



The Effectiveness of Online Learning and Teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language in Turkish Universities

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Abstract

Since (and particularly during) the Covid-19 pandemic, online teaching and learning methods have been adopted worldwide by educational institutions to meet the needs of students; Teaching Arabic as a foreign language is no exception. This study aims to investigate learners' and teachers' perceptions of learning and teaching Arabic as a foreign language online and the extent to which online learning supported the development of learner autonomy. This study was conducted at two Turkish universities that teach Arabic language as a foreign language. Data was collected through semi-structured online interviews with teachers and students of Arabic and diaries from teachers and students. Findings suggest that although online education promoted learner autonomy, it complements face-to-face education rather than replaces it. Findings also reveal that social media has a role in supporting online learning and that there is a need for more training for teachers in technology and curriculum. Based on the results, a set of pedagogical implications and recommendations for language teachers and policy makers are discussed.

Keywords: Language Teaching, Teaching Arabic as a Second Language, Online Language Teaching, Online Language Teachers, Online Language Learners

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought significant disruptions to education systems worldwide with a shift to online teaching resulting in significant changes in higher education pedagogy¹. The transition to online learning and teaching has been described as Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) defined as “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances”². Due to the abrupt move to ERT, teachers and administrations worldwide were unprepared and had to quickly construct emergency remote learning systems and modify their lesson plans, teaching strategies and assessment techniques³. Even though many institutions had used online education before, many professors and students did not have enough time to become accustomed to it. Teachers and students had to explore a range of online channels and platforms⁴ including the use of a Learning Management System (LMS) through distance learning or the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Foreign language teaching at educational institutions was no exception from the difficulties involved in shifting abruptly to online education. The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language as well as English and other languages switched to online platforms. Many language teachers had to undergo digital transformation overnight, overcome their fear of technology, change to teaching in new and challenging situations with little planning and training and work hard to ensure a successful educational process⁵.

Students also faced the challenge of adapting to this transition. Students have previously received their foreign language courses through face-to-face teaching, but due to Covid-19, they were forced to rely on their own technology resources

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- 1 Saloshna Vandeyar, “Educational Transmogrification: From Panicgogy to Pedagogy of Compassion,” *Teaching in Higher Education* 0, no. 0 (July 13, 2021): 1–13.
 - 2 Charles Hodges, Stephanie Moore, and Aaron Bond, “The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning,” *EDUCAUSE Review*, (January 1, 2020): 7. https://www.academia.edu/42679104/The_Difference_Between_Emergency_Remote_Teaching_and_Online_Learning.
 - 3 Lorico DS. Lapitan et al., “An Effective Blended Online Teaching and Learning Strategy during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Education for Chemical Engineers* 35 (April 1, 2021): 116–31.
 - 4 Aras Bozkurt and Ramesh C Sharma, “Emergency Remote Teaching in a Time of Global Crisis Due to CoronaVirus Pandemic,” *Asian Journal of Distance Education* 15, no. 1 (April 30, 2020): i–vi.
 - 5 Blasius Agha-ah Chiatoh and Jude Chia, “The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Challenge of Teaching English Online in Higher Institutions of Learning in Cameroon,” *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* 2, no. 5 (2020), <https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jeltal/article/view/745>.

to continue learning remotely online; social media and email among others.^{6 7}. Therefore, students had to develop more learner autonomy and become more independent learners.

Whilst there has been a number of studies exploring the sudden move to ERT in English language teaching contexts^{8 9}, there is a paucity of research which examines the move to the online teaching of Arabic as a foreign language. Given the significant impact on teaching and learning, and to inform future online teaching and learning practices, it seems germane to investigate the perceptions of teachers and learners on the affordance and difficulties of implementing online learning, as well as the prospects for increasing learner autonomy. It is also important to propose recommendations for improving online learning and teaching for post Covid-19 pandemic contexts so that institutions can adopt an appropriate pedagogy and avoid the jump to ERT. The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers and students in two Turkish universities perceived online learning in the under-researched area of Arabic as a foreign language, as well as to investigate the extent to which online learning could facilitate learner autonomy.

Literature review

As technology advances and user experience improves, several studies^{10 11 12} stress the effectiveness of online education when compared with traditional education. Online education connects students and teachers around the world, offers flexible

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- 6 Lapitan et al., "An Effective Blended Online Teaching and Learning Strategy during the COVID-19 Pandemic."
 - 7 Peter D. MacIntyre, Tammy Gregersen, and Sarah Mercer, "Language Teachers' Coping Strategies during the Covid-19 Conversion to Online Teaching: Correlations with Stress, Wellbeing and Negative Emotions," *System* 94 (November 1, 2020).
 - 8 Joseph Arthur Davies et al., "Responding to COVID-19 in EAP Contexts: A Comparison of Courses at Four Sino-Foreign Universities," *International Journal of TESOL Studies* 2, no. 2 (2020).
 - 9 Haifeng Pu, "Implementing Online ELT in the Time of Crisis: Ordeal or Opportunity?" *ELT Journal* 74, no. 3 (August 28, 2020): 345–48.
 - 10 Nord Anglia, "The Importance of Online Learning to Students and Teachers," 2021, <https://www.nordangliaeducation.com/news/2021/03/17/the-importance-of-online-learning-to-students-and-teachers>.
 - 11 Gina Ionela Butnaru et al., "The Effectiveness of Online Education during Covid 19 Pandemic—A Comparative Analysis between the Perceptions of Academic Students and High School Students from Romania," *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (January 2021): 5311.
 - 12 Lapitan et al., "An Effective Blended Online Teaching and Learning Strategy during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

learning hours, creates their own learning environment, and provides students with more control over their education¹³. However, some researchers suggest that understanding the perceptions of students is important in order to strengthen the effectiveness of online learning^{14 15 16 17}.

One of the main advantages of online learning is that it allows learners to consider their own learning patterns and promotes their autonomy. Although the idea of learner autonomy is not entirely new, it has recently come to the attention of researchers studying foreign language learning¹⁸. Previously, learner autonomy was linked to adult development and self-access learning methods, while assessing the ability of learners to do things on their own. The understanding of learner autonomy has changed as a result of the rise of learner-centered theories at the turn of the century. Now, rather than emphasizing autonomous learning, the focus is on what students can do to advance their learning¹⁹.

One of the foundational definitions of learner autonomy is the “ability to take charge of one’s own learning”²⁰. This definition was established on the foundation that learners should have the freedom which is based on developing their own abilities to be able to take actions responsibly and develop their learning as a result. With this in mind, some researchers argued against the individualistic interpretation of learner autonomy and stressed that it is “a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person”²¹. In this regard, pedagogical practices of learner autonomy include: the reflective capacity of learning through action, the capacity to adapt to the situation and

13 Anglia, “The Importance of Online Learning to Students and Teachers.”

14 Muhammad Adnan and Kainat Anwar, “Online Learning amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Students Perspectives,” *Journal of Pedagogical Research* 1 (June 21, 2020): 45–51.

