whenever I want.	3.97	79.545

7.	12	Textbooks will eventually be replaced with online materials.	3.954	79.090
8.	11	Because teachers are unaware of their shortcomings, less motivated students are frequently ignored in virtual classrooms.	3.818	76.363
9.	5	Controlling and monitoring my online class is not difficult for me.	3.477	69.545
10.	4	In comparison to face-to-face instruction, my EFL students are more confident and communicative	3.318	66.363
11.	7	Comparing face-to-face education versus online learning, the level of interaction is significantly higher.	3.295	65.909
12.	6	Compared to face-to-face classes, students contribute more actively and effectively online.	3.090	61.818
13.	1	Teachers who use online instruction are skilled at creating online assessments and quizzes.	2.704	54.090

From the table 1 above, the researchers are going to analyze the items with the reference to their weighted mean score and percentage.

Item (8) is ranked no.1. Its weighted mean score was (4.681) and percentage (93.636). This is supported by Cleofas & Rocha (2021) who state that poor students who do not own laptops or desktop computers, and those with limited or borrowed Internet connectivity face difficulties in virtual learning during Covid 19 pandemic. Ramij and Sultana (2020) state that most of the students do not own laptop or computers, for this, it is not possible for them to do assignments and tasks in a smart phone.

Item (10) is ranked no. 2. It was gained (4.431) weighted mean score with (88.636) percentage. As it is supported by Arnold (2012, p.190) who states “In the fully online situation, it is difficult to gauge who or how many are working on the same exam. Given such test reliability is compromised”. This shows take-home test or open book test is not being monitored, unlike face to face test-taker which is being monitored. Therefore, online tests are seen to be unreliable.

Item (9) is ranked no. 3. Its weighted mean score was (4.386) and percentage (87.727). Ramij and Sultana (2020) assume that students' difficulties can be seen in the “lack of proper internet connection with stable speed”. This means although if students

are able to attend classes, the experience is extremely inefficient because “they have trouble following the lecture because the network breaks down frequently not able to communicate properly with the teachers”.

Item no (13) is ranked no.4. It was gained (4.136) weighted mean score with (82.727) percentage. As Gea (2020) supported this by saying in virtual classrooms, group participation on assignments is more difficult than in traditional classrooms. Therefore, lack of team work among colleagues is clearly noticed in virtual classes among face to face classes.

Item no (2) is ranked no.5. Its weighted mean score was (3.97) and (79.545) percentage. He, Wang and Li (2008) supports this by saying virtual teaching feedback is not provided quickly to students so that this delay from instructors affects students' team effectiveness because of their frustration and anxiety.

Item no (3) is ranked no.6. It was gained (3.97) weighted mean score with (79.545) percentage. To support this Sudarsana et.al (2019) stated that virtual class access via internet is important for both teachers and students, i.e., it can be accessed from anywhere and the teaching / learning activities can be done easily anytime and anywhere.

Item no (12) is ranked no.7. Its weighted mean score was (3.954) and (79.090) percentage. This is supported by Brown (2012) who states that it is preferable to replace outdated paper textbooks with updated e-books or digital copies because it can be easily downloaded from Internet and can be read on computers and digital devices such as I-pads and smart phones.

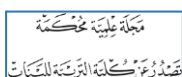
Item no (11) is ranked no.8. It was gained (3.818) weighted mean score with (76.363) percentage. Yeager (2008) describes less motivated students as those students who feel bored and uninterested in school. As a result, teachers in online classes disregard this group of students.

Item no (5) is ranked no.9. Its weighted mean score was (3.477) and (69.545) percentage. Abd Ali (2022) claims that teachers can easily utilize instructions to control students' learning in online classes. Additionally, Mershad and Said (2022) noted that teachers can simply monitor their students' engagement in class to examine and evaluate their progress.

Item no (4) is ranked no.10. Its weighted mean score was (3.318) and (66.363) percentage. This is supported by Alshumaimeri & Alhumud (2021) who stated that “virtual classrooms are suitable for students who might feel too shy to participate in classroom discussions”. That is to say most students found talking in online classes to be more natural and confident than in face to face classes.

