

**Effect of Online Learning
on the Undergraduate Students
of Anbar University Studying
EFL during Covid-19 Pandemic**

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Abstract

Online learning substitutes the traditional way of learning during the pandemic of covid-19. The study aims at investigating the effects of E-learning on college students during the lockdown due to the spread of covid-19 and studying the effect of lockdown on students' self-dependence in learning EFL. The sample of the study consists of (40) EFL learners enrolled at the fourth stage in the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar. A questionnaire as a research instrument was distributed during the official attendance hours. By using a quantifying qualitative procedure, the forty respondents' answers were analyzed qualitatively. The findings show that (38.4375 %) of the total sample agree with the first hypothesis and (38.2142) of the total sample also agree with the second hypothesis. This means that the first and the second hypotheses are accepted. The most important conclusions arrived at are : online learning supports students with more flexibility than in the traditional learning and it is an interesting new method that motivates students to learn EFL.

Keywords: Online learning , EFL , Covid-19

1-Introduction

The term online learning (OL) was first introduced at the university of New Zealand during business program. Petrova (2001, as cited in Petrova & Sinclair, 2005), defines OL as an "implementation of e-learning using Web-based technologies"(p.1). Such type of learning is widely used at the whole university and its significance is now recognized as strategic approach to supply a learning environment which supports and promotes learner success (García Peñalvo, 2008). Since 1999, OL within the business program has gradually developed into two distinct learning and teaching models of Web-based OL, known as enhanced mode and flexible mode. Both modes relate to category of blended learning as its delivery format blends face-to-face and OL and teaching (Petrova, 2001). In enhanced mode, OL is used to complete the content presented in the classroom and enhance the content that is delivered online across the institutional OL platform. On the other hand, in flexible mode online activities take the place of the face-to-face instruction (García Peñalvo , 2008).

OL has been dealt with from various aspects. No one can cover all its various aspects, since this subject is broad. Therefore, some researchers like Putri, Hamuddin, Nursafira and Derin (2020), Zhou, Li, Wu and Zhou (2020), Alipio (2020) and Zigh, Abdalli and Kouninef (2022) studied it variously. Putri et al. (2020) aimed at finding out the Moodle platform effectiveness in the OL process at the University Of Lay Adventists Of Kigali in Indonesia. The researchers examined a sample of (53) students enrolled in discourse analysis course. They chose them from the two classes: experimental and control. To achieve the aim of the study, the researchers used a quasi-experimental research design as an instrument to collect the data. The findings showed that using Moodle effectively enhances EFL students' learning as compared to traditional lecture-style

instruction. Zhou et al. (2020) aimed at analyzing the background of the large scale online education application introduced by the Chinese government during the covid-19 epidemic. The researchers not only explained the foundation of large scale online education but also disclosed the impact of the largest online education activities on society as well as education. The study proved that the infrastructure of the Internet was completed by China through the construction of informatization and education informatization in the last thirty years. Alipio's (2020) study aimed at observing the willingness of higher education students for OL in Philippines. The results showed that most of the participants chose 'No' in all OL readiness items. For the researcher, one should take operational, financial, and internet connectivity issues of learners especially in the low-income sector and rural areas before resorting to OL. Finally, a questionnaire was used by Zigh, Abdalli and Kouninef (2022) to explore the impact of OL on the students enrolled in the National Higher School of Telecommunications, Information and Communication Technologies (INTTIC) in Algeria during the covid-19 pandemic.

2-Aims

This study aims at

- 1-Investigating the effects of E-learning on college students during the lockdown due to the spread of covid-19.
- 2-Studying the effect of lockdown on students' self-dependence in learning EFL.

3-Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that

- 1-E-learning during the covid 19 lockdown has effects on students at university level.
- 2-E-learning during the covid 19 lockdown makes students more dependent on themselves in learning EFL.

4-Limits of the Study

This study is concerned with the investigation of the effects of E-learning on the fourth-year students of English at the University of Anbar during the period of covid-19 pandemic in the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023.