15 Alaa Alkhafaji et al., “A Set of Challenges for Setting Distance-Learning Environments Based on University Students’ Experience at the Covid-19 Pandemic Time in Iraq,” February 22, 2021.

16 Abhinandan Kulal and Anupama Nayak, “A Study on Perception of Teachers and Students toward Online Classes in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi District,” *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 2020): 285–96.

17 T. Muthuprasad et al., “Students’ Perception and Preference for Online Education in India during COVID -19 Pandemic,” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 100101.

18 Andrzej Cirocki, *Developing Learner Autonomy through Tasks - Theory, Research, Practice* (Halifax: LinguaBooks, 2016).

19 David Little, “Language Learner Autonomy: Some Fundamental Considerations Revisited,” *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 1, no. 1 (April 16, 2007): 14–29.

20 Henri Holec, *Autonomy and foreign language learning*, Council of Europe modern languages project (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981): 1.

21 Len’ Dam et al., “Towards a Definition of Autonomy,” in *Third Nordic Workshop on Developing Autonomous Learning in the FL Classroom* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 1990): 96–103.

context and the capacity to learn from others²². At the micro-level, autonomous learners determine goals, assess what has been learned and take responsibility for their learning process²³.

One of the learning platforms that has been studied in relation to learner autonomy is online learning and distance learning. A number of studies have explored the extent to which technology could develop learner autonomy in language learning^{24 25 26}. These studies have identified the immense potential of technological advancements to give language learners greater control over their education and greater freedom of choice. For example, in order to conduct their own learning in the context of their circumstances, language learners, as well as learners in general, choose their own pace and choose their own location and time for learning. The vast variety and availability of online learning materials means that “learners could select what is valuable and worth doing according to a personally held criterion”²⁷. In addition, educational technologies offer platforms and opportunities for meaningful interaction in a digital, social environment. When such interactions result in successful communication, learners’ self-confidence increases and this could lead to promoting learner autonomy. Moreover, technologies such as video calls through different softwares (Teams, Skype, Zoom, etc) are convenient to speak in real-time despite being in separate geographical locations. Other connected online resources, such as discussion boards and chat rooms, give language learners social, real, and collaborative learning experiences where they can cooperate and share learning responsibility²⁸.

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- 22 Rahima Arib, Phd Student, and Salima Maouche, “Teachers’ Readiness for Learner Autonomy in Teaching/Learning English as a Foreign Language in the Algerian Context.” 06 (December 31, 2021): 1013–30.
 - 23 Xue Wang and Wei Zhang, “Improvement of Students’ Autonomous Learning Behavior by Optimizing Foreign Language Blended Learning Mode,” *SAGE Open* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 1-10.
 - 24 Phil Benson, “Language Learning and Teaching Beyond the Classroom: An Introduction to the Field,” in *Beyond the Language Classroom* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 7–16.
 - 25 Hayo Reinders and Cynthia White, “Learner Autonomy and New Learning Environments,” *Language Learning & Technology* 15 (3) (October 2011), <https://www.researchbank.ac.nz/handle/10652/2497>.
 - 26 Qunyan Maggie Zhong, “The Evolution of Learner Autonomy in Online Environments: A Case Study in a New Zealand Context,” *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* 9, no. 1 (April 12, 2018): 71–85.
 - 27 Zhong, “The Evolution of Learner Autonomy in Online Environments: A Case Study in a New Zealand Context,” 71–85.
 - 28 Carol K. K. Chan and Yuen-Yan Chan, “Students’ Views of Collaboration and Online Participation in Knowledge Forum,” *Computers & Education* 57, no. 1 (2011): 1445.

Although online language learning could be effective in promoting learner autonomy, some researchers²⁹ point out that online learning might need more planning, time and strict attention than doing so in a traditional classroom setting to develop autonomous learners. In addition, in a study conducted, the author states that it is not clear how language learners engage in the use of technologies to mediate their language learning³⁰.

Several studies have emphasized the advantages of online education. For example, in one of the studies conducted, the authors examined how teachers and students in the Dakshina Kannada and Udupi Districts in Karnataka perceived online classes³¹. The findings of their study showed that students were satisfied with classes online and felt that teachers provided sufficient support. Similarly, perceptions and preferences of agricultural students at an Indian university towards online learning were investigated.³² According to the study's findings, the majority of students during COVID-19 exhibited a favorable attitude toward online learning. Online education was deemed to be advantageous since it offered learners ease and flexibility³².

Also, a similar study with the same objectives was conducted in Pakistan³³. The objectives were: a) to investigate the effectiveness of online learning in Pakistan from the viewpoints of higher education students; and b) to highlight the difficulties and barriers to online learning that higher education students in Pakistan encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of the study demonstrated that online learning helped in protecting teachers' and students' health during COVID-19 and also in ensuring the continuation of the courses offered by the universities. In the same vein, in a similar study the authors investigated university students' perspectives and attitudes towards distance-learning in Iraq and examined challenges students might face when completing educational tasks

29 Jérôme Eneau and Christine Develotte, "Working Online Together to Enhance Learner Autonomy," *ReCALL* 24 (January 4, 2012): 3–19.

30 Zhong, "The Evolution of Learner Autonomy in Online Environments: A Case Study in a New Zealand Context," 73.

31 Kulal and Nayak, "A Study on Perception of Teachers and Students toward Online Classes in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi District," 285-296.

32 Muthuprasad et al., "Students' Perception and Preference for Online Education in India during COVID -19 Pandemic".

33 Adnan and Anwar, "Online Learning amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Students Perspectives," 45-51.

online during the pandemic³⁴. The authors also found that students were able to adapt to the sudden change within a short period of time, continue their academic progress, and acquire new skills despite their lack of familiarity with distance learning. However, despite the positive findings in this study, particularly in terms of cost and time-effectiveness, safety, convenience, and improved participation, the students stated that online classes cannot replace traditional classroom teaching.

The Covid-19 epidemic has had a huge impact on both the teaching and learning of foreign languages as well as the educational systems utilized in schools and universities all over the world. For example, in one of the studies, the importance of online foreign language courses was reviewed for advanced level students³⁵. In this study, the author aimed to fill a research gap by examining the benefits of an undergraduate advanced-level Spanish course that was delivered online during a university summer session³⁵. The results showed significant gains in Spanish knowledge, thereby supporting the effectiveness of online courses. Students particularly highlighted the advantages of the self-paced nature of the course (i.e. flexibility) because it allowed them to complete assignments at their own pace and convenience, while also helping them to develop important time management skills overall. The students also discussed several obstacles, some of which may be connected to the course's fast-paced nature³⁵.

