

## *Teachers' Perceptions of Online Teaching in Higher Education in Libya*

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### **Abstract**

With the widespread of internet demand for learning, many higher education institutions are highly motivated to develop and implement online teaching. It is important to mention that some colleges and universities have given scope for online classes. Hence, it becomes crucial to gain the perceptions of participants of online classes. Therefore, the present study aims to explore teachers' perceptions about online teaching and the causes behind neglecting the implementation of online teaching in higher education institutions in Libya. The current study employs the quantitative approach. An online questionnaire was designed and distributed to 213 teachers at Libyan universities via Facebook, Whatsup, and Viber applications in November 2021 and it was available online for a week. The data were collected and analyzed manually. The results revealed that teachers in higher institutions are not familiar with online teaching due to various reasons including technical, cultural and administrative problems. Findings provide significant implications for policymakers and higher education institutions that enhance the quality of online teaching in Libya and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** Teacher's perception; Online Teaching; Higher Education; Reasons; Libya

## منظور أعضاء هيئة تدريس للتعليم الالكتروني لدى التعليم العالي في ليبيا

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### الملخص:

مع الانتشار الواسع لتقنية الانترنت وارتباطها الوثيق بعملية التعليم، أصبحت مؤسسات التعليم العالي في ليبيا لها دوافع عالية لتطوير وتنفيذ التعليم الالكتروني. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على التدريس الالكتروني في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في ليبيا من وجهة نظر أعضاء هيئة التدريس. كما تهدف إلى معرفة أهم العوائق الحائلة دون تطبيق التدريس الالكتروني. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، استخدم الباحث المنهج الكمي، ووظف الاستبانة الالكترونية كأداة للدراسة. وتكونت عينة الدراسة من 200 أستاذاً وأستاذةً. وقد أظهرت نتائج البحث أن أعضاء هيئة التدريس في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في ليبيا مدركون لفكرة التدريس الالكتروني كطريقة للتدريس تستخدم فيها التكنولوجيا. لكن لا يزال لديهم بعض الأسباب الكامنة وراء عدم تطبيقهم لمفهوم التدريس الالكتروني. وهذا راجع بحسب رأيهم لأسباب إدارية وتكنولوجية وثقافية. يمكن لنتائج هذه الدراسة أن تشجع صانعي القرار ومؤسسات التعليم العالي على تحسين جودة التدريس عن طريق الانترنت في ليبيا وغيرها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تصور المعلم، التدريس عبر الانترنت، التعليم العالي، الأسباب، ليبيا.

## 1. Introduction

Teaching is the process of transferring knowledge, skills, ethics and beliefs from one person to another. Online teaching started in the middle of the 1980s in the United States in several universities and schools (Yeung and Yau, 2021). The invention of the internet supported the concept of online teaching which offers great access to huge resources of knowledge to both educators and learners. Online teaching is sufficiently used in many developed countries. Recently it has become prevalent in many educational programs in higher institutions in many developing countries too.

According to Walter et al., (2017) factors contributing to the successful implementation of online teaching can be divided into three categories: learners, teachers and institutions. Various reasons might be behind the neglect of implementing online teaching in higher education in Libya. Therefore, this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of using online teaching in Libyan universities and to get a better understanding of the reasons behind the refusal of implementing this style of teaching as an alternative of face to face teaching. What is more, how teachers see online teaching, and whether they can conduct online classes or not, are all growing questions that must be considered before implementing online teaching. That is because some lecturers are not able to conduct online classes for different reasons (Sims et al, 2002).