5. Online Learning

Electronic learning, digital learning and E-learning are all different terminologies of OL. It is an organism of learning that lacks in-person meetings. In other words, all discussions, lectures and activities take place in the digital environment. According to Anderson (2008), it implies that "the learner is at a distance from the tutor or instructor, that the learner uses some form of technology (usually a computer to access the learning materials, that the learner uses technology to interact with tutor or instructor ,and with other learners" (p.16). Such style of learning offers flexibility which includes freedom from

reliance on time and place associated with the traditional classroom.(Vivolo, 2019).

Various scholars define OL differently. According to Littlejohn and Pegler (2007) as cited in (Phillips, McNaught & Kennedy, 2012), OL is “the process of learning and teaching with computers and other associated technologies, particularly through use of the Internet” (p.4). Dabbagh, Marra and Howland (2018) define OL as “any learning that takes place using the internet as delivery system”(p.1). OL is also defined by Manning and Johnson (2021) as “using the internet to learn.It is about connecting the learner to educational materials by way of the internet”(p.26). In the same way, Means, Bakia and Murphy (2014) classify OL as that kind of learning which takes place when all instruction and assessment are conducted via online. They define it as “a learner’s interaction with content and/ or people via the Internet for the purpose of learning”(p.8).

According to Bowman (2014), interaction in OL can be “synchronous or asynchronous” (p.83). This is in line with Jolliffe, Ritter and Stevens’ (2012) view who state that OL often occurs in either a synchronous or an asynchronous environment. In an asynchronous environment, learners and the facilitator communicate by means of a computer forum of some description at various times. On the other hand, a synchronous communication environment according to (Yang &Yuen, 2009), occurs in real time and involves participants who are all present at once, though they may not always be in the same location. Thus, instant messaging and telephone calls are some examples of synchronous communication environment.

Regarding the content of OL, according to O'Neil, Fisher & Rietschel, (2013), it can be “presented in a variety of ways including video casting, audio taping, films and links to the web, charts, graphs, statistical data, formulas and case studies”(p.1). Learners who enroll OL can attend either traditional or virtual universities. For instance, one can trace the traditional enrolment of learners at Pennsylvania State University and the virtual enrolment of learners at California Virtual University to notice their preference to take a course in online environment because of the flexibility and pace of learning in such environment. Such kind of learning enables them not only to learn anywhere and anytime but also work and have families.

Finally, one cannot deny the role of technology when talking about OL since this kind of learning is completely dependent upon technology. Thus, learners who master the use of laptops, tablets and smartphones can take online course easily.(O'Neil, Fisher & Rietschel, 2019). According to Almanar, Ariyana and Heeji (2020), “numerous applications and other online platforms were used to support distance learning”(p.113-114). One of these applications is Google classroom which can be accessed by anyone. Google offers such application as a central location to tutors not only to communicate but also to ask questions and

send feedback and supply homework. (Sudarsana, Putra, Astawa & Yogantara, 2019).

As an attempt to ensure the continuation of learning process in Iraq, tutors resort to OL when the educational institutions are closed officially during pandemic period. Because of the outbreak of such infectious virus, all staff of Iraqi kindergartens, schools as well as universities was accustomed to such style of learning as a way to facilitate learning process and keep students safe. This is in line with Baba, Sa'ari, Daud, Adenan and Kamarulzaman (2014) who state that some universities have shifted the way they submitted the information to their students. As concerns the benefits of OL, the first benefit of OL is availability, in terms of time and place, which enable people from all around the world to access learning with each other. Efficiency is the second benefit which refers to the ability of learners who can finish tasks more efficiently with the existence of technology than without it (Hartley, 2001). The third is that OL reduces the training costs of learners who travel to certain destinations so as to attend a course. The last benefit is that all the learners' materials are centrally stored in online courses. (Hopkins & Markham, 2003)

6-Methodology

6.1 Research design

Investigation of the effects of OL is categorized as a descriptive qualitative study. According to Sprinthall, Schmutte and Sirois (1991), the study is descriptive when the main purpose of the study is description. The present study studies the effects of E-learning that (40) EFL learners receive through the covid-19 lockdown. The current study is qualitative in nature applying the procedure of quantifying qualitative data. The data collection is a single-method procedure, namely, closed-ended items.

