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An Investigation of the Educational Challenges During COVID-19: A Case Study of Saudi Students' Experience

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Abstract: The outbreak of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has shaken the world, forcing countries to implement a state of emergency, including the education system. Students have been forced to remain in hostels or houses since they cannot get to university campuses. As a result of this predicament, university authorities have no option but to implement an online learning environment. Specifically, Saudi universities have faced numerous difficulties in bringing the online learning systems to continue the educational process. On the other hand, students faced difficulties to cope with such circumstances (complete online learning) without any preparation or backup plan. According to the findings of the literature research, students experienced difficulties that were difficult to overcome. The aim of this study was to determine the challenges that first-year students of the University faced. The present research got a total of 234 valid responses from the participants. The findings indicate that respondents were not fully prepared in this situation in terms of physical, environmental, and psychological readiness, with some variances in viewpoints depending on their gender and age. Respondents expressed concern about the effect of lockdown on their ability to perform well academically. In this study, the researchers found that switching suddenly to an all-online alternative cause significant obstacles for students. It was determined that the present blended learning model, which utilizes online learning to support face-to-face instruction, has encountered a critical challenge when it comes towards replacing it, particularly with underprepared learners.

Keywords: COVID-19, lockdown, online learning.

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Introduction

The outbreak of novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has resulted in the closure of universities (Abdelhafiz et al., 2020), affecting the learning process of more than 1.59 billion learners all around the globe (Bazimaziki, 2020; Mukute et al., 2020; Tobin & Hieker, 2021). The Saudi government imposed a temporary lockdown to avoid the COVID-19 transmission (Alrashed et al., 2020; Hassounah et al., 2020). Several countries have instituted measures that restrict the spread of the COVID-19 virus from older to teenage populations, resulting in the closure of universities, colleges, and other educational institutions worldwide. More than 80% of the world's students are out of school because of the pandemic. Despite the reduction in lockdown implemented in June 2020, which let most enterprises reopen, all education sectors remain closed, which is already suffering significant issues due to COVID-19 (Alahdal et al., 2020; Khoshaim et al., 2020).

As per the Saudi Ministry of Education (SMoE), health experts have urged schools to take "preventive and precautionary" measures to ensure kids' and staff's safety. The Ministry of Education requested that virtual schools be legalized in order to assist students in remaining competitive in the global economy and to ensure that the learning phase occurs in a secure and rational manner. The minister of education has permitted the establishment of virtual schools and distance education. The following figure presents the data of higher education activities during the COVID-19.

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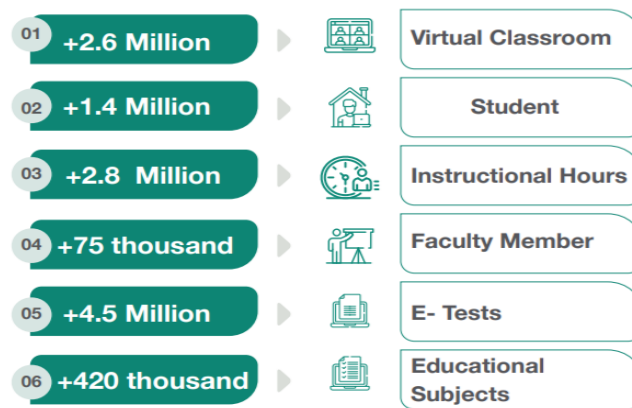


Figure 1. Higher education activities during the COVID-19 (Ministry of Education, 2020)

For studies presented in the literature portion of this study, it was determined that only a little subset of the research covered the impact that the COVID-19 lockdown had on students' emotional well-being. Interest in students' emotions has been emphasized since these emotions affect students' performance, ability to handle stress, and ability to develop creative solutions. Lockdown has the expected influence on students' psychological well-being since they may not like the online shift that has taken place.

