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## EFL Teachers' beliefs and Challenges towards Technology-Integrated Online Classrooms during the Covid-19 Pandemic at Ahram Canadian University

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## ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has offered us a challenging opportunity to pave the way for introducing digital learning. The unexpected shift of teaching the English language from face-to-face classroom to online learning activities through digital platforms has raised significant challenges for English teachers and students. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the EFL teachers' beliefs towards the effectiveness of technology-integrated online classrooms and the challenges they experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study adopts an exploratory sequential design whereby online questionnaire and interviews were used to come up with a comprehensive report on the impact of technology-integrated online classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic and the EFL teachers' challenges faced in online teaching. For data collection, 48 instructors at the English language department, Ahram Canadian University, participated in the study. Due to the pandemic lockdown, the study took place in the spring semester of the academic year 2020. The current study focused on addressing the following questions: Is technology-integrated online classroom beneficial during the Covid-19 pandemic? And what are the most significant challenges the EFL teachers face in online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic? The study results revealed that most EFL teachers reported a positive attitude towards using technology-integrated online classrooms, especially during the pandemic. The study also addressed that the most common challenges EFL teachers experienced were related to the internet connection, lack of technical skills, unfamiliarity with modern technological tools, platforms, websites, and students' low engagement and participation in online classrooms. From these findings, recommendations on teacher training programs with technology and suggestions for further research are indicated.

**KEYWORDS:** The Covid-19 pandemic, Technology-integrated online classes, EFL Teachers' Challenges.

معتقدات وتحديات مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تجاه الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت المدمجة بالتكنولوجيا أثناء جائحة كورونا (كوفيد- ١٩) بجامعة الأهرام الكندية

## المخلص

أتاحت لنا جائحة كورونا (كوفيد- ١٩) فرصة حافلة بالتحديات لتمهيد الطريق للتعلم الرقمي. ولقد أثار التحول غير المتوقع في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية من فصول دراسية تقليدية (وجهاً لوجه) إلى استخدام أنشطة التعلم عبر الإنترنت من خلال المنصات الرقمية تحديات كبيرة لمعلمي وطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية. وبالتالي فإن الدراسة الحالية تهدف إلى التعرف على ودراسة معتقدات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تجاه فعالية الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت المدمجة بالتكنولوجيا والتحديات التي واجهوها خلال جائحة Covid-19. تتبنى الدراسة التصميم الاستكشافي المتتابع؛ حيث تم استخدام الاستبيان والمقابلات عبر الإنترنت للتوصل إلى تقرير شامل عن تأثير الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت المدمجة بالتكنولوجيا أثناء جائحة Covid-19 والتحديات التي يواجهها معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التدريس عبر الإنترنت. و لجمع البيانات ، فقد شارك في الدراسة ٤٨ معلماً من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الأهرام الكندية. ونظراً للإغلاق الوبائي ، أجريت الدراسة في الفصل الدراسي ربيع ٢٠٢٠. ولقد تناولت الدراسة الحالية معالجة الأسئلة التالية: هل الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت المدمجة بالتكنولوجيا مفيدة أثناء جائحة Covid-19؟ وما هي أهم التحديات التي يواجهها مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الفصول عبر الإنترنت أثناء جائحة كورونا (كوفيد- ١٩)؟ ولقد كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن معظم معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لديهم موقف إيجابي تجاه استخدام الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت المدمجة بالتكنولوجيا ، خاصة أثناء الوباء. وأوضحت الدراسة أيضاً أن أكثر التحديات التي واجهها مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية كانت تتعلق بالاتصال بالإنترنت ، ونقص المهارات التقنية ، وعدم الإلمام بالأدوات التكنولوجية الحديثة ، والمنصات ، والمواقع الإلكترونية ، بالإضافة إلى انخفاض مشاركة الطلاب في الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت. وفي ضوء هذه النتائج تم الإشارة إلى توصيات بشأن تدريب المعلمين على التدريس باستخدام التكنولوجيا عبر الإنترنت واقتراحات لمزيد من الدراسات والأبحاث.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** جائحة كورونا (كوفيد- ١٩) ، الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت المدمجة

بالتكنولوجيا ، تحديات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

## **I- Introduction:**

The 21st century has witnessed plenty and a significant number of research and findings in integrating technology into the learning environment as a powerful learning tool. As Covid-19 has affected several aspects of life worldwide, especially social life, health, economy, and education, the lockdown was initially proposed to hinder the widespread of the virus in crowded places such as schools and universities. It has obligated the educational system to transform teaching into online versions urgently to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, technology integration into online teaching has gained increasing attention. Online learning, distance, and continuing education have become a solution for this unprecedented global pandemic, despite the challenges teachers and learners pose.