## 2. Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted regarding the implementation of online teaching in higher education in the Libyan context (Al-Badree 2007; Al-Mansouri, 2015; Al-Zoghbi, 2013; El-Kaseh, 2015, Ghawail et al. 2019; Rhema, 2010). All researchers discussed the challenges of applying online teaching and the use of technology for learning. However, most researchers have neglected university teachers' perceptions. It has been stated that the successful implantation of online teaching is affected by the perceptions of teachers, learners and institutions and is influenced by their satisfaction with the integration of technology in teaching and learning (Rhema, 2010). Similarly, Bataineh & Bani-Abdel-Rahman (2006) argue that there is a strong

relationship between teachers' perceptions and the success of teaching-based technology. Moreover, El-Kaseh (2015) and Walters (2017) have shown that understanding teachers' perceptions and their readiness to implement online teaching plays a crucial role in developing suitable training programs for more effective online teaching.

### **2.1. Definitions of Online Teaching**

The definition of online teaching is widely discussed in the literature. It can be defined as a way of teaching which is supported and facilitated by the integration of technology. Online teaching encourages the shift from teacher-centered teaching to learners-centered learning and stimulates the interactive approach of learning (Conceicao, 2006.) Online teaching refers to the way of teaching via using computers and internet technology (Mathew and Iloanya, 2016). It is the opposite of face-to-face teaching, classroom instruction and traditional teaching (Goyal, 2012). It covers areas such as virtual classrooms, computer-based learning, live classes and web-based learning.

Selim (2007) has defined online teaching as a new technological approach that applies information and communication skills and makes use of electronic tools in delivering instruction, information and content. According to Kulal (2020), it provides opportunities for teachers to discuss educational issues, share materials, and for students to learn subjects and explain any doubts with the help of technology. Despite the neglect of adapting the online classes, many university teachers in Libya have a desire to adopt technology and online tools in teaching. For this reason, the implementation of online classes has become popular in higher education in many developed and developing countries during the last decades. Several studies have presented factors that may contribute to the effectiveness of implementing online teaching in higher education. A study conducted by Mukhtar et al. (2020) found out that online teaching can offer flexibility and effectiveness of teaching, reduce expenses for both teachers and learners, save time, and provide easy access to information. However, other factors that may affect the implementation of online teaching will be discussed below.

## **2.2. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Online Teaching**

There is no doubt that communication and information technologies have a huge impact on teaching and learning in general. They have affected the way educational materials are delivered in the higher education sector. Infrastructure is one of the biggest challenges in implementing online teaching in higher education, especially in developing countries like Libya. More specifically, technological barriers can be in software and hardware components such as lack of computers and power supply and poor network services, which can strongly influence the application of online teaching. AL-Adwan & Smedley (2012) argue that any institution which plans to implement online teaching should provide teachers and learners with the highest degree of accessibility and reliability of the technology. As a result, higher education institutions should offer good quality technology and launch effective online programs in all universities (Karmakar and Wahid, 2007). That might lead to add flexibility in teaching and learning, developing innovative teaching approaches, providing easy access to information and saving time.

Although online teaching is not a new way of teaching, evidence shows that until recently many teachers as well as learners across the world do not feel comfortable with it. This feeling is attributed to many reasons: poor infrastructures, lack of access to the internet, lack of technical competence as well as lack of motivation from both teachers and students side to employ technology in teaching and learning (Azer & El-Sherbini, 2011).

Additionally, there are other barriers that might cause this lack of use to implement online teaching which include the cultural influence (El-Kaseh, 2015). In fact, Macpherson (2006) argues that any institution attempting to implement online teaching must be prepared culturally. Cultural issues are considered a core factor in online teaching due to their influence on learning, people's interaction, and communications. In the same vein, Edmundson (2003) explained several issues related to the cultural barriers when implementing online classes. He indicates that the environment in which the online classes are introduced, types of technology, learners' characteristics, and all these factors must be involved when designing online courses. This is mainly because different online styles whether in learning or teaching might be

accepted in some contexts but completely refused in another. In the Libyan context, Rhema (2010) argues that implementing online teaching should consider some cultural differences such as ethical issues and cultural communication. Libyan people in general are still traditional in their attitudes, communication, and interaction and they also have limited ability to follow technological development. This is in turn translated into their attitudes and beliefs about the usefulness of technology for communicating and interacting with learners in educational settings too. For this reason, in the education sector, many Libyan teachers and students are still uncomfortable with the use of online teaching (Rhema, 2010).