6.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the present study involves (140) male and female students enrolled in the fourth stage of the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023. Their ages ranged between 22-25 years old. The sample of this study includes (40) students chosen randomly by the researchers. (10) students participated in the pilot study and have been excluded. This means that the sample of the study represents (28.5%) of the population.

6.3 Instrument of the Study

The researchers employ five-lickert-scale questionnaire to collect the needed data which leads to achieve the aims of the study. The scale of the instrument is divided into five degrees (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree). The items of the questionnaire were taken from Zigh et al. (2022). The questionnaire contains 15 items distributed over two domains. The first domain is allocated to the first hypothesis and it includes eight items (from item one to

item eight), whereas the second domain of the questionnaire is allocated to the second hypothesis which includes seven items (from item nine to item fifteen).

6.4 Face Validity of the Instrument

Creswell (2012) defines validity as “the development of sound evidence to demonstrate that the intended test interpretation (of the concept or construct that the test is assumed to measure) matches the proposed purpose of the test”(p.630). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) describe validity as a significant key to the effectiveness of research. Accordingly, face validity of the instrument in this study is achieved by introducing the questionnaire to a jury that includes 3 jurors specialized in linguistics at University of Anbar. The Jury members approved the items of the questionnaire.

6.5 The Pilot Study

The pilot administration of the instrument of the study applied in 9/10/2022 at the English Department in the College of Education for Humanities. The number of the students of the pilot study is 15 students. The administration of the pilot study helps the researchers to determine things such as finding the average time needed to accomplish the questionnaire. Also, it is necessary to discover vague items in order to explain them more. It is worth mentioning that the experiment of the pilot administration was successfully completed.

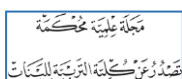
6.6 Reliability

It refers to the consistency and dependability of a given test. For more clarification, it means that when we apply the same test on the same students in two occasions or between two periods, the test gives similar results. Subsequently, the instrument will be reliable for the final administration (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). In this study, the researchers used test-retest method. The questionnaire applied two times on the same students under the same conditions (i.e. the number of students is 15 males and females). The first administration took place in 9/10/2022, while the second administration took place in 17/10/2022. After using Pearson Correlation Coefficient, results show that the coefficient correlation value is 0.87 which is considered highly acceptable.

6.7 Sample

The respondents of the current study are (40) EFL learners enrolled at the fourth stage in the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023. The total number of students is 140 divided into two sections; A and B. Their ages ranged between 22-25 years old. The rationale for selecting fourth year students is that they get the courses electronically. They access their educational curriculum outside a traditional classroom.

6.8 Instrument



Based on the aims of the study, the researchers have designed a questionnaire as an instrument to collect data. It is a research instrument used to get data rapidly as mentioned by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) that “one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour” (p.6). In this regard, data gathering was carried out through a questionnaire constructed in compliance with the study aims. Accordingly, it was designed to examine the effects of E-learning as well as the effects of lockdown on students learning independency at the university environment through the period of covid-19 pandemic. It was distributed on 2/10/2022 to respondents during the official attendance hours. Respondents were asked to read and rate the fifteen items on a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree (Appendix A). These items are about the effects of E-learning on college students during the spread of covid-19 besides the effects of lockdown on students learning independency. The instrument consists of two sections. The first section includes eight items which assess the effectiveness of E-learning on college students during the lockdown due to the spread of covid. The first item measures the students motivation to study online. Items two and six measure the role of technology in enhancing comprehension and accomplishing learning objectives. The third measures the easiness of accessing Moodle content during lockdown. The seventh measures the lecturer-students interaction during the discussion online.