Similarly, in another study, the authors investigated the effect of a distance education method implemented for the first time on students' ability to learn a foreign language³⁶. The research groups of the study consisted of two groups of students learning a foreign language (either English or Arabic) through e-learning tools. The findings of the study showed that the distance education method improved language learning by allowing students to use class time more flexibly for more effective learning. The application of the distance education method showed a gain in considerable advantages for students and teachers. Most notably students were able to work and use courses more flexibly regardless of time and place³⁶.

When it comes to online teaching Arabic; a number of studies have found significant benefits for students of learning Arabic as a foreign language online. For example, a study was conducted to explore how technology is used in the classroom

34 Alkhafaji et al., "A Set of Challenges for Setting Distance-Learning Environments Based on University Students' Experience at the Covid-19 Pandemic Time in Iraq," February 2021.

35 Elizabeth Enkin, "Intensive Online Foreign Language Learning at the Advanced Level: Insights from a Summer Online Spanish Course," *Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies* 11, no. 1 (April 1, 2017): 67-86.

36 Cemal Aktürk and S. Gulsecen, "Foreign Language Education and E-Learning," *Glokalde* 2 (January 2017).

to teach Arabic as a Foreign Language (FL) to university students in the United States³⁷. The results of his study showed that the utilization of technological tools in the classroom enhanced students' Arabic language skills, particularly in terms of listening skills for beginners. Also, a similar study was conducted to find out how students of an Arabic Language Department felt about using Facebook and other social media platforms for learning the Arabic language³⁸. The majority of participants claimed that using social media to learn Arabic had several advantages. It is important to note, nevertheless, that those who had a negative opinion of social media as a tool for learning Arabic argued that social media distracted them from their studies and used up a lot of their time³⁸.

The present study investigates the effectiveness of students' and teachers' perceptions of online education with a particular focus on Arabic as a foreign language in two Turkish universities: MAU and OMY. This study is significant since its main purpose is to highlight the importance of studying these environments and how they impact the teaching/learning experience with a particular focus on Arabic as a foreign language in two Turkish universities: Ondokuz Mayıs University (OMU) and Mardin Artuklu University (MAU). At Ondokuz Mayıs University and Mardin Artuklu University, Arabic as a foreign language has traditionally been taught on campus in person. However, with the move to ERT, students were required to continue their studies entirely online. With this increased use of online platforms for language learning, it became timely to conduct more research and investigate how students and teachers view online learning and teaching, and in particular, to explore the extent to which the online learning opportunities developed learners' abilities to work independently.

This study also highlights the importance of learner autonomy, which is viewed by Little (1991) (as cited in³⁹ and ⁴⁰) as the learner's ability and willingness to exercise some control over their learning and act independently. This study fills in some of the knowledge gaps about students' and teachers' experiences with studying

37 Samir El Omari, "The Effect of Computer-Assisted Language Learning on Improving Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) in Higher Education in the United States," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, The Proceedings of 2nd Global Conference on Conference on Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching, 192 (June 24, 2015): 621–28.

38 Risna Rianti Sari and Albar Adetary Hasibuan, "Students' Perception toward Social Media Assisted Language Learning (SMALL) for Arabic Learning," *Journal of Arabic Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature* 2 (2019): 101–14.

39 Musarat Yasmin and Ayesha Sohail, "Learner Autonomy: Pakistani English Teachers' Perceptions" *Bulletin of Education and Research* 40 (2) (August 2018): 179–94.

40 Richard Smith, "Learner Autonomy," *ELT Journal* 62 (4) (October 1, 2008): 395–97.

and teaching Arabic as a foreign language online. The study also provides some important pointers and recommendations to improve the learning and teaching of Arabic as a foreign language online not for the foreseeable future.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are Arabic as a foreign language learners' perceptions of the online learning experience in Turkish universities?
2. What are Arabic as a foreign language teachers' perceptions of the online teaching experience in Turkish universities?
3. To what extent does online learning enhance learner autonomy?
4. How can we develop the online learning of Arabic as a foreign language to encourage learner autonomy?

Method

This study follows a qualitative approach, which involves using two qualitative research instruments: semi-structured interviews and diaries. Qualitative research has the potential to provide rich and in-depth perspectives and insights into the phenomenon under investigation and to gain a thorough understanding of social phenomena in their natural contexts⁴¹. This type of research aims at examining aspects of human life, such as culture, expression, beliefs, morals, stress in daily life as well as discovering the underlying motives and desires, using in-depth interviews for the purpose. In this regard, qualitative research seeks to answer not just 'what' but also 'how' and 'why' individuals believe or think the way they do. In-depth interviews and open-ended questions are used in this kind of study to encourage participants to express their ideas and views openly with no limitations and to explore the underlying motivations.

Participants

The study sample consists of teachers and students of two Turkish state universities (MAU and OMU) (see Table 1).

41 John W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (Boston: Pearson, 2015).

Table 1.
OMU and MAU Study Sample

University	Teachers		Students		Diaries	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Teachers	Students
OMU	4	1	4	6	-	3
MAU	5	0	5	5	3	2
Total	10		20		8	

As seen in Table 1, the total number of participants who were interviewed was 30 teachers and students. The majority of those who agreed to conduct these interviews were males. The teachers' age ranged between 28 and 55 years and they teach undergraduates and students in the Preparatory programme. The students were also undergraduates or in the Preparatory programme. The teachers and students who were interviewed were assigned numbers from 1 to 10 to code their identity. For example, a teacher from OMU or MAU is referred to as OT1 or MT1. Similarly, a student from OMU or MAU is referred to OS1 or MS1.

Data collection tools

Ethical approval was granted by one of the researchers' institution (Birkbeck, University of London). Prior to the data collection process, participating students and teachers were given detailed information about the research topic. Also, informed consent was given by all participants. It was emphasized that informants' participation was entirely voluntary and they were free to end it at any time without having to give a reason.

Given the intended objectives of this research, semi-structured interviews and diaries were selected as the data collection methods. In the qualitative approach, the researcher gathered comprehensive data in semi-structured interviews in a relatively conversational manner^{42 43}. To gather data in this approach, the researcher used a predefined set of questions⁴⁴. However, if an interesting or novel line of inquiry emerged throughout the interview process, the approach enabled the researcher to pose further inquiries.

As for the diary studies, they are a type of qualitative data collection technique for user behaviours, activities, and experiences across time. Participants in a diary

42 William Adams, "Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews," in *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, Fourth Edition (Jossey-Bass, 2015), 494–505.

43 Margaret C. Harrell and Melissa A. Bradley, "Data Collection Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups" (RAND Corporation, December 14, 2009), https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR718.html.