Naveed et al (2017) have indicated that one of the biggest challenges for many teachers is the amount of time required to implement online classes. Teachers need to restructure their courses and subjects in a way that suits the requirement of online classes. Creating and developing online classes often increase workload and require more time (Al-adwan and Smedley, 2012). In a study conducted by Windiariti et al (2019) revealed that teachers said that the time is limited in online classes and they have to do as much work as possible. So teachers should manage their time effectively.

### **2.3. Implementing Online Teaching in Libyan Universities**

According to Al-Badree (2007) and Rhema (2010) implementing online teaching in Libyan higher education is still at an early age and is not considered popular. However, in recent years higher education institutions in Libya have basic infrastructures to implement online teaching. But the majority of Libyan universities still rely on the traditional method of teaching (face-to-face classroom instruction) (Al-Mansouri, 2015), and depend almost entirely on printed materials for learning (El-Kaseh, 2015). Because of the instability in Libya due to the civil wars and continuing conflict, many factors hinder effective online teaching. Poor internet and its lack of accessibility, absence of technological infrastructures, insufficient financial support, and shortage of inadequate training and development, are all issues which need to be resolved by decision-makers in order to implement effective online teaching.

In recent years, great efforts have been taken among Libyan university administrators to develop and change teaching methods from the traditional classroom to online teaching as an alternative tool for learning (Al-Ghawail et al. 2019). Moreover, most Libyan students now, particularly in higher education, prefer to use technological devices for sharing information and discussing different issues related to their studies (Kenan et al. (2013).

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The main objective of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of online teaching in higher education institutions in Libya. This study used a descriptive quantitative research method and gathered information from the participants by administering a questionnaire.

#### **3.2. Research Sample and Context**

This study was implemented at higher education institutions in Libya. The participants of this study were lecturers from different colleges and universities across Libya. They were from different academic fields. 213 lecturers from Libyan universities participated in a questionnaire. Their teaching experiences ranged from 1 year to 15 years and above. 59% of the responses were female and 41% were male.

#### **3.3. The Questionnaire**

The survey was designed and developed by the researcher to explore teachers' perceptions of online classes. After developing the questionnaire, two experts from the English language department at Sirte university revised and corrected the questionnaires to meet the research objectives. Then a pilot study was conducted in order to measure its validity. The questionnaire was also administrated to (5) teachers from different universities in Libya for more reliability. The questionnaire mainly included close-ended statements. It was divided into two parts: the first part included general information about the participants and any technology devices they used (4 items). The second part explored their perceptions and reasons behind the neglect of online teaching. It included 12 items measuring 5 dimensions: "Totally

Agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree", "Totally Disagree". The questionnaire was distributed online. It was available and open online for a week.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

Permission was taken from university teachers who volunteered to participate in this study via private groups in different social media Apps mainly (Viber – Whatsup – Facebook – Messenger). The questionnaire was then distributed to the participants online. An online survey was used to gather information because of its accessibility and rapid outreach in a short time. After collecting the data, descriptive analysis was used to analyze and interpret the results.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

In order to investigate university teachers' perception of online teaching, a quantitative analysis was used. The researcher chose this approach because it provides a summary of the key features of the collected data and includes measures. Responses were read several times and notes were made of any relevant information to the research questions. The questions that have been put forward to guide this investigation are:

Q1. What are university teachers' perceptions of online teaching in higher education in Libya?

Q2. What are the reasons behind neglecting the implementation of online teaching?

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

This section presents the findings and discusses the results of the data gathered from the questionnaire. The current study analyzed university teachers' perceptions of online classes and explored the reasons behind neglecting the implementation of online teaching in Libyan higher education institutions.

### **4.1. Teachers' Perceptions of Online Teaching**

Several themes were identified for teachers' perceptions and the reasons that hinder the application of online teaching. The effectiveness of face-to-face classes rather than online teaching, IT problems and software availability, teachers' knowledge of online



applications as online classes are a new thing for most of them, administrative support and some cultural issues.