Students who take online courses have prepared themselves for all kinds of difficulties, such as learning in a peaceful atmosphere where disruptions are controlled, obtaining and setting up all the computer and networking requirements, and learning to deal with things at home. But that is very different from the current state of whole e-learning. Students have not selected this style of learning. When students face unexpected challenges as a result of the pure e-learning approach, this is entirely expected. Furthermore, understanding how crisis-prone online learning has affected the educational process could be featured in the upcoming months.

Literature Review

Due to the campus shutdown, academic institutions rely on their online platforms to continue the educational process, which may be unprepared for the entire teaching procedure (Dhawan, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020). Access to available and stable Internet connections and computers to enable students to attend online classes is hard to guarantee (Alrasheed, 2021; El Firdoussi et al., 2020). Urban users make about 84% of the Internet population in Saudi Arabia (Alnasser et al., 2020). AlKhunzain and Khan (2021) found that even students who hail from low-income families have fast internet access. Internet speed and coverage vary depending on a student's financial situation and location. When it is needed to connect to the Internet, the connection frequently goes down. In Saudi Arabia, almost all areas do not have fiber optics to assist the Internet (Tanveer et al., 2020). Due to geographic differences, students who live in rural areas are at a disadvantage regarding the level and quality of internet connection they can receive (Cullinan et al., 2021). Unfair treatment could occur if lessons and exams are conducted entirely online. Thus, disadvantaged learners are more likely to experience it (Ahmed et al., 2021; Elsaid, 2021). They must contend with several problems such as a shortage of equipment (computers, the Internet) and quiet surroundings to ignore family obligations while studying.

Higher education at most universities is blended; however, the face-to-face teaching approach is highly emphasized (Alzahrani, 2017; Anas, 2020; Khan et al., 2018; Shahbaz & Khan, 2017). The notion of openly being expressive and honest is prevalent for face-to-face learning, and students feel comfortable with it (K. D. Rajab, 2018). Face-to-face communication has been put at risk by the interaction quality will be lowered due to the online processes; the possibility of spontaneous interactions as in the lecture hall may be lost (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Hwang & Song, 2018). Understanding the learners' input might reveal a range of emotional and personal concerns that may arise when encountering an entirely new setting (Aboagye et al., 2021; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Yusuf & Jihan, 2020). In some cases, contacting students might assist in discovering any online troubles they might be experiencing. Because labs and equipment are typically unavailable online, students also need to have access to these to complete assignments or experiments independently. In other circumstances, students will end up having to spend additional money due to the necessity of subscribing to higher Internet packages and buying laptops if they primarily use university computer facilities.

Technical difficulties were forecasted in online learning (Khoshaim et al., 2020; M. H. Rajab et al., 2020). Some learners do not have access to the environment and equipment resources essential for smooth online learning due to their drastically uneven financial resources among pupils. One must also consider the home setting of online learning, which makes it harder for underprivileged pupils to succeed. Simamora (2020) discussed the possible disadvantages of online system performance: heavy load, familiarity with the platform, and the use of educational resources and methods in online learning. The digital gap could also be problematic for successful online education transformation, which is a primary concern in countries in South-East Asia. Some colleges have successfully transitioned to an online education

approach. Training for both staff and students is a non-issue in the first two weeks of lockdown in Saudi Arabia (Alqurshi, 2020). Aljaber (2018) asserted that most Saudi institutions adopted E-learning but had not yet completed moving towards a fully online education process, including administering exams. Some sources argue that universities should utilize online examinations on their pupils. However, none of their arguments (Alruwais et al., 2018; Eltayeb et al., 2020; Khan, 2020) have withstood examination using actual data where pure online education and cheating results in an obstruction of transformation. Elhaty et al. (2020) that only minimal impacts resulted from disturbances such as adultery on the final evaluation in educational institutions. However, no issues were found during assessments, and claims that cheating would affect the dependability of online education were not substantiated (Chick et al., 2020).