Section Five: Conclusions, Recommendations & Suggestions for Further Studies

5.1 Conclusions



Based on the findings mentioned above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Items (7, 6 and 1) have the least weighted means and percentages, whereas items (8, 10, 9, 13, 2, 3, 2, 11, 5 and 4) have the highest weighted means and percentages.
2. Item no 7 is ranked 11. It gained (3.295) with (65.909) percentage. According to Miao and Ma (2022), students will be more interactive, motivated, attentive, engaged, and likely to debate ideas and thoughts with other students to improve their learning outcomes in online environment.
3. Item no 6 is ranked 12. It gained (3.090) with (61.818) percentage. Students' participation in online environments can enhance their learning, reflection, and discussion, according to Santi, Gorghiu, and Pribeanu (2022), who provided support for their claim. Throughout Covid19 pandemic, students actively participated in online learning for this purpose.
4. Item no 1 is ranked 13. It gained (2.704) with (54.090) percentage. According to the researcher's experience utilizing Google Classroom, online tests and quizzes allow the researcher to be somewhat proficient because they can take the place of written exams.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendations of the present study stated as follows:

1. EFL teachers are advised to keep using virtual classes in hand with face to face classes by providing learners with assignments that completed online.
2. Virtual platforms can be used by EFL teachers to give online courses to their colleagues about finding variety of instructional strategies, tools, and technologies that motivate and engage their students in the learning process.
3. It is advised that all Iraqi public schools teachers be more dependent on virtual platforms now and in the future to take advantage of using these platforms in the teaching learning process.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

The researchers' suggestions for further studies can be stated as follows:

1. A similar study can be conducted on Iraqi EFL students' perspectives on virtual platforms in EFL teaching.
2. Comparison can be made between EFL teachers' and students' perspectives on virtual platforms in EFL teaching.
3. A similar study can be conducted on Iraqi EFL private school teachers' perspectives on teaching via virtual platforms.

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وجهة نظر معلمي اللغة الانكليزية العراقيين لغة اجنبية نحو المنصات الافتراضية لتدريس اللغة
الانكليزية لغة اجنبية

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المستخلص

المنصات الافتراضية هي صفوف دراسية عبر الإنترنت تستخدم في تدريس وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وتتيح لكل من المعلمين والطلاب الاتصال والتواصل والتعاون عبر الإنترنت في وقت فعلي. يحصل المتعلمون على إمكانية الوصول إلى الإمكانيات التعليمية في المنزل بسهولة. يمكن ان تتحقق الصفوف الافتراضية باستخدام مجموعة متنوعة من التقنيات، بما في ذلك المؤتمرات الفيديوية و Google Meet و Zoom والمحادثات وردود الفعل ومشاركة الشاشة. يمكن للمستخدمين الوصول إلى هذه البرامج على مجموعة من الأدوات، بما في ذلك أجهزة الكمبيوتر المحمولة والأجهزة اللوحية والهواتف الذكية. أثر جائحة فيروس كورونا كوفيد-19 على جميع المؤسسات التعليمية، بما في ذلك المدارس والكليات والجامعات. لقد تحولت مؤسساتنا التعليمية العراقية إلى استخدام المنصات الافتراضية في هذا الوباء، كما هو الحال مع جميع المؤسسات الأجنبية الأخرى. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى فهم أفضل لما يشعر به مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق تجاه استخدام المنصات الافتراضية لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

وقام الباحث بتعديل وتغيير الاستبانة التي أعدها (Abd Ali, 2022) لتحقيق هدف الدراسة. يتكون هذا الاستبيان من ثلاثة عشر فقرة بمقياس خمسة (أوافق بشدة، أوافق، غير مؤكد، لا أوافق، وأعارض بشدة)

اجمع خبراء اللغة الانكليزية على صلاحية الاختبار وثباته ظاهرياً. لتحديد ثبات الاستبيان تم استخدام صيغة ألفا كرونباخ. خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢٣، تم توزيع الاستبيان على ٤٠ معلماً في المدارس الابتدائية في عموم محافظاتنا العراقية. يتم تحليل النتائج باستخدام المتوسط المرجح والنسب المئوية لاحقاً. وفي الختام تم عرض التوصيات والمقترحات لدراسات أخرى.