Saudi EFL University Instructors' Perceptions of Online Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Farah N. Algraini

Department of English Language, College of Humanities and Sciences at Hotat Sudair, Majmaah University, Al-Majmaah, 11952, Saudi Arabia

Abstract—This study aimed to investigate the EFL university instructors' perceptions of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were 32; 87.5% of them were females while 12.5% were males. They belonged to many higher educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected using an online questionnaire. This questionnaire included four parts which were (1) the participants' demographic information, (2) the advantages of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) the disadvantages of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and finally (4) the effectiveness of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results revealed that most of the participants had a more dominant positive attitude regarding online learning activities although some of them claimed that there were some negative aspects that should be taken into consideration. Online education is fundamentally characterized by its flexibility, being chargeless, and enabling EFL instructors to think creatively and improve their performance. However, the lack of regulating sinful activities such as cheating, lack of face-to-face social interaction, and poor accessibility to the internet connection were essentially the three significant disadvantages of online education that most of the participants agreed on. Based on the findings obtained, this study provided some recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.

Index Terms—online education, COVID-19, pandemic, EFL, perceptions

I. INTRODUCTION

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world has changed almost all life aspects, especially education. Schools and universities were required to teach online. Before this pandemic, online education was used to support the processes of teaching and learning, but the current situation has turned the educational process to be presented online at all educational levels (Nursalina & Fitrawati, 2021). Online learning is a learning activity that can be performed anywhere if there is an internet connection (Hughes et al., 2002). It is any learning experience that depends on the availability of the internet as the main delivery mode of communication and presentation (Appana, 2008). However, the internet is a perfect learning tool that provides educational environments which are flexible, useful, and suitable for innovating in teaching (Moos & Azevedo, 2009).

In Saudi Arabia, however, all schools and universities have adopted online education to teach all fields using several online platforms such as Blackboard, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. The current researcher observed some EFL instructors in several universities. They demonstrated that teaching the English language online has a positive and negative impact. They emphasized its effectiveness and flexibility in time and place. On the other hand, they claimed that they had some technological difficulties during the pandemic like having less interaction with their students and a lack of internet connection. For some of those EFL instructors, it was a new experience and they had to work on themselves and train to deal with technology properly. Therefore, this study investigated the perceptions of EFL university instructors of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia to get a deeper insight into the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges that happened when conducting online classes during that critical period in the context of Saudi universities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has started in China and gained huge attention in the world due to serious respiratory illness. The first case was discovered on January 30, 2020, so the World Health Organization (WHO) has officially announced the outbreak of COVID-19 as a critically universal health emergency (Habib, 2020). In March 2020, WHO declared that there were 509,167 cases with 23,335 deaths in the world confirming 1012 cases with 3 deaths in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, many countries, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, decided to close all educational institutions (i.e., universities, schools, …etc.) and shifted to online education using several online educational platforms.

B. Online Education

Online education is simply defined as access to learning experiences via several technological tools (Carliner, 2004). According to Anderson (2008), it is a kind of distance education that always provides access to any educational experience which is flexible in time and place more than campus-based education. Online education during the pandemic is defined as teachers and students do not go to schools or any educational institution, but rather they stay home to teach and study using technology such as smartphones, iPads, tablets, and laptops as well as using different platforms such as Blackboard, Zoom, Google Classroom, … etc. (Nursalina & Fitrawati, 2021). Online learning refers to internet-based courses that might be presented synchronously and asynchronously. Synchronous online learning means any type of learning where direct interaction occurs between students and their teachers as what is happening in conferences and online chats. On the other hand, asynchronous online learning is a kind of learning that occurs indirectly (i.e., not at the same time) using independent learning approaches such as blogs, online discussions, Moodle, and other platforms (Susan & Rossen, 2017).