Students' understanding of online learning may alter when the school is on lockdown. In preparation for the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, QS conducted a poll to understand better the lockdown impact on students' education (Leal Filho et al., 2021). In the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, 58% of the questioned students stated that they were not interested in learning over the Internet, while 51% expected classes to be relocated online. Although they were pleased to see some relief in the form of course summaries, lecture outlines, and pre-recorded lectures, students had discontent with their learning environment, other than scheduling and interruptions.

The literature analysis suggests that previous studies have yet to completely analyse the issues associated with complete online conversion for education during the COVID-19. To summarize, this study highlighted areas of unaddressed problems found in previous studies that examined the COVID-19 lockdown transformation issues. Present the gaps as follows: there is the absence of studies that describe the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown Saudi's context; in the past, students' feedback on this transformation was assessed moderately; technical aspects concerning the COVID-19 lockdown received insufficient emphasis, and finally, numerous studies addressed the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on medical students, but little to no attention was given to other academic areas.

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-method inquiry was utilized to gather the data for quantitative and qualitative findings. A mixed-method approach allows participants to voice their opinions and ensure study conclusions are derived from participants' experiences. (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018). A qualitative technique is best suited for exploring a specific subject and discovering a deep understanding of it (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Many questions in this study had open-ended prompts to gather student responses. Open-ended questions are believed to produce a broad range of reactions (Weller et al., 2018). Open-ended asking is more trustworthy and suitable, which is why we've chosen it for our question design. Additionally, respondents' freedom to express their own beliefs may cause them to report on thoughts they haven't had before.

Another approach employed was content analysis. Researchers can measure and analyze certain words, themes, or concepts by applying content analysis. This methodology (a combination of various strategies) is a time-tested and practical approach when employed with text. There are three different techniques, each of which offers three other options: traditional, guided, and summative. Since this experiment has no existing theory on which to base its results, the standard approach was applied to obtain results. Code categories are derived directly from the text data, as described in the usual approach, "coding categories are derived directly from the text data."

As it's implemented now, it offers the advantage of gathering information from participants directly, which eliminates the need to impose pre-existing classifications or hypotheses. To understand the entirety of the question, answers are reread numerous times.

Location Background

The study was carried out at Majma'ah University, which has E-learning programs and labs for the students. It was expected that some of the faculty members had got basic training on the implementation of Desire to Learn (D2L) and Blackboard software. The University had started online teaching as per the guidance of SMoE. The University had managed training sessions on the use of blackboards. Teachers were free to use Zoom or Blackboard at the onset of the pandemic, but later the University created accounts on Blackboard, and faculty were asked to follow this platform for the implementation of E-learning. The SMoE has the privilege that a vast majority of the faculty had online classes and didn't miss any lectures from the first day of the lockdown.

Moreover, Blackboard and Microsoft Teams training had been given to the students and faculty. Without any end date specified, the SMoE kept increasing the lockdown for the education sector. Thus, the university management had, in cooperation with the authorities, continuously implemented E-learning.

The university administration has practiced nearly the same approach for all disciplines when dealing with online courses. The faculty had to fill an online form to indicate the number of lectures, assignments, quizzes, group discussions, and nearly most of the Blackboard features revealed by the deanship of information technology. The university management had asked every department to identify concerns and possible solutions and then compiled a

list of each department's obstacles and issues. To support a continuous education process, all departments were inquired about the utility of the E-learning platform. The teachers indicated that many of their pupils had limited Internet access, which impairs their academic achievement (many of them have mobile data plans). While the planned online teaching techniques, which include discussion boards, forums, instant messaging, and completion of the assignment, would need students to have internet access, this poses a problem because many students claimed that they could not afford a separate laptop or internet connection.

Sample, Data Collection and Analysis

Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot (2020) conducted a case study on how administration and faculty handled education during COVID-19. The present study was governed by the challenges raised by Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot (2020). The research study is also governed by the difficulties indicated by (Almarzooq et al., 2020). The framework of the present study was adopted from the study of (Krishnamurthy, 2020). The present study is governed by the (Krishnamurthy, 2020) study, including the change in online education procedure following the COVID-19 pandemic. The framework addresses various topics, but this project focused on students' transitions. The current study focused on undergraduate students.