44 Harrell and Bradley, "Data Collection Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups".

study self-report data longitudinally, or over a lengthy period of time, which might last anywhere from a few days to a month or longer⁴⁵. As a result, in this study these methods were used in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation because they may have quickly provided information about the topic, the problem and the research objectives. In addition, this is usually done through qualitative enquiry. Also, diary assessment is complimentary to questionnaire and interview approaches, it is not a replacement for them⁴⁶. One of the benefits of using diaries is they foster autonomous learning, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition, students can express their own issues they have with the course material⁴⁷.

In this study, 8 participants wrote diaries: two teachers from MAU, 3 students from OMU, and 3 students from MAU. They were asked to write diaries for 4-6 weeks about learning and teaching Arabic online. The students were asked to record their Arabic learning experiences, challenges and any interesting aspect of Arabic learning each week. They were also encouraged to write as much or as little as they liked about the prompts given. Having done so, they were asked to send these diaries either weekly or when requested by the researchers. As for the teachers, they were asked to record their remarks and experiences about online Arabic teaching, challenges in teaching Arabic online, and online activities to promote learner autonomy. To ensure that students would not be deterred from recording reflections they felt they could not adequately write in the foreign language due to linguistic limitations or a lack of confidence in the use of Arabic, they were given the option to write in either Turkish, their native language, or Arabic. The students were also told their diaries would not be revised as the focus would not be on correct language⁴⁸.

For the semi-structured interviews which were conducted individually for each participant via Zoom, open-ended questions that met the research aims were prepared (See Appendix A and B). Each interview with a teacher or a student lasted for an average of 60 minutes. Questions were divided into two parts: students questions

45 Kim Salazar, "Diary Studies: Understanding Long-Term User Behavior and Experiences," Nielsen Norman Group, 2016, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/diary-studies/>.

46 Ann Bowling, *EBOOK: Research Methods in Health: Investigating Health and Health Services* (UK: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014).

47 David Nunan, *Research Methods in Language Learning* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

48 Melina Porto, "Learning Diaries in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom: A Tool for Accessing Learners' Perceptions of Lessons and Developing Learner Autonomy and Reflection," *Foreign Language Annals* 40 (December 31, 2008): 672–96.

and teachers questions. These questions focused on teachers' experiences, learners' experiences, curriculum, interactive exercises, educational skills, interaction and communication tools, and technical matters. For the diaries, WordPress was used so that participants could document their experiences, perceptions, and activities during the time of the study.

Data Analysis

Because the sample size was not large in this study, the interviews were piloted on one teacher and one student using both languages (Arabic and Turkish) to test their validity and strength and to ensure that no issues would arise throughout the study. The idea of conducting this pilot study was due to the important function it has in the research process. Pilot studies serve a variety of crucial purposes and can be a great resource for other researchers^{49 50}. One advantage of performing a pilot study is to identify any weaknesses in the main study, potential gaps in research protocols, and any methodologies or equipment that may be inappropriate or overly complex for participants. Pilot studies may also look for potential issues with carrying out the research approach practically. It is worth mentioning that data obtained from these piloted interviews were not included in the study for analysis⁵⁰.

Thematic analysis was used in this study to analyse qualitative data. This method is known to be the most commonly used method of qualitative data analysis because of its accessibility and flexibility. Thematic analysis helps in identifying, organising and providing insights into themes that emerge from a dataset⁵¹.

There are five processes to thematic analysis; becoming familiar with the data, creating initial codes, looking for themes, defining and labeling themes, and producing the final report⁵²: In this context; the interviews were transcribed and the analysis was carried out through NVivo software and Excel to categorise data according to the research questions, tools mentioned, and perceptions of positive and negative effect on online teaching and learning. Diaries were collected, translated

49 Zailinawati Abu Hassan, Peter Schattner, and Danielle Mazza, "Doing A Pilot Study: Why Is It Essential?" *Malaysian Family Physician: The Official Journal of the Academy of Family Physicians of Malaysia* 1 (2–3) (August 31, 2006): 70–73.

50 Edwin Van Teijlingen and Vanora Hundley, "The Importance of Pilot Studies," *Nursing Standard (Royal College of Nursing (Great Britain): 1987)* 16 (June 19, 2002): 33–36.

51 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Thematic Analysis," in *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol. 2. Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological* (2012), 57–71.

52 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2) (January 2006): 77–101.

and put into Word documents for a thorough analysis to identify emerging themes through multiple rounds of coding by the researchers. The thematic analysis led to development of a number of themes (see below).

Findings

Responses from the semi-structured interviews with students and teachers revealed five main themes related to the participants' perceptions and experiences of the effectiveness of online teaching and learning of Arabic as a foreign language. The five themes which were also based on the research questions were determined as: the effectiveness of online teaching, tools and technology, pros and cons, development and appropriateness and learner autonomy. These themes will be explored in this section.

Students' perceptions and experiences

Effectiveness, curricula and exercises

In asking the students about the effectiveness of online learning, the answers obtained showed that for some students (six students out of twenty from both OMU and MAU) it was effective in comparison with face-to-face learning. For instance, OS2 said:

"For me online learning was very effective. Four months ago, I didn't know how to say anything in Arabic except my name. And now with only online lessons (4 hours/day), I have improved my Arabic language skills a lot."

Similarly, OS3 said:

"Thanks to online learning, we have access to a variety of audio-visual materials. Although we may have problems with online learning (such as bad communication), I think it encourages you to be quick and practical."

Also, MS3 believed that

"Online learning is effective. Thanks to online learning, we can attend Arabic lessons anywhere in the world by clicking on a link or via social media. However, the downside is that we are not physically present with the teacher."

In OS2's diary, the participant recorded:

"We feel comfortable because lessons are recorded. This means we can listen to these lessons at home and at any time."

However, other students from OMU and MAU (eight students) still believe online learning is effective but not as effective as face-to-face learning. For example,

OS1 stated:

“Online learning is not as effective as face-to-face learning. It is only 80% effective, and even today both students and teachers still have gaps in how they teach and learn online.”

Similarly, MS9 believed that

“Online learning has its pros and cons. In terms of the positive, the Internet provides us with the opportunity to re-listen to the lesson. As for the negatives, I think that face-to-face is a more effective way of learning. The verbal exchanges and the relationship between teachers and students are better because gestures and facial expressions are clearer. This makes learning more effective. In online learning, there is only one way to teach: give lectures and then answer students’ questions - dialogue is missing.”

However, some students from OMU and MAU (six students) thought that online learning was not effective. For example, participant OS7 believed that

“Online learning wasn’t effective for me. Online learning has its pros and cons. For me, it was difficult because I started to have problems with my eyesight because I used a computer constantly. I prefer learning face to face, not only for Arabic but for all lessons.”