The last seven items were designed to investigate the effects of lockdown on students' self-dependence learning EFL. They measure the students' ability to learn without teachers' assistance, discuss courses with classmates, accomplish the homework before the appointed deadline and to experience innovative methods of learning. The students were instructed that all items used to assess the effectiveness of E-learning as well as the effects of lockdown on students learning independency at the university environment.

6.9 Data Analysis

The data utilized to achieve the aims of the current study have been formulated by the researchers. The answers of the (40) respondents to the instrument of the study have been gathered and then analyzed qualitatively by means of a quantifying qualitative procedure. The respondents were asked to read the items, and tick one of the options (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree) on the fifteen proposed items. Accordingly, the respondents' answers were gathered and tabulated as in the tables below.

7-Results and Discussion of Results

The data utilized to accomplish the first aim were collected by the means of the first part of the questionnaire, the tool of the study. The forty participants' answers to this part of the questionnaire were collected and analyzed qualitatively using a quantifying qualitative procedure. In this part of the questionnaire, the respondents were required to tick eight items. Accordingly, the participants' answers are collected and tabulated into two forms of tables. Table (1) shows the percentages of the participants answers to these items. On

the other hand, table (2) shows the percentages of the respondents to the independence of E-learning during the lockdown of covid-19. The tables are as follows:

Table (1) shows the eight items proposed to measure the effectiveness of OL during the covid-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Frequency of Respondents' Answers to H 1

Item	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
1	5 12.5 %	7 17.5 %	15 37.5%	9 22.5 %	4 10 %
2	1 2.5 %	10 25 %	10 25 %	16 40%	3 7.5 %
3	2 5 %	3 7.5 %	8 20	22 55%	5 12.5 %
4	1 2.5	7 17.5 %	5 12.5 %	19 47.5%	8 20
5	3 7.5 %	1 2.5 %	14 35%	15 37.5%	7 17.5 %
6	2 5 %		5 12.5 %	13 32.5%	20 50%
7	3 7.5 %	3 7.5 %	12 30%	17 42.5%	5 12.5 %
8	4 10%	10 25%	11 27.5%	12 30%	3 7.5%
	52.5	102.5	200	307.5	137.5
Mean	6.5625	12.8125	25	38.4375	17.1875

Table (1) reveals that the percentage of (4) respondents who strongly agree with item one is (10%) and the percentage of (9) respondents who agree with the same item is (22.5%). They consider that E-learning during the covid-19 pandemic is effective. This is in line with Jalkanen , Jokinen, & Taalas (2015) who claim that an increase in motivation results is due to the attendance of teacher in the contact class. In addition, the number of the respondents who are motivated is more than the number of those who are unmotivated.

In addition, the percentage of (16) respondents who agree with item number two is (40%) and the percentage of those who strongly agree is (7.5%). This indicates that they make use of OL applications to achieve their learning objectives. This is in line with Selim (2007) who explains

that the quality of education can be improved through the use of technology and internet. On the contrary, few students argue that the use of E-learning applications is not effective for learners who intend to accomplish their objectives. This is inconsistent with Selim's (2007) view who reveals that E-learning will not succeed if the technical support is lacking. Also this is inconsistent with Hoq (2020) who illustrates that "24/7 entree at both campus and off-campus is essential for e-learning to be effective(p.461)."