In comparison to graduate students, undergraduate students prefer classroom-based learning. Graduate students perform independent research, and they typically only need to meet face-to-face with their supervisors. This means that the undergrads must endure more hardship during lockdowns. It's also worth noting that the educational framework (Krishnamurthy, 2020) did not cover any of the educational institutions where in the situation of the present study concerned.

To ascertain MU's commitment to education process continuity, the Quality Assurance department was had vivid monitoring of the E-learning process. This department is responsible for ensuring that the SMOE regulations and directives are met at the University. So, it can be inferred that they are responsible for monitoring the transformation of online education into an entirely online approach. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was sent to three faculty members who have the experience of E-learning platforms for suitability purpose. They analyzed it and offered suggestions for improvement, which were incorporated before sending to the participants. The questions were grouped to fit a range of difficulties, from highly technical to very intellectual to environmental concerns, to change education from blended and conventional into purely online learning. The questionnaire was designed and delivered to students through their accounts in Blackboard as it is available to all university students. The questionnaire link was distributed to students with the assistance of various academic departments from the targeted campus. This means that the number of surveys gathered was 429. Only 234 surveys were accepted after pre-processing the data. Duplicated responses were determined to be caused by connectivity issues with the Internet.

Table 1. The Demographic Background of the Participants (N=234)

Gender	Male	161	68.3%
	Female	73	31.7%
Age	16-18	181	80.7%
	19-23	53	19.3%
Major	Computer science	81	34.6%
	Computer Engineering	64	27.3%
	Math	42	17.9 %
	Physics	47	20.1%

Table 1 shows the demographic background of the participants. It is vital that most of the study participants were male (68.35), and 31.7% were female participants. 80.7 % of the participants were 16-18 years old, whereas a considerably lower percentage (19.3%) were 19-23 years old. This is the expected age of learners who join universities in Saudi Arabia. The two most represented majors in this study were computer science (with a total of 81 participants, 34.6 % of the sample) and Computer Engineering (with 46 participants, 15.4% of the sample). Math and physics majors have comparatively fewer participants, 42 and 47 respectively.

Once the answers are all placed in one location, the procedure develops a systematic way to categorize and code each solution. Coding was created to record potential lockdown issues based on earlier studies. Additionally, the following codes were also established as supplementary potential significance in the lockdown context in the initial round of screening.

The code categories were built on the codes that were retrieved from the responses of the participants. The categories presented here were technically challenging, communicative, time-management related, related to accessing resources, psychological preparation, and working together. To test inter-coder reliability, we determined whether there was an agreement between coders with % agreement. All the authors have coded the participants' responses separately, following the coding procedure. Almost all codes received a score of 93% or higher in percent agreement. A third

author coded 25% of the cases independently from the coding book for this purpose. Almost all codes received a score of 96% or higher in percent agreement. A t-test was used to compare the three groups. A purely quantitative technique may empirically identify group differences. Because integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods is more acceptable, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches is more appropriate. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach's alpha was used after getting responses for the participants. The reliability of the questionnaire was .86 which is regarded as highly reliable. The data's normality was evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests are the most often utilized in research studies (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The Null-hypothesis "The data is not normal" is rejected if the p-value (Sig. value) of these tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk) is greater than 0.05. The normality result of the questionnaire categories are greater than 0.05 in all scenarios, indicating that the data is normal. Table 2 shows the normality analysis of the data used in this investigation.

Table 2 Normality Analysis of the Data

Tests of Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Challenges faced during Virtual classes	0.133	234	.200*	0.941	234	0.087
Impact of Lockdown	0.119	234	.200*	0.937	234	0.109

Findings

There were three parts to the questionnaire: demographics, current circumstances, and the COVID-19 lockdown impact, along with a free-text section where people can add additional comments. Demographic part of the questionnaire is discussed above in methodology section. The results of the other parts of the questionnaire and qualitative analysis are discussed under following headings.