The transition from face-to-face classes to online instruction constitutes a significant challenge for teachers (Hodges et al., 2020). They have been shifting their lessons to virtual environments to continue educating their students. As a result, educators have encountered and interacted with numerous available online resources (e.g., learning management systems, video conferences apps, online games, blogs, and collaborative activities).

While attending online sessions, students may face challenges that they have never encountered in a traditional teaching and learning environment. Accordingly, they are expected to access information and interact with their peers and teachers through various technological devices and applications for participation. In addition, they are required to perform the mentioned activities, submit their assignments, and complete the examinations online (Kuama, 2016).

In response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the whole education process transformed to online, especially ELT (English language teaching), which has been transferred to e-learning in most universities all over the world. In Egypt, it is the first time that EFL learners have been officially engaged in e-learning. So, this study focuses on the challenges and obstacles encountered by EFL teachers in online classrooms during the pandemic and what needs to be done to avoid these problems, as other issues and concerns of using technology in traditional teaching and learning have been investigated and covered by several studies and projects.

## **II- Literature Review:**

The coronavirus pandemic has changed the teaching-learning process in higher education institutions and has affected how teachers and students interact. As a result of the pandemic, universities worldwide were obliged to adopt online learning to avoid the virus spread and ensure the educational process's continuity (Sobaih et al., 2020).

Previous studies on integrating technology in EFL classrooms has identified certain factors that positively affect the learning/teaching process. Al-Awidi and Aldhafeeri (2017) determine the positive impact of digital classes, which increasingly gain popularity with EFL teachers to change their traditional teaching methods towards a new style that would benefit students. Moreover, Patil (2020) clarified that adopting new theories of language teaching methodology is always a challenge for both teachers and students. Many theories about EFL learning and teaching have been proposed, and significant changes in the EFL teaching methodologies have been made based on the learner's needs. Changes also occurred in the learning materials where printed materials do not present information dynamically (Huang et al., 2012), and using digital materials (e.g. videos, audios, presentations, online documentaries or motion pictures, etc.) are preferred (Kuhl et al., 2011). Their study also showed that, in integrating technology into the curriculum, if the teaching and learning process is well-planned and effectively introduced, it would lead to manifold development of learners' language acquiring capacity.

In a similar direction, it is a demanding endeavor to explain how technology impacts every aspect of the learning process. According to Yadov et al. (2018), the advent of the digital era and the importance and need of integrating new technologies have also dramatically changed the way of learning and communication. The social impact of new technological tools (online and blended classes, using tools such as mobile or project-based technology integration) is not comprehensible since the popularity and widespread use of the internet have led to a considerable transformation in our society (Martins et al., 2016).

Hence, another benefit of using new technologies in language learning is to encourage learners to actively construct their learning environment (Bonner & Reinders, 2018). They observed that adopting new technologies in language learning classrooms encouraged students to enhance their language ability by interacting with the real world. In accordance, Spiteri and Rundgren (2020) clarify that the process of informal learning (peer informal learning among teachers through sharing ideas and experiences in implementing technology in their classrooms) motivates teachers to learn and use new technological techniques and has a positive influence on the process of technology integration because colleagues affect one another's beliefs and attitudes towards using technology.

In addition, technology can improve student engagement. Traditional teaching and learning methods do not push students and teachers to their full potential, but by using technology, teaching and learning are improved and given a new dimension as it maintains their interest. It is the best way to create language learning, especially during critical situation (Pital, 2020).

By effectively utilizing technological interaction tools, it would help find ways to collaborate with students, teachers, and experts worldwide, opening up an opportunity to understand the language via multimedia with an international audience. Innovative tools and techniques can also be used to maintain interest and enhance language learning, such as game-based learning, learning with the help of handheld devices as mobile, student response centers, and instructional tools like smart interactive whiteboards are being effectively used and ranked high by both language teachers and learners.