Also, a student from MAU had a similar opinion. MS4 said:

“For me personally, it was not very effective. Especially for practical lessons such as grammar and conversation. Although we can see the teacher online, we are not able to carefully watch how the words are pronounced or their lips move. And sometimes, their voice is not very clear and calm. All of these things reduce its effectiveness - especially for language learning.”

However, to a question about whether the Arabic language curricula are suitable for online learning, participant MS6 responds by saying:

“I believe speaking lessons and the activities used are not appropriate for online learning are not effective. In addition, we have few activities and exercises.”

The student justifies his view by saying two or even three students cannot talk together and at the same time.

Similarly, in response to the same question about the curricula, participant MS3 says:

“Although the activities and exercises used are suitable, I’ve noticed that these activities are not enough and as a result, students have difficulties in learning Arabic.”

Perhaps, as we can note from the above excerpts, this variety in opinions is due to the extent of experience, knowledge and familiarity of this type of education.

In addition to all this; regarding teachers’ capability and technological competence,

OS3 said

“Not all teachers are able to use some online programmes. For example, one of the teachers taught us for two weeks, but unfortunately, we did not benefit from him.”

While MS2 indicated this in their diaries, saying

“My teachers in the preparatory programme were very capable of, and good at teaching Arabic. They not only taught the language, but also made me love it, which, actually, helped me learn it very quickly.”

This could be attributed to the teachers’ experience, the way they deliver it through the lesson and their reliance on active teaching and other methods, even if teaching is online.

After analyzing all the interviews, it was shown that 6 of OMY students praised the teachers’ capability to teach online, and 4 students believed that teachers’ capability for online education should be developed. In MAU, 9 students praised the teachers’ capability to teach online, and 10 students believed that the teachers’ capability to teach online should be developed.

With regard to online exercises, it was found that 8 OMU students said that the exercises were appropriate for online education and 2 students said they were inappropriate. In MAU, 4 students said they were appropriate, while 6 students said they were inappropriate.

What about the *curricula*?

Tools and technology

In order to examine the participants’ views about the use of tools and technologies in online education, they were asked about the technological tools, websites and equipment they used. For instance, one of the students from OMU, OS3 believes that

“different techniques can be implemented in online learning, and that the use of different audio-visual materials makes the lessons more interactive despite being taught from distance.”

Also, OS4, believes that the Global Arabic Open Platform gave him the opportunity to learn Arabic in a completely different way from what he was used to, in addition to YouTube and other sites.

Meanwhile, OS8 added by saying that

“We have benefited from Zoom, Google Meet, and Class Room to learn Arabic this year, and the Global Arabic Open Platform, in particular, had a great role in improving my pronunciation.”

Similarly, MS1 added that besides Zoom, WhatsApp and Classroom, we use ‘Tevakku’ dictionary software, Google Translate and social media. Regarding the tools, OS4 added:

“I have my own computer and my smartphone, and the Internet works fine, so I have everything necessary.”

Also, MS10 added:

“I only have a smartphone, and what I miss is a computer.”

So, as there is a range of remote learning tools available, most of the students in their use stated that they use some programmes and platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meet, Facebook, WhatsApp, among others.

After analysing all of the interviews, it was revealed that (10) OMU students prefer to use technology and other sites while learning online. As for MAU, (8) students prefer it as well, while (2) students do not. In terms of equipment and tools, it was shown that (8) of OMU students have all the necessary equipment (such as a laptop, a smart phone, and a tablet) for online learning, while (2) students have their mobile phones only for online learning. And for MAU, it was found that (3) students had all the equipment, and (7) students had some equipment. These results show the extent of their use of these tools in both universities and the availability of the necessary equipment as well.

The benefits and challenges of online learning

In order to examine the participants’ views on the pros and cons of the online context, they were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of learning Arabic online. For example, OS1 sees that

“The pros are more than the cons. For example, there is a person-to-person interaction online. In a face-to-face environment, the classrooms are crowded and there is no opportunity for special attention to students. In online learning, the teacher can interact with you individually. For example, the teacher looks at your work and tries to make you talk about it.”

Also, MS3 believes that:

“Online learning saves time because you do not have to travel or commute to university; and from home you can attend classes all over the world.”

Meanwhile, OS4 adds that:

“We can attend classes in an interactive manner, and we can do this outside of our daily activities, that is, I can attend many classes online in addition to university courses.”

Regarding the drawbacks, OS2 indicated in their diary that

“Some technical problems such as poor internet can cause a problem and disrupt lessons. For example, some students may not pay attention and forget to mute their microphones.”

Student OS4 added that:

“There is no classroom in an online environment and students’ interaction with the teacher is less, which affects the quality of learning.”

Here, too, it is clearly seen that the disadvantages may vary, depending on the circumstances, skills and equipment. However, after reviewing all opinions and analysing all interviews, it was found that some OMU students (5 students) prefer to learn online and 5 students do not. In MAU, 4 students prefer online education and 6 students do not.

Development and appropriateness of online learning

Participants were also asked about their suggestions for developing online education and if online education is suitable for learning Arabic as a foreign language. For instance, OS1 suggests that:

“More evaluations (tests or research assignments) can be conducted on the topics immediately after the courses or during the semester or academic year.”

Meanwhile, OS2 believes that

“The speaking part should last a little longer as well. Online learning should continue even when we return to face-to-face learning, and the integration of the two will be beneficial to students, teachers and institutions.”

On the other hand, OS3 believes that

“Students should prepare by reading articles, practicing exercises, watching videos, or using other resources before joining the lesson, and that students’ communication with each other before the lesson and after the lesson is very important.”

Also, OS4 recommended that:

“The number of students in the virtual classroom should not exceed 6-7 members as a maximum. The higher the number, the more chaos and noise there is.”

After examining the findings, it is found that 8 OMU students think that it is important to combine online and face-to-face learning while 2 students see it as unimportant. As for MAU students, 5 students see the integration of online learning and face-to-face learning as important, while 5 students see it as unimportant.

Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy has been a prominent theme that appeared regularly in the data. For example, student OS1 says he has developed himself as an autonomous learner through self-discipline at home with his lessons; so, he prepared a schedule based on his training sessions and tried to follow them exactly. The participant also says:

“Sometimes I feel I am more dependent on the teacher and need more help from my teacher. When we had face-to-face lessons, we had the opportunity to meet the teacher and ask him questions in person, but with online learning, we don’t have that opportunity.”

As for OS2, he says:

“When we were having face-to-face lessons, we used to ask questions and get instant answers. In online learning, we try to find the answers ourselves. This makes us less dependent on the teacher. For example, when I am not sure of a task or concept, I first try to understand it myself. If it does not become clear then ask friends and at the end ask the teacher. This makes us more independent and helps us learn better. It also makes us learn how to do research.”