However, online education has been characterized by several benefits such as flexibility in time and place, providing opportunities to establish social relationships among individuals, helping in eliminating barriers that may potentially hinder students' participation like being afraid of talking to others, motivating learners to communicate with others, or allowing each one to study at his/her own pace either slowly or quickly (Sanderson, 2002). Moreover, Dhull and Arora (2017) list additional advantages of online education which are accessibility to learning from anywhere in the world, individuals' ability to plan and monitor their learning, developing teachers' cognitive abilities, cost-effectiveness, learners' capability to publish their works when producing a high-quality something, gaining and improving technical skills when using Information Communication Technology (ICT), providing equal learning chances to all people, and narrowing geographical barriers in the way of education. Regarding the types of online education, Anderson (2008) states some advantages for learners and instructors. He clarifies that asynchronous online learning provides access to online materials anytime while synchronous online learning facilitates real-time communication between students and teachers. Moreover, online education enables individuals to access up-to-date and relevant learning materials and to interact with experts in the field of their study. In terms of teachers, they can tutor anytime and anywhere. They can update their materials whenever they want as well.

On the other hand, according to Dhull and Arora (2017), online education has been criticized for many reasons. It does not allow people to have face-to-face interactions so they cannot build social relationships. In addition, it contributes to decreasing students' motivation and distracting them, especially those who have problems with time management. Moreover, having poor communication with others makes learners feel isolated; this is considered a crucial drawback of online education as Roberts and Mclnnerney (2007) confirm. Furthermore, online education may have a negative psychological influence such as frustration. Frustration is the most permanent feeling associated with online learning in which sometimes individuals cannot log in or links they receive do not work. Besides, computer anxiety is considered a definite problem when students become afraid of interacting with computers and cannot manage them properly (Dhull & Arora, 2017). Almosa (2002) criticizes online education for various reasons such as remoteness and lack of face-to-face interaction. Additionally, he suggests that it is difficult to control some sinful activities such as plagiarism and cheating in exams. He also mentions that not all fields can be taught or studied online such as scientific fields that need practical teaching.

C. EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Online Education During COVID-19 Pandemic

Kusuma et al. (2021) conducted a descriptive case study to investigate the EFL teachers' perceptions of synchronous teacher-student, student-teacher, and student-student interaction via Google Meet during the COVID-19 epidemic. The findings demonstrated that EFL teachers tried to create an attractive educational environment even though they encountered different challenges in online classroom interactions. Chi and Yen (2022) explored the perceptions of EFL high school teachers of online English language education under the impact of COVID-19 by interviewing six EFL high school instructors in the Mekong Delta. The results revealed that the participants, although they faced some obstacles when conducting online classes, had positive attitudes due to the usefulness and simplicity of online education. In addition, Astiandani and Anam (2021) investigated six Indonesian secondary EFL teachers' perceptions towards how they implemented the online formative assessment, the affordances and challenges they faced, and how they dealt with these challenges amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings confirmed that all the participants perceived using the online formative assessment positively because they could provide their students with immediate feedback, improve their students' performance, have flexibility in time and place to submit their assignments, and avoid having a boring time. On the other hand, the participants expressed that the most important obstacles they had were having a slow internet connection, lacking some facilities, and wanting more time to create online tests. Furthermore, Nursalina and Fitrawati (2021) conducted a descriptive quantitative study to investigate 42 EFL teachers' perceptions of online learning activities during the pandemic at high schools in Padang. The findings showed that those participants had quite positive attitudes towards online learning in the pandemic era. Additionally, as a part of their research, Fitri and Putro (2021) analyzed the perceptions of 126 primary and secondary EFL teachers regarding the effectiveness of integrating ICT in their teaching during the epidemic period. The results showed that most of the participants had positive attitudes toward online teaching because it is effective. However, they explained that they faced some problems because of a lack

of internet access, little technical support from schools, and limited knowledge and training in ICT. Aksyah et al. (2021) examined the teachers' perceptions and obstacles they had when they taught English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results confirmed that 55.45% of the participants were against online education due to some technical and situational problems while 44.54% of them preferred this method.