Some online platforms, including unified communication and collaboration platforms, like Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, Canvas and Blackboard help teachers create effective educational courses, training, and skill development programs (Petrie, 2020). They also have features for video meeting, workplace chat, and file storage to keep online classes organized and easy to work with. Moreover, they allow sharing various content like audio, videos, Word, PDF, and Excel file. These also enable teachers to track students' learning and assessment through online quizzes and the rubric-based assessment of submitted assignments.

According to Doucet et al. (2020), online classroom time is assigned to discussion with teachers and peers to deepen understanding and encourage problem-solving, critical thinking, and self-directed learning skills. Other beneficial online classroom platforms such as video conferencing (Zoom, Google Hangouts Meet, Slack, Cisco, WebEx) and customizable cloud-based learning management platforms as Elias, Skype, and Moodle are widely used.

Although these studies focused on the benefits of integrating technologies in EFL classrooms, in the normal conditions, and in challenging situations such as the Coronavirus pandemic situation, which is problematic for all life aspects like education and learning and for all countries such as Egypt, many researchers have addressed the online teaching and learning problems during the Covid- 19.

Most of these studies are related to students' problems, ignoring the challenges faced by teachers. Only a few researchers have addressed the challenges faced by teachers in online teaching and learning. In a study conducted by Gratz and Looney (2020), teachers lacked online teaching skills, a lack of time for online course preparation, and their subject or course content is unsuitable for online teaching. Moreover, Arora and Srinivasan (2020) recorded the significant challenges teachers face in the online teaching-learning process as network issues, a lack of awareness, a lack of training, a lack of interest, less attendance, a lack of interaction and a lack of personal touch. Similarly, Kaup et al. (2020) stated that teachers do not have sufficient infrastructures such as configured laptops, internet,

and microphones to impart education efficiently. While online sessions, many teachers face connectivity issues, bandwidth issues, system failure, etc., because of a lack of technical assistance, they cannot resolve problems. While Pokhrel & Chhetri (2021) explained that teachers' challenges during the Covid-19 are due to students' large number in the online class, and lack of online teaching infrastructure, professional development, students' participation, and tools for authentic assessments and timely feedback. In agreement, Verma et al. (2020) clarified that many institutions did not train their teachers to work remotely through online platforms, so they found it challenging to manage their students in remote teaching. The teachers reported that the online teaching setting was an exhausting and demotivating experience.

As some researchers explored the challenges and obstacles encountered in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic according to their educational environment and suggested facilities by their institutes, this study aims to identify EFL teachers' beliefs and challenges towards technology-integrated online classrooms at Ahram Canadian University, Egypt, during the current global crisis and the possible solutions to improve students' performance and overcome these problems in the future.

#### Statement of the Problem:

The current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic has affected learners worldwide. As a result, the government has come up with an e-learning programme, and online classrooms appear to be a suitable solution to fill in the void for traditional classrooms.

So, this study attempts to provide a viewpoint and review the EFL teachers' beliefs and challenges towards technology-integrated online classrooms at Ahram Canadian University during the Covid-19 pandemic to better understand the challenges of online education for better planning and management of the teaching process.

#### Questions of the Study:

The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- Is the technology-integrated online classroom beneficial during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 2- What are the most significant challenges the EFL teachers face in online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic?

#### Aim of the study:

The current study aims to find out the EFL teachers' beliefs and challenges during the transition to online learning in the second semester of 2020 (Spring 2020) at Ahram Canadian University, Egypt, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and explore possible solutions and suggestions for future online teaching.

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### **Significance of the study:**

The results of this study are hopefully expected to be helpful to:

1- EFL teachers: This study may enable EFL teachers to use the platform in online classroom to enhance students' performance through using multiple applications and techniques during the Covid-19 pandemic, and also investigate their challenges during the pandemic to help them adapt rapidly to the new technological requirements of the online teaching process.

2- Language Learner: This study may provide more comfortable and technical error free learning environments for language learners.

3- The institutional management and curriculum designers: This study may raise the institutional management and curriculum designers' awareness to develop a suitable cooperative atmosphere for teachers and students and reshape the curriculum and assessment tools in accordance with developments in the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Delimitations of the study:**

This study was delimited to:

- A group of 48 EFL teachers worked at the English Language department, Ahram Canadian University.