Challenges faced during Assignment/Homework Submission

Table 3 presents the challenges faced by the students during the suspension of face-to-face classes.

Table 3. Challenges Faced by the Students During Online Learning

Issues	No of participants	%	Qualitative sample
Assignments/Homework submission date and time	53	22.6	Most of the subjects have the same deadline to upload the assignment and homework. Thus, I have to sit long hours in front of the laptop
Laptop availability	93	39.7	As all the schools have online classes, it was difficult for us to manage a separate laptop of all sibling
Software	21	8.9	I had issues in running the BB, and hence sometimes, I had been indicated as "Activity Risky" by the software
Lack of relevant material	9	3.8	Most of the participants indicated that the contents of the relevant subject were uploaded on the BB.
Discussion in Forum	85	36.7	Sometimes I had issues with discussion on the BB forum because of the time restrictions. On other occasions, internet connectivity created problems in discussion
Internet	72	30.7	Due to limited and unstable internet data and several users, internet speed affected my participation in the virtual classroom.
Understanding the instruction	15	7%	I had faced problems in understanding the nature of the assignments.
Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS) problems	10	4.22%	I had a connectivity issue in joining the BB and sometimes BB automatically kicked me out of the virtual classes, resulting in lower grades in classroom participation.
Environment issue	39	16.06	There were a lot of problems related to taking online classes. Family distraction was one of them. The noise of the family distracted me during the Virtual courses.
Interaction with teachers	12	5.1	Online classes are the sources of one-way interaction, and sometimes due to internet connectivity, we didn't understand the discussion question, so we kept silent.

It is vital from the data that learners indicated challenges which is a combination of issues. 22.6% of the participants indicated that they had to work longer hours to meet the assignment's deadline or homework submission. 39.7% of respondents said they didn't have computers or laptops (ancient computers, no software, filthy surroundings, and lack of space). About 8.9 % of respondents identified they have software-related issues. The good thing that emerged that a considerable low percent of the participants indicated that they had problems in a relevant subject. Approximately a quarter of respondents found significant challenges such as a poor Internet connection (30.7% of respondents), discussion in forums (36.7% of respondents), and an inadequate environment at home (16.06% of respondents). A significant number of the participants (7.1%) indicated that they had problems understanding the instructions. Finally, a considerably low percent of the participant indicated that they had issues interacting with the teachers.

Challenges During Virtual Classes

Table 4 presents the findings for the challenges that learners had to face during online classes.

Table 4. Challenges During Online Classes

Problems	Respondents	%	Qualitative sample
Difficulties with LMS	42	20.2	My laptop restarted when I used LMS on the university Web page, and sometimes internet connectivity had created the problem of joining my virtual class on time. Automatically, disconnection while doing the paperwork on my notebook. LMS was smooth, but I faced difficulties viewing the teachers' and students' screens while doing the peer or group work.
Connection stability	39	16.07	Sometimes the connection stability created problems, and I couldn't open the pages. I was unable to hear the sound of the teacher because of the slow Internet.
Technical hurdles	12	5.1	Sometimes I could not connect with the microphone in LMS, and on other occasions, when I tried to unmute, BB logged me off from the session.
Time management	9	3.8	Time management was challenging for me in accomplishing the tasks
Feedback and guidance	17	7.2	Though teacher feedback was there in the LMS system, I rarely check it; feedback and guidance for completing tasks were not as helpful as physical classes.
Learning Environment	36	15.9	It was challenging to focus on the screen and understand the teacher's presentation or uploaded a video.
No problems	37	16%	