A similar idea was recorded in OS2’s diary. It was stated:

“I can learn the Arabic language through new programs that I did not know before. This week, I learned some useful programs through which I learn Arabic by myself.”

However, OS3, OS8 and MS3 believe that they are now more dependent on the teacher.

For example, MS3 said

“I think we are more dependent on the teacher. When we were in a face-to-face environment, if I did not understand something, I could ask my classmates. But in online learning, I can’t be sure of my classmates’ information. In a face-to-face environment, I can ask my classmates or other teachers. In online learning we have to rely on our teachers.”

Similarly, OS8 said

“I think we are more dependent on the teacher. This is mainly because we are unable to interact with our classmates. We cannot take advantage of their knowledge. In face-to-face learning, we are able to interact with others more, but in online learning we rely only on the teacher.”

After analysing the interviews, it was found that online education provided 10 OMU students with opportunities to research and read more, and in MAU 7 students see this as well. As for learner autonomy, 9 OMU students believe that online education has increased their autonomy while learning, and 3 of MAU students see it as well.

Teachers' perceptions and experiences

Teachers are another crucial component of online education. Their aptitude for managing online lessons and interest in doing so are crucial factors. Because some teachers might not always be competent to teach courses online, there are problems about how teachers view online classes and whether they can manage online programs. Therefore, like the questions asked to students while conducting the interviews, the teachers were also asked about online teaching in terms of effectiveness, tools and technology, pros and cons, development, appropriateness and learner autonomy.

Effectiveness, curricula and exercises

Participant OT1, a teacher at OMU, states that he tried online teaching for a long time, but he believes that:

“Today’s curricula are not suitable for online education. We need more appropriate interactive curricula and suitable exercises as well.”

Meanwhile, OT2 adds:

“If we give direct education 100% in terms of interaction, we might give online education between 70 and 75%.”

He also added that:

“The teacher is the one who adapts the curriculum, and not the curriculum that adapts the teacher. The curricula are appropriate to some extent, but not enough on their own. Rather, they must have aids from the teacher’s designs and other programs.”

After reading and examining all the interviews, it is found that 5 of OMU teachers have already tried teaching online and have long experience in this field, while 3 of MAU teachers have tried online teaching, while 2 teachers have not.

Also, 3 OMU teachers believe it is appropriate to teach Arabic online because online language teaching offers diverse options and flexibility so that students and teachers can get the most out of a lesson, while 2 teachers see it as inappropriate. In MAU, 2 teachers see an opportunity to teach Arabic online, and 3 teachers see it as inappropriate. As for the curricula and exercises, 1 OMU teacher believes that the curricula and exercises are suitable for teaching Arabic online, while 4 teachers think they are not suitable for that. As for MAU, 5 teachers think the curricula are not appropriate for this.

Tools and technology

In order to examine participants' views about the use of tools and technologies in online education, they were asked about the technological tools, websites and equipment they used. For instance, one of the teachers from OMU, OT1 said:

“I use many teaching aids such as computers, smartphones, smart boards. For social media, I use WhatsApp. Communication via Google is much better than through WhatsApp and Google Classroom. In Zoom, you can control assignment and teaching. I also use Google forms in exams.”

Whereas Participant MT1 said

“I used the laptop with its built-in devices, the internet connection, in addition to a traditional blackboard that I put in front of the camera and use with colour pens. For the websites, I used the university website (LMS) and ZOOM. I found Zoom more useful. I used WhatsApp for coordination and personal communication. I also guided the students to the Al Jazeera Net website for teaching the Arabic language. It all depends on the personal motivation of the student.”

However, after analysing the interviews, we found that 4 OMU teachers have sufficient technical tools to teach online, while 1 does not. Also, at MAU 4 teachers have technical tools and 1 does not. We believe this is a relative matter that differs from one person to another.

Benefits and challenges of online teaching

In order to examine the participants’ views on the advantages and disadvantages, they were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of teaching Arabic online. For example, MT1 states that:

“Online education saves time, money and effort. A student, anywhere now, can study, also learn, and obtain a degree.”

The same idea was also confirmed in MT1’s diary:

“It’s easy to communicate with students anytime and anywhere, even outside the official hours. In addition, pictures, illustrations, and videos can be used to explain the material to students.”

On the other hand, MT1 believes that:

“We missed direct contact with the student, and now the time is limited and the groups are large.”

Also, MT2 adds that

“There is a lack of seriousness of students in this type of education compared to face-to-face education. In addition, students cannot participate as they like in the lesson. But when they are among their families, they are not being serious. In face-to-face education, they interact more with the teacher and with their colleagues as well. Furthermore, the teacher cannot evaluate the student well.”

Different opinions have been gathered regarding online teaching and it seems that the teachers’ skills and experience with online tools shape their perceptions in relation to online teaching.

Development and appropriateness of online teaching

Participants were also asked about their suggestions for developing online education and if online education is suitable for learning Arabic. For instance, OT3 believes that

“Online education requires a lot of effort and that educational methods must be developed so that we can have a suitable education and provide a variety of educational material. Also, education sites and educational platforms can do this by departing from the classic method of teaching languages and having an educational framework for the Arabic language because the features and characteristics of the Arabic language differ from other languages in some respects, but not all.”

Whereas MT1, a teacher at MAU notes:

“The materials were not prepared for distance education, and the teacher was not prepared for distance education, as well as the teacher. When we teach conversation, we want the student to speak. The program is not suitable for distance education because it does not allow everyone to speak, and the same is true in the reading lesson. Likewise, the teacher did not receive training courses in this education, nor even some instructions and guidance for this education.”

Through our research, it is found that Arabic language learning needs more support, especially in terms of online education and making scientific materials more interactive.

Through analysis of all of the interviews in this regard, it is noted that 3 OMU teachers believe that students interact with them during the lesson in this type of education, while 2 teachers believe that students do not interact with them. In addition, in MAU, the percentage was also the same.

Moreover, 3 OMU teachers prefer online education and 2 teachers prefer face-to-face education, while at MAU, 2 teachers prefer online education and 3 teachers prefer face-to-face education. Meanwhile, teachers of OMU and MAU agree 100% on the need to develop curricula to fit online education as indicated in the interviews.

Learner autonomy

In order to examine teachers' views about the contributions of the teacher to enhancing learner autonomy, the teachers at OMU and MAU were asked a number of questions in this regard. For instance, OT1 said:

“I can enhance the student's autonomy, for example, by asking the student to find a certain book and summarize it. I can also encourage him, give him a gift, a reward, or grades, or design a gift for him.”

Also, OT2 said:

“Some students have become more autonomous because I don’t just restrict them to the classroom. There is distance education now. When the teacher opens the door for the students, they can start by themselves and try to search, especially when the teacher asks them to do research. Some students have become less autonomous because they tied themselves to the computer only: they do not go or think outside the lesson.”