- The spring semester of the academic year 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **III- Study Design and Data Collection Instruments:**

#### **A- Study Design:**

This study is a mixed-method design. The researcher adopted Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method Design through using a questionnaire and online interview techniques to identify teachers' beliefs and challenges towards the technology-integrated online classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **B- Participants:**

A total of 48 English language instructors with varied teaching experiences and different age groups working at the English Language department, Ahram Canadian University, participated in this study. The participants at least have a CELTA certificate in teaching the English language and are currently involved in teaching English for students registered in three different levels (beginners to advanced levels). Their professional teaching experience ranged from 3 to 25 years. During the Covid-19 pandemic, they received essential training for online teaching through Zoom and Microsoft teams on the ACU LMS. Moreover, they were skilled in using different technological applications such as vodcasting, podcasting, etc. The sociodemographic characteristic of the participants is presented in table (1)

**Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristic of the participants.**

Variables	Category	Count	Percentage
Gender	Male	20	58.3%
	Female	28	41.7%
Degree	Bachelor	19	39.3%
	Master	13	27%
	Ph-D	12	25%
	Ass- prof	2	4.2%
	Prof	2	4.2%
Age	23-30 years	17	35.4%
	31-40 years	17	35.4%
	Over 40 years	14	29.2%
Position	English instructor	12	25%
	Demonstrator	7	14.6%
	Assistant lecturer	13	27%
	Lecturer	12	25%
	Ass. Professor	2	4.2%
	Professor	2	4.2%
Years of teaching experience	3-7	22	45.9%
	10-18	13	27.1%
	Over 20	13	27.1%

### **c- Instruments of the study (Data Collection):**

1) Technology-integrated online classroom implementation questionnaire:

a- Aim of the questionnaire:

The questionnaire aimed to investigate the EFL teachers' opinions and experiences on the impact of technology integration into an online classroom during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is an effective tool to examine teachers' perceptions of various education-related issues because the scales reflect the complexity, and at the same time flexibility, of human behavior and responses to different phenomena.

b- Description of the questionnaire:

It is a google survey form-based questionnaire. The questionnaire, in its final form, contained sixteen items. The items of the questionnaire were direct, clear, and simple.

c- Questionnaire validity:

To test questionnaire validity, it was submitted to jury members specialized in Curriculum and EFL Instruction. They evaluated the appropriateness of the questionnaire's items and the clarity of the questionnaire instructions and items. Therefore, the questionnaire's items were modified based on their recommendations.

#### **d- Questionnaire reliability:**

The researcher administered the questionnaire to another thirty language teachers, other than the study sample, to test questionnaire reliability. The reliability coefficient was estimated by using Cronbach Alpha Formula. The estimated value was (0.91), and it was considered relatively high.

#### **e- Questionnaire response rating:**

The questionnaire was a Likert four-point bipolar scale. Participants were required to state to what extent they agree with each item ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, to strongly disagree.

#### **f- Questionnaire duration:**

The duration of the questionnaire was estimated by summing up the times of the fastest and the slowest participants in answering the questionnaire divided by two. So, the time allocated to the questionnaire was  $16+34/2= 25$  minutes.

### **2) The Interview:**

#### **a- Aim of the interview:**

A structured interview with teachers was conducted via Google Meet, whereby recorded voice messages were transcribed in written form to address the EFL teachers' challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic and the possible solutions.

#### **b- Interview setting:**

The setting was quiet, with less background noise to have clear recording data. Hence, for this reason, this interview session was conducted in the evening after their online classes.

#### **c- Description of the interview:**

It is a one-on-one interview. After describing the interview objectives for the participants, 48 EFL teachers participated, and each teacher was interviewed after his/her online classes. Interview questions are designed and formulated based on study objectives. The interview consisted of two questions:

- 1- Describe your experience with technology-integrated online classroom during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 2- Describe the challenges you faced while teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic situation, and what are your recommendations for addressing these challenges?

#### **d- Interview duration:**

Teachers are asked to answer the questions completely online through the Google Meet application, and each interview lasted for 10-15 minutes. The interview took place over five days, from 30 May 2020 to 3 June 2020.

### **IV. Data Analysis and Results:**

The purpose of the current study was to examine EFL teachers' beliefs towards the impact of technology-integrated online classrooms and the challenges they encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the current study design, the findings of the study were categorized into two sections: quantitative and qualitative findings. The quantitative analysis data addresses the first research question on whether technology integrated into online classrooms beneficial during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results are presented in table (2).