In Table 4, the following trends are revealed: the issues reported fall into six categories. The main problem was that students found it challenging to log in when attending class because of the unreliable internet connection. In 16.07% of respondents' responses, this issue was reported. Many respondents thought the difficulty in sustaining reliable online class attendance was because many of them only have a mobile hotspot to access the Internet. The other big problem reported by 20.02% of respondents was trouble getting work done using an online learning system, difficulty logging in, and difficulty using the new technology (Blackboard). Many respondents noted that because of older computers (and laptops), they could not connect, download, and upload assignments, nor could they use LMS without other necessary applications while attempting to do so in a single or concurrent session. Pupils' discontentment with the circumstances that they were forced to endure (5.1 percent). For instance, they reported as not being able to focus, saying that they had "more difficulty remaining focused," that they had "a difficult time remaining on one subject," that they were "preoccupied," that they were "not sufficiently answered," and that they "missed class meetings. Finally, 16% % of respondents said they had no problems.

Table 5. Suitable Tool for Delivering Virtual Classes

Tool/ Application	Percentage
Blackboard LMS	53
Videos uploaded in LMS or WhatsApp groups	24
Zoom application	36
Teams	05

It is vital from table 5 that most of the participants (53%) indicated Blackboard as a suitable Tool for delivering material. This is because Blackboard contains several features that make learning interactive and valuable in many ways. Another reason for this colossal agreement is that after seven weeks of the lockdown, the University made it

compulsory to use LMS. Participants considered Zoom as an interesting Tool for delivering virtual classes and learning material.

Table 6: Lockdown Impact on Participants' Status

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Interaction with Classmate and Teachers	3.2%	5%	20%	57%	14.8%	3.7
Negative impact of Lockdown	4.8%	6%	25.1%	24.5%	39.6%	3.9
Financially	3.4%	7.3%	16.4%	27.8%	45.1%	3.9
Psychologically	2.4%	7.3%	17.3%	25.5%	40.6%	4

There were four negative aspects emerged from the data analysis as indicated by the participant including interaction with classmate and teachers (57% agree and 14/8% strongly agree); financial impact (27.8% agree); psychological concern (45.1 % strongly agree). The mean value of all the aspects is approximately four which indicated that most of the participants are agreed with these negative aspects of suspension of the face-to-face classes.

Differences Among Gender Groups

To identify the male and female differences about the lockdown on the psychical aspect, financial interaction with classmates and teachers, t-test was performed. There were substantial differences regarding the financial aspect of the suspension of the physical classes among males ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.03$) as compared with females ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.06$), $t(233) = 5.37$, $p = .01$. In other words, this shows that males indicated that the lockout caused them to suffer financial hardship compared to female respondents. A much higher percentage of male ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .97$) also claimed that the lockdown had a greater negative influence on their psychological states than women ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.07$), with a significant difference $t(233) = 5.21$, $p = .000$. Male respondents ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.93$) also reported that the lockdown impacted their psychological statuses more negatively than female respondents ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.067$), $t(233) = 5.12$, $p = .000$. The interaction with classmates and teachers, when compared to females, males revealed significant differences as well. The average scores for male respondents ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.83$) indicated that they found it difficult to communicate with other group members and students.

In contrast, female respondents' average scores ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.06$) indicated that they found it easier to do so. P value remained < 0.05 in all cases which is considered significant. Finally, among female respondents, the most significant obstacle was an inconsistent and limited Internet connection. Male students' primary issue was a lack of high-performance computers, an inadequate learning environment (houses), and a reluctance to completely migrate to the online platform.