Teachers' perceptions form a significant element in the application of online teaching. The results of this study (as shown in table 1) showed that there is a noticeable interest in implementing online teaching, as 60% of the participants agreed that they can implement online classes. 47% of university teachers agree that traditional methods of teaching are more effective than online classes. Furthermore, 60% of the participants agree that online teaching is a new approach in Libya and many of them are uncomfortable using it. 25% of the participants highlighted the point that some subjects are difficult to be taught online and should therefore better be delivered face-to-face. Additionally, 55% of the responses revealed that the time factor was not an obstacle to the implementation of online classes.

**Table 1: Teachers' perceptions of online teaching**

Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Online teaching is not an effective alternative tool of classroom learning	15	N/G	52	24.4%	37	17.4	101	47%	25	7%
Online teaching is new in my context and many teachers are uncomfortable with it	11	N/G	28	13.1%	20	9.4%	129	60.6%	25	11.7%
I never come across the need for online classes.	37	17.4%	100	49.8%	21	9.9%	45	21.1%	4	1.9%
I'm not fully aware of online teaching and I don't know how to conduct it when needed	35	16.4%	100	46.9%	23	10.8%	49	23%	6	2.8%
I do not have time to conduct online classes	24	11.3%	97	45%	43	20%	40	18%	9	4.2%

#### 4.2. Reasons Hindering the Application of Online Learning

The results shown in table 2, responses are divided into negative and positive opinions of employing online classes. That is due to various reasons that hinder them from implementing online teaching namely due to cultural, technical, and administrative

issues. Based on the findings shown in table 2, 41% of the responses agreed that 'technical conclusively' was a significant cause. It can be said that university teachers support the implementation of online teaching but have no sufficient infrastructures to aid them to do so because of aspects like computers, networks and electricity. 55 % of them agree that cultural barriers hinder them from achieving such a goal, and 52 % agree that they are not satisfied with the administrative support that has been provided by the institutions.

**Table 2: Reasons hindering the application of online classes**

Reasons	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Due to technical issues	26	12.2%	73	34.3%	25	11.7%	72	33.8%	17	8%
Due to cultural issues	16	7.5%	48	22.5%	27	12.7%	110	51.6%	12	5.6%
Due to administrative issues	19	8.9%	55	25.8%	27	12.7%	86	40.4%	26	12.2%

#### 4.2. Discussion

This study aimed at exploring university teachers' perceptions of online teaching in higher education and discussing the reasons behind its lack of implementation in Libya. The results of this study showed online teaching is new for many instructors in Libyan universities, they are not familiar with it. What is more, teachers are uncomfortable with being involved in online teaching and learning. So they have their reasons for not implementing online teaching. This finding is in line with El-Kaseh (2015) who pointed out that the reason behind this discomfort was that most teachers use technology for entertainment and communication but not for educational purposes. In addition, their level of technological awareness is significantly low. Similarly, Azer & El-Sherbini, (2011) had the same result and they indicated that the wide acceptance of implementing online teaching in higher education faced uncomfortable feelings among both teachers and learners was considerable low and that many of them were found it rather uncomfortable with it due to many reasons including technical and cultural barriers.

Many studies discussed various challenges related to university teachers which all focused on the lack of internet technology skills, cultural barriers and lack of e-teaching training courses, and institutional support, which all significantly influence the use of technology (Naveed, et.al, 2017). The results of the current study also showed several reasons such as poor technological support, the cultural impact, and the lack of institutional support which are all factors that hinder the implementation of online teaching in higher educational institutions in Libya.