Discussion on the quantitative data:

**Table 2: Technology-Integrated Online Classroom Implementation Questionnaire Results**

No.	Questionnaire items	Response rating	Number of participants	Percentage
1	Technology-integrated online classroom is an opportunity to help teachers exploit the current pandemic circumstances to act as learning facilitators rather than information providers.	Strongly agree	16	33.3%
		Agree	22	45.8%
		Disagree	8	16.7%
		Strongly disagree	2	4.2%
2	Teachers need good technical infrastructure (hardware, software, and internet) for the smooth conducting of the online classes.	Strongly agree	33	68.7%
		Agree	15	31.3%
		Disagree	0	0%
		Strongly disagree	0	0%
3	Teachers need institutional support for successful online teaching and assessment.	Strongly agree	26	54.2%
		Agree	16	39.6%
		Disagree	1	2.1%
		Strongly disagree	2	4.2%
4	Online teaching makes teachers feel more competent as educators	Strongly agree	9	18.8%
		Agree	25	52.1%
		Disagree	12	25%
		Strongly disagree	2	4.2%
5	Online teaching accommodates students' personal learning styles	Strongly agree	5	10.4%
		Agree	22	45.8%
		Disagree	17	35.4%
		Strongly disagree	4	8.3%
6	Online teaching requires adequate software skills training that is not too time-consuming.	Strongly agree	14	29.2%
		Agree	30	62.5%
		Disagree	4	8.3%
		Strongly disagree	0	0%
7	Online teaching does not require	Strongly agree	13	27.1%

EFL Teachers' beliefs and Challenges towards Technology-Integrated Online Classrooms during the Covid-19 Pandemic at Ahram Canadian University

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No.	Questionnaire items	Response rating	Number of participants	Percentage
	extra time to plan learning activities	Agree	14	29.2%
		Disagree	21	43.7%
		Strongly disagree	0	0%
8	Online classes are effective in improving students' academic achievement (i.e. The grades).	Strongly agree	12	25%
		Agree	31	64.6%
		Disagree	4	8.3%
		Strongly disagree	1	2.1%
9	Online teaching promotes student collaboration.	Strongly agree	6	12.5%
		Agree	31	64.5%
		Disagree	9	18.8%
		Strongly disagree	2	4.2%
10	Online teaching makes classroom management more difficult.	Strongly agree	6	12.5%
		Agree	15	31.3%
		Disagree	22	45.8%
		Strongly disagree	5	10.4%
11	Online teaching promotes the development of communication and productive skills (e.g., writing and presentation skills)	Strongly agree	12	25%
		Agree	24	50%
		Disagree	9	18.8%
		Strongly disagree	3	6.3%
12	Participating teachers in selecting computer technologies is necessary to be effective.	Strongly agree	16	33.3%
		Agree	29	60.4%
		Disagree	3	6.3%
		Strongly disagree	0	0%
13	Online teaching enhances teachers' professional development.	Strongly agree	17	35.4%
		Agree	25	52.1%
		Disagree	4	8.3%
		Strongly disagree	2	4.2%
14	Online teaching promotes students' interpersonal skills (e.g., ability to relate or work with others).	Strongly agree	17	35.4%
		Agree	21	43.8%
		Disagree	7	14.6%
		Strongly disagree	3	6.3%
15	Online teaching does not increase the amount of stress and anxiety students experience	Strongly agree	13	27.1%
		Agree	19	39.6%
		Disagree	14	29.2%
		Strongly disagree	2	4.2%
16	The success of online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic depends mainly on	Strongly agree	16	39.6%
		Agree	24	50%

No.	Questionnaire items	Response rating	Number of participants	Percentage
	parents' support.	Disagree	8	16.7%
		Strongly disagree	0	0%