D. Online Education During COVID-19 Pandemic in Saudi Arabia

In their study, Khalil and Alharbi (2022) examined 101 EFL teachers' perceptions of the performance of three e-learning platforms which were Blackboard, Google Classroom, and Zoom during the pandemic era of COVID-19. They asserted, according to the participants' opinions, that the most beneficial platform was Google Classroom followed by Blackboard and Zoom. Moreover, their study revealed that all the participants agreed that online education is healthy, interactive, and helpful with students' depression and mental stress during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In their qualitative study, Saleh and Meccawy (2022) examined 25 EFL teachers' perceptions from the Preparatory Year Program at King Abdulaziz University of online teaching during the pandemic era. The findings clarified four key challenges that EFL teachers encountered. These challenges were basically related to the learners which were lack of physical interaction, lack of participation and attendance, lack of motivation, willingness to cheat in online exams, and not being responsible for their learning process. Moreover, the researchers identified the significant problems related to teachers themselves which were feeling of isolation and lack of online classes control and management. Regarding the system challenges, they mentioned that internet issues and technical difficulties were the most important systemic obstacles. For institutions, time management and having overloading content to be taught in a short amount of time were the basic problems EFL teachers faced. Algethami (2022) explored 161 English language teachers' perceptions from several Saudi universities of their experience with teaching English online during the COVID-19 epidemic era. The findings asserted that Saudi universities were technically ready to immediately shift to the process of online teaching. However, the participants' perceptions were mixed regarding teaching English online because of their personal preferences and different teaching contexts. Moreover, the same result was discovered regarding their attitudes toward the effectiveness of online teaching and assessment. Moreover, Alghamdi (2022) investigated the perceptions of 205 EFL teachers in elementary schools regarding the implementation of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in Saudi Arabia during the critical period of COVID-19. The findings showed that the participants' perceptions were positive and considered MALL a beneficial tool although they encountered some challenges which were students' non-use of mobile phones for academic purposes, lack of internet connection and speed, small screen size, and lack of MALL activities and software.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

To achieve the objective of this study which was about investigating EFL university instructors' perceptions of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, a quantitative approach was used for collecting data, analyzing data, and discussing the results.

A. Participants

The population of this research consisted of EFL university instructors from several Saudi universities. The sample was chosen randomly. It contained 32 participants; 87.5% of them were females while 12.5% were males. They belonged to many higher educational institutions which were Majmaah University, King Saud University, Imam Mohammed Ibn Saud Islamic University, Bisha University, King Abdulaziz University, Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Um Alqura University, King Khalid University, and Technical and Vocational Training Corporation. 40.6% of them had 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, followed by the participants with 16 years and more of teaching experience representing 25%, 18.8% of the participants had 11 to 15 years of teaching experience, and 15.6% of them had 0 to 5 teaching experience years. 62.5% of the participants had not had the experience to teach online before the COVID-19 pandemic while 37.5% had. Moreover, 53.1% of them agreed that they had been trained to teach online during the epidemic era, 34.4% of them agreed that they had the chance to be trained before the pandemic, and 12.5% of them claimed that they had not been trained ever. Regarding the platforms they used during this critical period, the majority of the participants (75%) confirmed that they used Blackboard, 9.4% of them used Zoom, 9.4% used Google Meet, and 6.3% used Microsoft Teams. Furthermore, 56.2% of the participants reported that they have been currently teaching online courses while 43.8% of them have not.

B. Instruments

This study used a five-point Likert questionnaire developed by the researcher containing five options, which were strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. It included four parts. The first part was about collecting the participants' demographic information. The second part focused on the advantages of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic including 10 items. The third part was related to the disadvantages of online education during that era consisting of 10 items. The last part entailed the effectiveness of online education during the epidemic period involving 11 items. Moreover, to ensure that the questionnaire is valid, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient was calculated as shown in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

TABLE 1
THE VALIDITY OF THE PART "ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

Items	Person correlation	Items	Person correlation
1	.627**	6	.458**
2	.710**	7	.561**
3	.518**	8	.606**
4	.525**	9	.594**
5	.571**	10	.526**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

TABLE 2
THE VALIDITY OF THE PART "DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