As noticed in the above table (1), (22) respondents with (55%) agree with item number three. They can access Moodle content easily at any time by a mobile phone. This is consistent with Herron, Jeffrey, Taurean and Douglas (2021) who assert that "e-learning resources are made available 24/7 to the students through Learning Management Systems such as Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment and Blackboard learn (p.29)". Thus, the students can access these two online distance E-learning platforms by a mobile phone anytime. On the contrary, the percentage of the respondents who disagree and strongly disagree respectively is (7.5%) and (5%). This may be related to the lack of computers as well as other devices like tablets, mobiles... etc. This is in accordance with Flye, Gibson, Seemann, and Wilkinson (2002) who declare that "many students of all ages do not have computers at home and do not have access to them in their community (p.15)". Song, Singleton and Koh (2004), as cited in Agbele and Oyelade (2020), also further add that "students may also face some challenges in assessing the online lessons as most of them are not technically oriented (p.30)". Regarding item number four, results show that 19 students of the sample which represents (45%) percent of the total sample agree that sharing course contents online useful for the learners. This result can explain that reaching the course contents is easier that reaching the course contents directly at university because it saves time and efforts from both students' and lecturers' side. This is in line with Sharma (2018) who illustrates that "students feel excited about sharing their ideas and experiences with others (p.164) ".

The results of this questionnaire also reveals that (15) respondents with (37.5%) agree with the item number five. They agree that courses which are delivered visually do not only make the content clear, but also keep them interested and encourage them to join more courses. This is in

line with Hai-Jew (2009) who considers visuals as “a part of most online courses and trainings (p.18)”.

According to Yang (2017), learning which depends on reading the textbook is less effective than watching a video. Thus, (20) respondents strongly agree with item number six. This reveals that the use of a variety of media like videos, images, texts and sounds is not only helpful but also enhances comprehension, the percentage is (50%). Yang (2017) also explains that the majority of students agreed that watching a video is significantly more effective than reading a textbook for learning. For instance, a student posits in his speech “watching a 10-minute video gave me a better understanding than reading a whole chapter in the book.(p.8)”. Zhang, D., Zhou, L., Briggs, R. and Nunamaker, J. (2006) as cited in Agbele and Oyelade (2020) state that “Educators can use a combination of audio, videos, and text to reach out to their students in order to maintain a human touch to their lectures (p.30)”.

As can be seen in the item number seven in the table (1) above, (17) respondents with (42.5%) agree that the lecturer interacts with them. Other respondents have poor communication with their lecturer in online discussion. Their total percentage of strongly disagree and disagree is (15%). For Hanum (2017), interaction is required not only to fill the gap but also accomplish the target. Ellis (1990) as cited in Hanum (2017) mentions that “interaction is meaning-focused and carried out to facilitate the exchange of information and prevent communication breakdowns (p.1)”.

As for item number eight, results are almost equal. Eleven students who represent (27.5%) of the total sample are neutral and 12 students who represent (30%) of the sample agree that there is harmony between the courses and what do you expect to learn. This can be attributed to the largest percentage of students who are ignorant concerning the learning objectives of each course. Regarding the first hypothesis, results show that (38.4375) of the total sample (agree) that E-learning during the covid 19 lockdown has effects on students at university level. This means that the first hypothesis is accepted.

Regarding the other items of the questionnaire and the percentages of the participants' answers about the independence of E-learning during the lockdown of covid-19, they are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Frequency of Respondents' Answers to H 2

Item	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
9	1 2.5 %	4 10 %	12 30%	13 32.5%	10 25%
10	3 7.5 %	2 5 %	12 30%	18 45%	5 12.5 %
11	4 10 %	10 25%	7 17.5 %	14 35%	5 12.5 %
12	9 22.5%	15 37.5%	10 25%	4 10 %	2 5 %
13	3 7.5 %	3 7.5 %	13 32.5%	16 40%	5 12.5 %
14	2 5 %	1 2.5 %	9 22.5	19 47.5	9 22.5
15	2 5 %	1 2.5 %	7 17.5%	23 57.5	7 17.5%
	60	90	175	267.5	107.5
Mean	8.5714	12.8571	25	38.2142	15.3571

The above table portrays the effect of E-learning on Students' Independency. It shows that the numbers of the respondents who agreed and strongly agreed with item nine are (13) and (10) respectively, their percentages are (32.5%) and (25%). According to these responses learning in physical classroom is better than virtual class.