Discussion

The majority of the participants in this study mostly complained about unstable Internet access. They couldn't keep up with the software that required high performance on their primary computing devices. Therefore, their computer devices had problems installing and running such applications. In this respect, the study's findings endorse the results of the previous studies (Almarzooq et al., 2020; Elhaty et al., 2020; Hassounah et al., 2020). Furthermore, respondents who indicated instability with the Internet relied on their mobile data plan, suggesting that the surveyed participants had connectivity in their respective locations. According to findings reported by Adnan and Anwar (2020), Leal Filho et al. (2021), M. H. Rajab et al. (2020), the location, as indicated by the participants, had bad connectivity. This assertion is valid as the connectivity of the present study house also had bad mobile signal quality. As previously noted by (M. H. Rajab et al., 2020), approximately half of the respondents indicated that studying and completing tasks from home was challenging. They stated a loss of motivation, inattention due to noise, and interference from family life. Results of this study confirm the statement made by (AlKhunzain & Khan, 2021), which is that in the development of curricula, emphasis should be given to learners' preferences, capacities, and motivators, as well as the learners' motivational features and constraints.

This study analyzed the student perspective concerns that existed during the COVID-19 lockdown using empirical evidence, which hasn't been thoroughly investigated in prior studies. Data analysis revealed that males indicated that the lockout caused them to suffer financial hardship compared to female respondents. In addition, the research into Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) discovered curriculum and online learning system suggestions based on minimum feedback from the participants. Other studies primarily focused on educators and how well the online platforms functioned. The input received by students was moderately taken into consideration; however, when taken into consideration, it focused on the potential technological challenges the students might face.

When combined with the previous finding, the results indicated that it was challenging to maintain excellent communication with instructors and classmates. Some of the stated problems deal with the fact that respondents are physically used to talking to lecturers and classmates. Knowing when to contact instructors and classmates was challenging in online communication because many of them had varying conditions. Others, for example, claimed to

have to travel many kilometers to locate locations with stable Internet connections. In contrast, others described getting in a family conflict and thus became responsible for their family members' Internet needs. Additionally, Internet instability only permitted one-way communication with instructors when using the Internet for online classes. Even to get a clear voice stream from professors, respondents had trouble.

Most responders were concerned about the shutdown's financial impact (27.8 percent said to agree, 45.1 percent said strongly agree). They were compelled to continuously buy more expensive Internet data plans because of heavy consumption during online class sessions, which prompted them to go out of their way to find access to the Internet, acquire an even more expensive Internet data plan, or go to a location with an Internet connection. They were also apprehensive about missing the deadline, which could result in the sponsorship falling through. As past studies had concentrated on other elements aside from financial influence on students, those results found few similar findings. Moreover, among female respondents, the most vital issue was an uneven and restricted Internet connection which hindered their learning efficiency. The major hurdle for male students was a dearth of high-performance computers, an unsuitable study atmosphere (houses), and a hesitation to fully transition to the online system.

People had to be psychologically prepared for the new education environment they found themselves in due to the lockdowns. The results of the present study are also in line with the study by Tobin and Hieker (2021). The respondents agreed or strongly agreed on the impact of the lockdown on their psychological status as in the present study. Some were unwilling to migrate to the new environment entirely. Online education was cited as a problem in that respondents indicated that their homes were unsuitable due to excessive noise, a lack of privacy, sharing computing devices with relatives, family obligations, and difficulty achieving a work-free state (feeling sleepy with irregular sleeping patterns). The students, then, were concerned that their academic standing would be compromised. The respondents' concerns may stem from numerous factors, such as a failure to keep up with online tasks due to Internet connectivity.

Prior research has barely addressed the issues, if at all. This study broadened the conversation on the effect of alterations in the education process on psychological well-being. By modifying the course curriculum to account for the difficulties that result from lockdowns, the work of Leal Filho et al. (2021) indicates that students have been accepted and additional students have registered for modified courses, which might suggest the necessity for the modification. These investigations, however, only included a small number of samples, and further research is required to verify the findings.

Saudi students demonstrated varied points of view on the issues. Students' financial and psychological situations and academic performance were all shown to be different. This was expected as Internet access varies significantly between states, as well as varying household incomes. Considering the various influences that students may face, such as family background and Internet penetration in the region, is highly sensible. Empirical studies demonstrated that teachers should take financial capabilities and students' level of readiness into the mind and consider students' financial abilities and psychological willingness.