Items	Person correlation	Items	Person correlation
1	.496**	6	.565**
2	.581**	7	.593**
3	.571**	8	.757**
4	.515**	9	.620**
5	.606**	10	.684**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

TABLE 3
THE VALIDITY OF THE PART "EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

Items	Person correlation	Items	Person correlation
1	.777**	9	-0.065
2	.493**	10	.500**
3	.620**	11	0.048
4	.615**	12	-0.003
5	-0.017	13	.581**
6	.465**	14	.767**
7	.471**	15	.747**
8	.497**	-	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show that all the items of the three parts were valid except items 5, 9, 11, and 12 which belonged to the third part "Effectiveness of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic". Therefore, these items were excluded. Moreover, to check the reliability of the questionnaire, Alpha Cronbach's Stability Coefficient was calculated (Table 4).

TABLE 4
THE RELIABILITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Dimensions	Reliability coefficient
Advantages of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic	.0.741
disadvantages of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic	.0.785
Effectiveness of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic	.0.775
Overall Reliability	**0.814**

If the total is 80% or above, then the instrument becomes reliable (Artstein & Poesio, 2008). Since the result of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.814, the instrument was reliable.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

A Google Form was used to prepare the questionnaire to be sent to EFL university instructors via various modes of social media. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and ranking) were calculated using SPSS (version 25.0) as shown in Tables 5, 6, and 7 to investigate the EFL university instructors' perceptions towards online education during the pandemic of COVID-19.

IV. RESULTS

A. Advantages of Online Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

To determine the EFL university instructors' perceptions of the advantages of online education during the epidemic era in Saudi universities, frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and ranking were computed (Table 5).

TABLE 5
QUANTITATIVE DATA OF THE PART "ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

N	Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean	SD	Ranking
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
1	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic was helpful for EFL teachers and students.	10	31.3	11	34.4	4	12.5	6	18.8	1	3.1	3.72	1.02	7
2	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to developing my performance as an EFL teacher.	6	18.8	17	53.1	7	21.9	2	6.3	0	0.0	3.84	0.81	6
3	Online education environment during the COVID-19 pandemic was more flexible.	11	34.4	18	56.3	1	3.1	2	6.3	0	0.0	4.19	0.78	3
4	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic helped me as an EFL teacher to be creative.	5	15.6	17	53.1	5	15.6	5	15.6	0	0.0	3.69	0.93	8
5	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic was free of charge.	14	43.8	8	25.0	5	15.6	2	6.3	3	9.4	3.88	1.01	5
6	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to developing EFL students' technological skills.	7	21.9	24	75.0	1	3.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.19	0.47	4
7	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to improving EFL teachers' technological skills.	17	53.1	14	43.8	0	0.0	1	3.1	0	0.0	4.47	0.67	1
8	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic was helpful in improving EFL students' cognitive skills.	2	6.3	10	31.3	12	37.5	6	18.8	2	6.3	3.13	1.01	10
9	Online education platforms have several tools that facilitate teaching online classes.	7	21.9	25	78.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4.22	0.42	2
10	During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was easy to motivate EFL students to do their assignments and provide them with feedback.	5	15.6	13	40.6	7	21.9	7	21.9	0	0.0	3.50	1.02	9
	Overall mean											**3.88**	**0.50**	**-**

The table above reveals that the perceptions of the participants of the advantages of online learning during the epidemic era were high with a mean score of (3.88 ± 0.50). Item 7 was the most frequent item selected by the participants and was ranked first with a mean score of (4.47 ± 0.67), followed by item 9. This item was ranked second in terms of frequency among other items with a mean score of (4.22 ± 0.42). Item 3 was the third most frequent element with a mean score of (4.19 ± 0.78) and was slightly different from the sixth item that came fourth with a mean score of (4.19 ± 0.47). In the fifth place, item 5 appeared with a mean score of (3.88 ± 1.01) followed by item 2 that was ranked sixth among the other items achieving a mean score of (3.84 ± 0.81). Item 1 came in the seventh place with a mean score of (3.72 ± 1.02). Item 4 had a mean score of (3.96 ± 0.93) achieving the eighth rank. Item 10 was the ninth one in terms of frequency with a mean score of (3.50 ± 1.02). The least frequent item was item 8 occurring with a mean score of (3.13 ± 1.01).