It is obvious that (18) respondents with (45%) agree with item ten and they prefer the face-to-face support of lecturers in the classroom despite having downloaded videos and lectures through Moodle. Similarly, (14) respondents with (35%) agree with item eleven. They encounter difficulties when they do their homework because the courses are not taught directly from the lecturers in the classroom.

It is obvious from table (2) that the percentage of the (15) respondents who disagree with item twelve is (37.5%). They were unable to concentrate on the courses with the existence of children, noises and other distractors. This is in line with Sun, Liu and Wang (2022).

Results of item thirteen show that 16 students of the sample which represent (40%) of the sample agree that they can accomplish their homework before the appointed deadline through E-learning during the lockdown. The reason behind this may be that the learners have more time to take about what do they study (i.e. they don't

spend time on transportation back and forth to the university, don't go out for shopping or spending time with relatives and friends).

Nineteen students with (47.5%) agree with item number fourteen. They prefer direct courses delivered by lecturers in the classroom so as to help them do their homework easily. This is in line with Selvaraj, Radhin, Nithin, Benson and Mathew (2021) view : “about 73.5 % of students said that the online class has made some of the subjects more difficult than it is in a regular class (p.5)”. In this case, learners need lecturers’ support in achieving their assignment. This is in accordance with Ulum’s (2020) view: “teachers need to involve themselves in assignment as well by cooperating with learners (p.23)”.

As for item number fifteen, results show that 23 students which constitute (57.5%) of the sample agree that E-learning during the lockdown is an opportunity for them to experience unprecedented method of learning. This can be attributed to the monotony of learning method used before the lockdown since teachers at universities didn't use E-learning before lockdown. Therefore, students find that e-learning is a new and interesting way in learning. Accordingly one can decide that the second hypothesis is accepted because results show that (38.2142) of the total sample (agree) that E-learning during the covid 19 lockdown makes students more dependent on themselves in learning EFL. This means that the second hypothesis is also accepted.

5.Conclusions

1. Teachers' interaction with students is essential to make OL effective.
2. OL is inexpensive since students don't need to pay for transportation, clothes, pocket money... etc.
3. OL supports students with more flexibility than in the traditional learning.
4. OL is an interesting new method for learning which draws students attention and motivates them to learn.
- 5-Learning in physical classroom is still important since some students believe that it is more useful than virtual learning.

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Appendix A

The Effectiveness of E-learning			
No.	Items	Rate	Tick
1	To study online during COVID-19 pandemic is motivating for you.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
2		strongly disagree	
		disagree	

	Using the e-learning applications such as Google Meet, Zoom is effective for you to reach your learning objectives.	neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
3	It is easy for you to access Moodle content during the period of lockdown.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
4	You think that sharing the course content online is useful for the learners.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
5	Visual courses are attractive.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
6	Videos, images, texts and sounds are helpful for the course comprehension.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
7	The lecturer interacts with you during the discussion online.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
8	There is matching between the courses and what do you expect to learn.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
		strongly disagree	

9	It is possible for you to achieve your homework in the e-learning during the lockdown although there are distractions in your house such as noise , children ...etc.	disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
		strongly agree	
10	During the e-learning period, you prefer face to face teachers' assistance in the classrooms although you have videos and lectures downloaded through Moodle.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
11	You face difficulties when you do your homework because the courses aren't taught directly from the lecturer in the classroom.	strongly agree	
		agree	
		neutral	
		disagree	
12	It is possible for you to concentrate on the e-learning courses while there are noises, children and other distractors.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
13	When having e-learning during lockdown, you can accomplish your homework before the appointed deadline.	strongly agree	
		agree	
		neutral	
		disagree	
14	During lockdown, internet applications make it possible for you to cooperate with your classmates for discussing the courses and accomplishing homework.	strongly disagree	
		disagree	
		neutral	
		agree	
15	Learning electronically during the lockdown is considered as an opportunity for you to experience unprecedented methods of learning.	strongly agree	
		agree	
		neutral	
		disagree	