Although there is a significant change in how educational institutions around the world now operate and make use of online learning and teaching, its popularity among Libyan university teachers is still relatively low as 61% of Libyan instructors in higher education prefer using face to face teaching for various reasons including technical, cultural and administrative problems. Rahmatulla et al (2020) agree with this finding as their findings indicate that most developing countries are still applying teacher-centered approaches which do not take advantage of the use of technology and the internet. However, Gegone & Abdullah (2020) argue that due to technological development, teachers at universities have to apply new methods of teaching and not rely on classroom teaching in delivering knowledge. In addition, 56% of the participants agree that some cultural barriers are sometimes making online classes difficult and inapplicable. This point is similar to what Edmundson (2003); Macpherson (2006); Rhema (2010) found in their studies, the learning environment, types of technology, learners' characteristics and cultural communication all must be considered in the design of online teaching.

According to Karmakar and Wahid, (2007) infrastructures and technical issues are considered a major part of implementing online successfully, as they require huge budgets from the organizations to guarantee appropriate internet connectivity, hardware, software, networks, videos, interactive TV and DVD, and other technical support units. The results of this study show that 41% of the participants indicate that there is a lack of infrastructure to effectively make use of online teaching. On the other hand, 56% of the participants reveal that their institutions have inadequate financial support to develop technology-based teaching and learning. Othman et al. (2013) have pointed out that

in a developing country like Libya which had suffered from armed conflict since 2011, that has negatively affected the country's economic and telecommunication sectors, which in turn leads to the destruction of infrastructure in educational institutions. Therefore, all these factors should be considered before implementing online teaching to adopt successful and powerful use of technology in the teaching and learning process and make online teaching applicable.

According to Andersson & Grönlund (2009), the support and encouragement by the administrators can motivate teachers and lead to a successful implementation of online teaching in the educational process. However, in Libyan institutions administrators cannot generally deal with some educational issues such as infrastructure development, financial support, assure the quality of outcomes, updating curricula and innovative teaching methods, and continuing staff development (Al-Fakhri & Bukhatwa, 2016). Therefore, applying online teaching will take time and effort from the institutions and also require an understanding of the technical, cultural, financial, and administrative aspects of the higher education sector (Rhema, 2010). Responses from this study show that there is limited support for institutions to help implement online courses. This should be supported by decision-makers, as the implementation of new technology is unlikely to be successful without widespread organizational support (Al-Zoghbi, 2013). Several studies in the relevant literature revealed that the lack of time to develop online courses is one of the key barriers that face university teachers in implementing online teaching (Al-adwan and Smedley, 2012; Naveed et al, 2017; Windiarti et al, 2019). However, the results of the present study show that time is not a significant obstacle to conduct online teaching if the required facilities and the support are provided by the institutions.

## **5. Conclusion**

Online teaching is a relatively new method of teaching in the Libyan context. The growing use of technology in the field of teaching, in general, has developed the quality of education. The need for online teaching has demonstrated optimistic perceptions among university teachers. However, various issues might be

raised concerning the lack of implementation of online teaching in Libya.

When implementing a new way of teaching in a country like Libya, certain factors must be taken into account. Firstly, there is an urgent need to provide good infrastructures, and a strong internet connection. Secondly, teachers' attitudes towards the effectiveness of online teaching should be considered. Thirdly, increasing teachers' comfort-ability and encouragement from educational institutions. Finally, cultural barriers are also one of the strongest pillars which must be considered when implementing online teaching.

The current study showed that online teaching has acceptance among teachers in higher education in Libya. It has an essential role to play in the future if the above factors and procedures are implemented. Yet, it cannot be an alternative tool for face-to-face classroom teaching. Then again, the employment of online teaching cannot be ignored. The efforts should be focused on finding solutions to issues that hinder the implementation of online classes.

The results from the present study hope to contribute, to what extent, to the implementation of online teaching in Libyan higher education. The findings have shown that university teachers were not familiar with online teaching. That is due to several reasons behind the neglect of the implementation of online classes. The outcomes of the current study may encourage the actual implementation of online teaching in Libyan higher education, convince decision-makers, university administrators, and management leaders to resolve issues that hinder the application of online teaching and consider all concerns in their plans.

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