B. Disadvantages of Online Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

To indicate the EFL university instructors' perceptions of the disadvantages of online learning during the epidemic era in Saudi Arabia, frequencies, percentages, mean, ad standard deviation, and ranking were computed (Table 6).

TABLE 6
QUANTITATIVE DATA OF THE PART "DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

N	Items	Approval degree										Mean	SD	Ranking
		Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
1	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic demotivated EFL students to learn.	1	3.1	9	28.1	13	40.6	8	25.0	1	3.1	3.03	0.90	6
2	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic prevented EFL students to learn because it costs very much.	0	0.0	2	6.3	8	25.0	17	53.1	5	15.6	2.22	0.79	10
3	During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to interact online between EFL students and their teachers.	3	9.4	5	15.6	3	9.4	19	59.4	2	6.3	2.63	1.03	8
4	During the COVID-19 pandemic, online education made EFL students feel alone due to the lack of social interaction.	5	15.6	12	37.5	9	28.1	6	18.8	0	0.0	3.50	0.98	2
5	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic put the learning process at stake due to poor accessibility to the internet connection.	3	9.4	15	46.9	8	25.0	6	18.8	0	0.0	3.47	0.92	3
6	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for EFL teachers to teach EFL students in virtual classes.	0	0.0	4	12.5	3	9.4	24	75.0	1	3.1	2.31	0.74	9
7	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for EFL teachers to control sinful activities such as cheating.	12	37.5	11	34.4	4	12.5	5	15.6	0	0.0	3.94	1.08	1
8	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for EFL teachers to know the individual differences of their students.	8	25.0	9	28.1	3	9.4	11	34.4	1	3.1	3.38	1.29	5
9	Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for EFL teachers to ask questions or receive quick feedback from their students.	4	12.5	16	50.0	1	3.1	11	34.4	0	0.0	3.41	1.10	4
10	Teaching EFL online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic needed more time than teaching traditional classes.	4	12.5	8	25.0	6	18.8	13	40.6	1	3.1	3.03	1.05	7
	Overall mean											**3.09**	**0.60**	**-**

This table shows that the perceptions of the participants towards the disadvantages of online learning during this critical era were high with a mean score of (3.09 ± 0.60). Item 7 in this part was the most frequent item selected by the participants and was ranked first with a mean score of (3.94 ± 1.08), followed by item 4 that was ranked second in terms of frequency among other items with a mean score of (3.50 ± 0.98) that was slightly different from item 5 that came third with a mean score of (3.47 ± 0.92). Item 9 was the fourth most frequent element with a mean score of (3.41 ± 1.10). In the fifth place, item 8 appeared with a mean score of (3.38 ± 1.29) followed by item 1 that was ranked sixth among the other items achieving a mean score of (3.03 ± 0.90) that was very close to item 10 which came in the seventh place with a mean score (3.03 ± 1.05). Item 3 had a mean score of (2.63 ± 1.03) achieving the eighth rank. Item 6 was the ninth one in terms of frequency with a mean score of (2.31 ± 0.74). The least frequent item was item 2 occurring with a mean score of (2.22 ± 0.79).

C. Effectiveness of Online Leaning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

To determine the EFL university instructors' perceptions of the effectiveness of online learning during the epidemic era, frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and ranking were computed (Table 7).