This study indicated that students were facing difficulties because many relied heavily on Internet connectivity via their mobile phones. The evidence from this study suggests that the authors who recommended creating a more flexible higher education system to handle future crises had it right. Students' opinions were rarely heard, as these recommendations were mainly based on academic staff conversations and curriculum evaluation covered in this study. Findings revealed that students reported additional assignments being assigned by lecturers in online learning environments. Online assignment completion respondents stated that they had more tasks sent to them online than in person. However, this study contacted students rather than the aforementioned Dhawan (2020), who got a small number of students from the representative student council, which would result in different outcomes. This was a far more detailed investigation. COVID-19 was viewed as a chance for the education sector to rebuild its process to manage such circumstances in the future.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 has altered history and forced governments to implement lockdown measures, especially in educational institutions. Students worldwide have been taken by surprise, resulting in a complete transformation of the educational process. Saudi students are among those who have been adversely affected by the suspension of the physical classes. Literature has demonstrated that the online systems of universities are technically capable of undergoing such a transition. This is because E-learning and M-learning are being practiced even before the outbreak of COVID-19, particularly in language instruction (Khan et al., 2020, 2021). Students, on the other hand, were not entirely prepared for this situation. Students experienced intermittent live broadcasts of the lectures due to Internet connectivity issues, which added to their load of learning. Male students faced significant challenges due to a lack of high-performance computers, an inadequate study environment (houses), and a reluctance to fully switch to the online system.

Furthermore, they discovered that their homes did not provide a conducive learning atmosphere due to considerations such as family and comfort resulting from their inability to communicate effectively with instructors and other

students. Students expressed concern about their academic performance because they were not mentally prepared for such a circumstance.

Currently, online education at Saudi universities is only used to supplement the traditional face-to-face education process (Khan et al., 2021). In this study, the University discovered that it was challenging to integrate curriculum and assessment into a pure online teaching strategy, which appears to impact education worldwide (Abdelhafiz et al., 2020; Anas, 2020; Chick et al., 2020). As a result, the instructions and guidelines were delivered hurriedly by the SMOE, with inadequate time for students to adjust to their new standard of learning.

Students in this study were enforced to study online, in contrast to distance learning students who have chosen to pursue education online in a well-suited setting for learning purpose. They were not prepared physically or psychologically (they only have a basic Internet plan or connection through their mobile phones, and they rely heavily on university facilities to meet with group members, complete assignments, and complete projects). Because of this, respondents expressed anxiety about the impact of this circumstance on their ability to perform well in their classes. This circumstance necessitates the development of programs that take this into account (Eltayeb et al., 2020) and more investigation into the transformational influence of pure online education on students' performance.

Recommendations

The present study investigated the challenges that learners face during online learning. It is so important to note that learners did not have any sort of fully E-learning experience. This is the first time that students and lecturers have encountered this unexpected circumstance and set of obstacles (academic, communication, technical, and so on) that have impacted the educational process in terms of the quality of lectures, lab experiments, and examinations. Thus, future studies are operative to investigate the challenges after infusion of training, that will depict the more descriptive results. Study included participants from on public University. The inclusion of the participant from other universities may present distant findings. Moreover, participants' location is also very important as the speed of internet may vary from location to location. Future comparative study can be conducted with the participants of different areas. Universities should anticipate the post-COVID-19 era because education has been profoundly affected by innovations (Chick et al., 2020) that have the potential to modify it in the future. Finally, the participants in the present study were taught through selected platforms. Future research may also look for the learners' experience of using different E-Learning platforms.

Limitations

The study was limited to only one institutions' participants. The inclusion of the distant institutions may present more confined results. Moreover, the present study focused only on undergraduate students, future studies are operative to include the different levels of the participants. Also study mainly relied on the learners' usage of Blackboard platform only.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Khan: Writing. Ali: Data Analysis. Alorani: Data Collection. Kumar: Editing/ reviewing. Shahbaz: Methodology and reliability analyses.

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