At the same time, MT5 noted:

“Students are more autonomous in some matters such as when they attend class, how often they watch, and they research learning materials on their own. They are less autonomous in other matters. A student at this age needs some guidance. In this regard, the student does not benefit from the educational aspect provided by the teacher.”

Similarly, the idea of online learning facilitating learner autonomy was confirmed in MT1’s diary. The participant recorded:

“Weak students with poor performance or even shy students won’t be embarrassed before their classmates because they have the freedom to ask the teachers questions privately in case they are assigned a project and they are still not sure how to do it.”

During analysis of the interviews, we found that 4 OMU teachers help their students become autonomous while learning, and that 2 teachers do so at MAU. In addition, 4 OMU teachers see the integration of online education and face-to-face education as important, and 3 MAU teachers see it as important as well.

Based on the above results, most interviewees expressed a positive attitude towards autonomous learning yet they need directions and instructions on how and what to learn. Therefore, when students learn Arabic as a foreign language online, the teacher plays a significant role in leading and directing them to enhance their capacity for autonomous learning. This can be done by enhancing interaction with peers and teacher and also by enhancing students’ cultural awareness of foreign culture as it may influence the learners’ interest in learning the language⁵³. In addition, the appropriate infrastructure for online teaching and learning Arabic should be provided in order to be more effective and achieve the desired goal of learning.

Discussion and recommendations

In the present study, it was pointed out that during the Covid-19 epidemic, online learning became increasingly popular in educational institutions. The effectiveness

53 Guoqiao Wang and Ligang Han, “On the Strategies to Cultivate College Students’ Autonomous English Learning Ability in the New Era,” *English Language Teaching* 13 (October 27, 2020): 94.

of online learning, course satisfaction, and student involvement had been raising concerns among teachers and administrators as academic institutions transitioned from face-to-face instruction to online learning. Meanwhile, a number of studies^{54 55 56 57} were conducted to evaluate the quality of online teaching and learning delivery by identifying students' and teachers' perceptions and course satisfaction. The studies also aimed to ascertain how these environments influence online teaching delivery and students' learning engagement and autonomy and whether online teaching and learning is advantageous for students or has any negative consequences for them. Similarly, it was shown in the present study that the pros of online Arabic education makes learning a positive experience for most students.

One advantage of online Arabic education reported by the participants in this study is that it encourages interaction because hesitant students who might be reluctant to pose a question in front of the class can now do so in a live, one-to-one conversation with the teacher. To make sure that every student is paying attention and involved as learning takes place, teachers on the other hand, have the option of giving online quizzes and editing videos to improve online learning. According to a previous study⁵⁸, it was noted that online learning makes extra opportunities available for interactivity between students and teachers during content delivery. In addition, the flexibility of online learning enables students to gradually understand ideas and make sure they understand them completely before continuing. Again, this contributes to getting better scores.

Another advantage of online Arabic education stated by the participants is that the communication and information-sharing processes enhance the experience of the student when online education is taking place. Students can view lectures online and consult pertinent study materials in a variety of multimedia formats. This also helps teachers by allowing students to incorporate a variety of tools, interactive lessons and videos into their curriculum. In addition, online Arabic education is

54 Adnan and Anwar, "Online Learning amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Students Perspectives," 45-51.

55 Alkhafaji et al., "A Set of Challenges for Setting Distance-Learning Environments Based on University Students' Experience at the Covid-19 Pandemic Time in Iraq."

56 Kulal and Nayak, "A Study on Perception of Teachers and Students toward Online Classes in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi District," 285-296.

57 Muthuprasad et al., "Students' Perception and Preference for Online Education in India during COVID -19 Pandemic."

58 Nicole M. Wagner, Khaled Hassanein, and Milena Head, "Who Is Responsible for E-Learning Success in Higher Education? A Stakeholders' Analysis," *Educational Technology & Society* 11, no. 3 (2008): 26-36.

affordable because both students and teachers no longer have to commute in order to be in a physical classroom location. This ultimately means more cost-effective classes for the student and even the teacher ⁵⁹.

While there are many important advantages to online learning, students face a number of challenges which have limiting or negative effects. In this regard, several studies also claim online learning has drawbacks (see ⁶⁰ for a summary). One of the disadvantages which participants in this study stated is the lack of interpersonal communication. Despite the fact that online classes can really be rather social in character, it is nonetheless the case that most students complete them physically alone. This can be a significant drawback, particularly for students who already spend a lot of time alone at home. So, to be as effective as traditional classes, online education must enable social interaction, for example, by developing tools that motivate students to actively participate in live sessions.

Another disadvantage reported by the students in the present study is related to clarifications and explanations. The effectiveness of online learning was reported not be as high as that of classroom instruction. Face-to-face interactions with the instructors make the learning process considerably simpler. This might imply that online classes require a deep understanding of the different approaches to teaching and learning as well as extra effort by the teacher to create a successful online course.

One more disadvantage reported by the students in the present study has to do with improvement of communication skills in online sessions. Participants indicated that some teachers lack sufficient expertise not only in dealing delivering online communication skills to students but also in dealing with technical equipment. The participants stated that online teaching and learning requires additional training for instructors. This was made very obvious when teachers were required to move entire curricula and courses online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This required a lot of extra work from many teachers, including recording lectures, moving assessments and assignments online, and setting up live video call sessions and portals for submitting homework ⁶¹.

Network and other technological problems could be the biggest disadvantage as reported by both teachers and students in the present study. It was reported by the

59 Valentina Arkorful and Nelly Abaidoo, "The Role of E-Learning, Advantages and Disadvantages of Its Adoption in Higher Education," *International Journal of Education and Research* 2, no. 12 (2014): 397–410.

60 Arkorful and Abaidoo, "The Role of E-Learning, Advantages and Disadvantages of Its Adoption in Higher Education," 397–410.

61 Zakaryia Almahasees, Khaled Mohsen, and Mohammad Omar Amin, "Faculty's and Students' Perceptions of Online Learning During COVID-19," *Frontiers in Education* 6 (May 12, 2021).

participants that although efforts by the government were made to create a reliable internet infrastructure, many smaller towns and communities still struggle to keep a steady connection with enough speed.

In general, the study produced encouraging findings that suggest that teaching Arabic as a foreign language online may be very beneficial if appropriate teacher and student orientation and training programs are put in place, and if online language learning platforms and technologies are up to date. Providing training to teachers in order to use online teaching platforms contributes to the enhancement of instruction quality and teachers' self-confidence⁶².