TABLE 7
QUANTITATIVE DATA OF THE PART "EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

N	Items	Approval degree										Mean	SD	Ranking
		Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
1	I believe that the online education environment is more fun.	2	6.3	8	25.0	6	18.8	14	43.8	2	6.3	2.81	1.09	9
2	I believe that teaching the English language online would be difficult.	0	0.0	11	34.4	8	25.0	13	40.6	0	0.0	2.94	0.88	8
3	I believe that online education makes the learning process effective.	0	0.0	13	40.6	7	21.9	12	37.5	0	0.0	3.03	0.90	7
4	I believe that online education can substitute for face-to-face education.	1	3.1	6	18.8	2	6.3	17	53.1	6	18.8	2.34	1.10	11
5	I believe that online education makes it easy for me to assess my students' performance.	1	3.1	7	21.9	3	9.4	19	59.4	2	6.3	2.56	1.01	10
6	I believe that online education helps me to achieve the objectives of the courses.	1	3.1	12	37.5	8	25.0	11	34.4	0	0.0	3.09	0.93	6
7	I believe that the home environment is more suitable for online education.	6	18.8	8	25.0	8	25.0	9	28.1	1	3.1	3.28	1.07	4
8	I prefer to have training sessions to teach online classes.	6	18.8	14	43.8	8	25.0	4	12.5	0	0.0	3.69	0.93	1
9	I will keep teaching online classes even after the COVID-19 pandemic.	4	12.5	10	31.3	10	31.3	8	25.0	0	0.0	3.31	1.00	3
10	I prefer online education because it makes me more comfortable.	6	18.8	7	21.9	9	28.1	10	31.3	0	0.0	3.28	1.01	5
11	I believe that online education is important, and I recommend it.	10	31.3	6	18.8	9	28.1	7	21.9	0	0.0	3.59	1.06	2
	Overall mean											3.09	0.57	-

Table 7 demonstrates that the perceptions of the participants towards the effectiveness of online education during the pandemic era were high with a mean score of (3.09 ± 0.57). Item 8 in this part was the most frequent item selected by the participants and was ranked first with a mean score of (3.69 ± 0.93). Item 11 was ranked second in terms of frequency among other items with a mean score of (3.59 ± 1.06). Item 9 came third with a mean score of (3.31 ± 1.00). Item 7 appeared in the fourth place with a mean score of (3.28 ± 1.07) that was slightly different from item 10 which came fifth with a mean score of (3.28 ± 1.01). Item 6 was the sixth most frequent element with a mean score of (3.09 ± 0.93). In the seventh place, item 3 appeared with a mean score of (3.03 ± 0.90) followed by item 2 that was ranked eighth among the other items achieving a mean score of (2.94 ± 0.88). Next, item 1 came in the ninth place with a mean score of (2.81 ± 1.09). Item 5 had a mean score of (2.56 ± 1.01) achieving the tenth rank. The least frequent one among the others was item 4 occurring with a mean score of (2.34 ± 1.10).

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the EFL university instructors' perceptions of online education during the pandemic of COVID-19 in Saudi universities. The findings revealed that the participants had an overall positive attitude towards using online platforms when learning or teaching the English language claiming that this process was helpful and effective. They agreed that learning/teaching the English language online has several advantages that make it highly recommended to be utilized. They indicated that it could improve the technological skills of EFL teachers and students, facilitate teaching online classes, develop the EFL teachers' performance, help EFL teachers to think creatively, enhance EFL students' cognitive skills, motivate EFL students to do their assignments and provide them with appropriate feedback, achieve the objectives of the courses, and make them comfortable. Moreover, the participants strongly agreed that online education is free of charge and very flexible and asserted that online education platforms have several tools that facilitate presenting online classes. Furthermore, they added that it was not difficult to teach or interact with their students at that time. These results are in line with the results of the studies conducted by various researchers such as Chi and Yen (2022), Astiandani and Anam (2021), Nursalina and Fitrawati (2021), Fitri and Putro (2021), and Dhull and Arora (2017).