The Analysis of the participants' responses to the administered online questionnaire revealed that they have divergent opinions and points of view regarding integrating technology in online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic. As shown in table (2), 79.1% of the respondents agreed that technology-integrated online classroom is an opportunity to help teachers exploit the current pandemic circumstances to act as learning facilitators rather than information providers. They can guide and direct their students by asking questions, exploring options, and suggesting alternatives. On the other hand, 21.9% disagreed with the idea. Regarding item (2), all teachers, 100%, agreed that they need good technical infrastructure (hardware, software, and internet) to smooth conduct the online classes. For item (3), almost all the respondents, 93.8%, need institutional support for successful online teaching and assessment, whereas 6.2% did not need it. While for item (4), 70.9% of the teachers in online classrooms feel more competent as educators; competency encompasses knowledge, skills and professional action, rather than seeing such action as the application of knowledge. On the contrary, 29.4% of the teachers thought the opposite. Concerning item (5), only 56.2% of the respondents agreed that online teaching accommodates students' personal learning styles, and 43.8% refused this idea. This point should be put into consideration while designing course material and online activities. As to item (6), most teachers, 91.7%, explained that online teaching requires adequate software skills training that is not too time-consuming, and only 8.3% disagreed. 46.3% of the participants in item (7) believed that online teaching does not require extra time to plan learning activities; in comparison, 43.7% believed otherwise. Item (8) showed that 89.6% of the respondents thought that online classes are effective in improving students' academic achievement, while only 10.4% contradicted this viewpoint.

In addition, in item (9), 77% of the participants agreed that online teaching promotes student collaboration, and only 23% denied this point. While for item (10), 43.8% of the teachers endorsed that online teaching makes classroom management more difficult, and 56.2% considered that classroom management was not difficult. Regarding item (11), 75% of the respondents believed that online teaching promotes the development of

communication skills (e.g., writing and presentation skills), while 25% believed the contrary. As to item (12), 93.7% of the teachers considered that it is essential to participate in selecting computer technologies to be effective according to their subject nature and objectives, and only 6.3% disagreed. 87.5% of the respondents in item (13) consented that online teaching enhances teachers' professional development, and 12.5% contradicted. Concerning item (14), 78.2% of the participants agreed that online teaching promotes students' interpersonal skills, while 20.9% thought the opposite. As shown in item (15), 66.7% of the respondents asserted that online teaching does not increase the amount of stress and anxiety students experience; on the other side, 33.4% refused this idea as it may increase students' stress and anxiety. With regard to item (16), 83.3% of the respondents believed that the success of online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic depends mainly on parents' support, while 16.7% believed otherwise.

The quantitative data findings reflect that EFL teachers have a positive attitude and ability to use the technological devices to teach online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, they reported that technology-integrated online classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic can be helpful in many ways and can be used as an essential instructional tool.

**Discussion on the qualitative data:**

To answer the second research question that addresses the challenges faced by the EFL teachers, the researcher interviewed 48 EFL teachers via Google Meet because of the pandemic. The interview consisted of two questions.

Some of the participants' responses from the interview, as confidentiality was promised, concerning their experience with technology-integrated online classroom during the Covid-19 pandemic are listed below:

"It was a new experience for me as an English instructor to use any online platforms in teaching. For me, it is a fruitful experience. On the personal level, I discovered new potentialities in myself that I have never thought I possess."

"I love online teaching because it can save time. I have taken two courses to learn how to use some programs about online teaching and how to deal with the students. I'm really very impressed and very excited about distance learning. It's a huge advance in education. It's a big factor for me to gain self-confidence by sharing and talking to others."

"After the training, we have got through to be able to use platforms like Teams, Zoom and others, I myself have got no problem. Yet, there are other issues out of hand hope we could cope more and more. Classes are running smoothly on such platforms, programs and application ...Thanks for advanced technology..."

"Technological tools were highly useful to facilitate and deliver the message needed easily. In addition, online learning made it easier to share a larger amount of resources with students who are able to reach the information explained in the lectures with all the attached materials wherever and whenever they need. Thus, they don't have the stress of missing out part of the information provided in the lectures."

"Subjectively, I do not prefer online classes -neither as a teacher nor as a student. However, I may describe my experience with technology integrated online classrooms as a good one. It is the only safe way/choice for all of us during the COVID-19 pandemic. The priority is always our safety and well-being. For me, It is a good experience because of some reasons:

First, I can still communicate with students and teach them. Simply! Second, students can receive suitable academic materials; can ask me questions, and get feedback through Teams. Third, online teaching has added a whole new experience and some new abilities to me as a teacher. Finally, face to face teaching/learning process is more effective to me; nevertheless, online teaching/learning process currently plays an important role that I can not deny."

"I Basically work with Adults, so I believe it was a fruitful experience. Many students faced difficulties getting used to Online learning, but now they're more than ok with it. Plus, most of the students prefer online learning to save time, money, and effort. What is more, they tend to it to be protected from the pandemic. On the contrary, a large number of them still prefer offline learning."