Despite their lack of familiarity with distance learning, students were nevertheless able to navigate it and continue their study as well as develop new skills. Without the cooperation of their academic institutions and teachers, who responded as swiftly as they could to support students in continuing their academic progress, that would not have been possible. During the Covid-19 pandemic, both teachers and students were happy that their teaching and learning demands were covered in the online teaching and learning environment. Students expressed satisfaction with teachers' online communication strategies and their consistent comments on their online performance. Teachers also provided clear and effective delivery of the online learning materials.

The results also showed that online learning systems are able to make students more active and creative because online learning provides a great opportunity for students to find Arabic learning resources such as books, videos, recordings or other conversational materials on online sites. These results are in line with findings from other studies that stressed the fact that the availability of a wide range of online materials pertains to providing students with opportunities to find what interests them most, hence building their autonomy through setting goals and learning objectives and finding materials that help them achieve these goals⁶³. The high level of learner autonomy was recorded in this study through their satisfaction and willingness to research and read more. These findings also lend support to previous research regarding the availability and range of online learning materials which enable learners to select what is valuable and worth doing⁶⁴.

62 Muhammad and Anwar, "Online Learning amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Students Perspectives," 45-51.

63 Andrzej Cirocki, *Developing Learner Autonomy through Tasks - Theory, Research, Practice* (Halifax: LinguaBooks, 2016).

64 Zhong, "The Evolution of Learner Autonomy in Online Environments: A Case Study in a New Zealand Context," 71-85.

Universities and teachers were capable of making the quick switch from face-to-face to totally virtual learning, but this experience's biggest flaw was the absence of the necessary infrastructures. As a result, students had to work harder and put in more time to keep up with the pace of this transformation. Some students and teachers found it difficult to participate in educational activities from home and via the internet because doing so required a steady internet connection and a peaceful area. Furthermore, some students were burdened financially because they needed to have their own devices and an internet connection.

However, from the views of students and teachers, remote learning was simple to use and beneficial, which may be a sign of things to come for this type of learning in the future. Additionally, students and teachers are becoming more accustomed to the concept of distant learning, which could serve as the basis for creating a successful online learning environment in the future. Despite this favorable attitude toward online education and instruction, the results indicate that, when appropriate, traditional education and face-to-face instruction in physical classrooms are still preferable to virtual instruction. On the other hand, the majority of the participants felt that certain abilities, including speaking, were weak. In fact, in a mixed-methods study that was conducted, the researcher looked into language learners' perceptions of their skills in online versus face-to-face learning⁶⁵ (p. 1). "The comparative results in both contexts show that students have more positive beliefs toward learning a language in face-to-face settings than in online settings". It requires careful planning to incorporate various language abilities into online language courses. Such problems arose since the Covid-19 outbreak was unpredictable and all the educational systems were switched over to distant learning without any prior planning.

It is recommended that educational institutions enhance the quality of online learning delivery in the new environment that was created by the Covid-19 epidemic and beyond based on the study's findings. Educational institutions should hold courses, seminars and international conferences to familiarize teachers with the platforms and online teaching techniques, and provide some recommendations to problems. These professional development courses help practitioners adapt to new changes and grow professionally so that course provision reaches high standards⁶⁶. It is advised that teachers and curriculum experts offer online resources that support

65 Munassir Alhamami, "Learners' Beliefs about Language-Learning Abilities in Face-to-Face & Online Settings," *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 16, no. 1 (September 4, 2019): 31.

66 Thomas S. C. Farrell, *Reflective Practice in L2 Teacher Education* (Routledge Handbooks Online, 2019).

student online learning engagement given the quick transition from face-to-face to online education. To encourage students to feel emotionally, cognitively, and socially involved throughout the online learning process, teachers may structure course materials and use online teaching techniques. Teachers may also improve their online feedback and communication techniques. Teachers should use digital and assistive technology tools during the lesson to make it more effective and interesting. These tools could be educational games, smart boards and the smart wall system, and the use of active learning techniques in the classroom (El Omari, 2015).

The administrators of educational institutions may spend time conducting ongoing assessments of the quality of online learning delivery, student satisfaction with courses, and learner engagement and utilize the outcomes of these assessments to inform policy and academic management decisions. With the new method of instruction, students may be given necessary and suitable online resources and materials to support their online learning requirements and subsequently improve their knowledge, skills, and performance as well as their attitudes toward learning. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, educational institutions may take into account the notion that the success of teaching and learning Arabic, as well as other foreign languages, online depends on the availability of adequate learning resources, teacher facilitation and participation, and meaningful teacher-student or student-student interactions.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Questions - Students

Introductory questions to break the ice:

1. What is your name? How old are you?
2. What do you study?
3. How long have you been learning Arabic?
4. What courses have you studied online?

Skills questions:

1. How do you do conversation lesson with the teacher or with other students online?
2. To what extent is learning Arabic online effective for you?
3. To what extent are the exercises used in an online learning environment appropriate?

Tools and technology questions:

1. What are the technological tools and websites you use during online learning?
2. What equipment do you have for online learning? What equipment is missing?
3. How do you see the ability of teachers to teach Arabic online?

Opinion and evaluation questions:

1. What are the positive things you see about learning Arabic online?
2. What are the negative things you see about learning Arabic online?
3. What are your suggestions for developing online education? How did you develop your autonomy as a learner?
4. To what extent do you think online teaching is suitable for learning Arabic?

Learner autonomy:

1. How does online learning provide you with opportunities to research/read?
2. To what extent can you decide whether you need to ask the teacher about a task or find out yourself?
3. To what extent can you choose activities that will benefit you while learning online?
4. Do you think that you are more or less autonomous/ dependent on the teacher in online learning?

APPENDIX B: Interview Questions - Teachers

Introductory questions to break the ice:

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been teaching Arabic?

Online teaching questions:

1. Have you tried online teaching before? If yes, can you describe your experience?
2. To what extent do you think teaching online is effective?
3. What courses have you taught online?
4. How many students attend the virtual class?

Online Arabic Language Teaching Questions:

1. To what extent do you think online teaching is suitable for learning Arabic?
2. To what extent do you think the courses are suitable for teaching Arabic online?
3. To what extent are the exercises used in an online learning environment appropriate?

Tools and technology questions:

1. What are the technological tools and websites you use during online teaching?
2. What equipment do you have for online teaching?
3. To what extent do you think students interact with you in this type of teaching?

Opinion and evaluation questions:

1. What are the positive things you see about teaching Arabic online?
2. What are the negative things you see about teaching Arabic online?
3. What are your suggestions for developing online education?
4. To what extent do you think online teaching is suitable for learning Arabic?

Questions of teacher contributions to strengthening learner autonomy:

1. How do you contribute to increasing students' research and reading opportunities during online learning?

2. To what extent do you involve students in search for interesting material?
3. How do you enhance the student's self-confidence while choosing educational activities on the Internet?
4. Do you think that students are more or less autonomous with online learning?
How?