On the other hand, the participants reported some of the disadvantages of teaching or learning the English language online. One of the most important challenges that EFL instructors encountered during the epidemic period was the difficulty of regulating sinful activities such as cheating; this result supported what Almosa (2002) confirmed. In addition, the participants claimed that the lack of social interaction and the poor accessibility to the internet connection negatively affected the learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic; this is consistent with what was mentioned by Dhull and Arora (2017) and Almosa (2002). Moreover, some of them suggested that it might be a little bit difficult for them to ask for or receive quick feedback at the same time from their students even though some of them illustrated that online education helped them to provide their students with feedback at any time. Others indicated that sometimes they felt it was easy for them to know their students' individual differences, so it was not difficult to motivate them; this asserted what Saleh and Meccawy (2022) concluded. Additionally, some of them disagreed that, when teaching EFL

online classes during the pandemic, they needed more time than teaching traditional classes or found it difficult to teach virtual classes.

Furthermore, the participants indicated that they would keep teaching online classes even after the epidemic has been over even though they proposed that online education cannot substitute face-to-face education to avoid being isolated. This result is the same as Dhull and Arora (2017) and Almosa (2002) asserted. However, most of them expressed that they preferred to have some training sessions to teach online classes to master technology, as supported by Fitri and Putro (2021) because little knowledge of technology or technological illiteracy is one of the most key problems that can prevent online education. Also, some of them disagreed that the home environment is more suitable for online education due to several reasons such as distractions including family, television, and social media, internet connection issues, and lack of interaction. Accordingly, they suggested that teaching the English language online would be difficult. Also, most of them did not agree that online education offered a funny educational environment during that serious era.

VI. CONCLUSION

In March 2020, WHO announced that COVID-19 is a global pandemic. All aspects of life were affected negatively, particularly education. This virus was the main reason for closing schools and universities. This closure considerably forced educational institutions to unprecedently shift from traditional learning to online learning either synchronously or asynchronously (Almahasees et al., 2021). Online learning is having the experience of learning using technology (Carliner, 2004). However, this study aimed to investigate the EFL university instructors' perceptions of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that most EFL teachers had a more dominant positive attitude regarding online learning activities although some of them demonstrated that there were some negative aspects that should be taken into consideration.

Online education is believed that it has some pros that encourage EFL instructors to use it when teaching. By using online education, EFL teachers' and students' technological skills are developed, and several tools are provided to help in facilitating English language learning. Moreover, it is characterized by its flexibility, being chargeless, and enabling EFL teachers to think creatively and improve their performance. Furthermore, it motivates EFL students to do their assignments and provides EFL teachers with opportunities to give feedback. However, there are some cons that may negatively affect online education and make it more difficult for EFL teachers to activate this type of learning. Lack of controlling sinful activities such as cheating, lack of face-to-face social interaction, and poor accessibility to the internet connection are the fundamental three disadvantages of online education that most EFL university instructors agree on. In addition, EFL teachers prefer to be trained before being engaged in this technological experience because this can help them to get more benefits and encourage them to develop their students' performance as well.

After going through the advantages and disadvantages of online education, it can be concluded, in general, that most EFL university instructors, who participated in this study, had quite positive perceptions of online learning activities and believed that it is important and effective. To sum up, it can be said that online education is a significantly excellent choice to use if there are some issues that hinder traditional education such as being unable to study due to long distances or having a job. Moreover, the flexibility of asynchronous online education makes it a preferred option for those people who can join classes at a specific time. Yet, there are some aspects that should be considered to ensure that online education would be activated successfully. Accordingly, the Saudi education ministry should significantly take some considerable and corrective steps to overcome the challenges that EFL teachers and students may face when teaching or learning online. To generalize the results, other aspects related to this topic, however, might be investigated by further researchers. A study can be conducted on a sample containing an equal number of females and males to examine whether gender can affect EFL teachers' attitudes toward online learning. In addition, another study can be implemented to investigate the effect of online learning on EFL students' self-efficiency in a particular language skill (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, or listening). Moreover, an additional study can be conducted to compare EFL university instructors' attitudes to EFL school teachers' attitudes toward the effectiveness of online education.

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Farah Nasser Algraini is currently an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia. She received her MA in Linguistics and her PhD in Applied Linguistics from Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include teacher education, teacher professional development, online language learning, language learning and teaching, and cognition/metacognition and language learning.