"It wasn't the first time to use the internet in education, but it was the first time to teach online. I believe it was a great experience. I learnt how to create cooperative teams to participate in classes. Managing the class wasn't easy at first, but I got accustomed quickly. So, I think it was a great experience, and choosing Teams was a good choice, too."

As shown, most of the EFL teachers believe that online teaching, in the beginning, was a bit challenging to be able to engage and integrate the students into the online classes. However, after some practising and research to be oriented with the applications used, it became easier to maintain an informative and entertaining class.

In terms of the challenges they faced while teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic situation, and what are their recommendations for addressing these challenges? Some of the participants' responses from the interview were:

"The internet connection for one. It's not always reliable, and that causes a lot of problems and interruptions. Also, not all the students are familiar with the tools or the websites used in online teaching or even

blended teaching. So, I recommend educating both the teachers and the students on how to use the online teaching tools more effectively."

"The challenges were how to simplify information for students online and how to use different strategies online to overcome these problems I had to ask all of them continually to be sure that they are focusing. Also, I tried to use more than one board, online PowerPoint shows, office programs, download pictures ...etc. It was the hardest time ever."

"Two significant challenges emerged during the crisis. First, there was a need to adapt teaching methodologies to enhance the quality of learning as being affected by the shift from face-to-face to online teaching. Second, it exerted effort to organize and manage exams and assessments from a distance. It is worth mentioning that finding the right balance between face-to-face and online learning is a solution, with providing a safe environment on campus for both students and instructors."

"Not all students (participants) are technologically updated to employing modern technological applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meets to undertake the educational mission of educational institutions such as schools and universities."

"I usually face problems with Connectivity, reluctant students to participate in class activities, unfamiliarity with some online platforms, Unpunctuality of some students, repeated excuses because of Connectivity on the side of students which sometimes turn to be mere lies. Accordingly, I recommend that the university provides students with a strong internet connection to support their classes, use other platforms such as Zoom, and Google Meet to solve many problems that may take place with Teams. Also, PD online events must be organized to help both teachers and students develop their skills. Some of these events can be only fun gatherings which can help build rapport among the staff members and students to help both avoid the burn-out and enhance their wellness. Also, paid office hours must be activated to help learners meet their instructors if they have any problems facing them. The curriculum must be tailored in a way be more skill-based and career-oriented to help prepare learners for their future careers."

"There are many challenges that I have faced while using online platforms in teaching. First, while teaching on ZOOM, it kept disconnecting, especially when it surpasses 40 minutes. Secondly, in Microsoft Teams, there is a problem with the speed of the internet as this platform needs a relatively high speed of internet. As for the recommended solutions, it is preferable to increase the speed of the internet. Additionally, there should be a new platform that would accept the huge number of students.

"Online teaching poses few challenges, yet the sustainable collaboration and support provided by the department make the educational process continue smoothly. For instance, some students are faced with technical issues such as the sudden shutdown of their computers. Besides, there are moments when their Wi-Fi is spotty, and week monitors can make it difficult to keep up with the virtual classrooms. Actually, the most suitable solution for this problem is by allowing the instructors to record class sessions as a backup, and the English Language department has already applied this policy."

"There are some difficulties that we face, such as the occasional disconnection. Moreover, we face a problem in the evaluation and assessment process, especially in writing and speaking skills. Unfortunately, the interactive participation of students is not sufficient! They rely on mere passive attendance without interaction or participation, and I think this is a catastrophic matter that leads students to dependency, boredom, laziness, and a low-quality learning experience."

"I believe that online teaching must be activated during the pandemic for the next year as well, in order to preserve our students and lecturers, especially with the increase in COVID rates worldwide. I believe that the activation of other platforms besides Microsoft Teams will enhance the efficiency of the educational process and the opportunities for student participation and interaction in the classroom. It will help achieve the desired learning outcomes, specifically with productive skills such as speaking and writing. Students and lecturers could use their emails to send written assignments and require students to open cameras during lectures when available."

"Maybe the biggest challenge was getting the students' attention during the class as sometimes they lose it while turning off their cameras and being home. Lots of SS are indifferent. The holiness of the educational process is diminished somehow since lots of SS use their mobile during lectures while they are in their bedrooms or on means of transport. Teachers should keep their sessions interactive and interesting in order to keep the students focused."

The qualitative data reflects that EFL teachers agreed that challenges mostly related to problems with electricity or internet during online sessions or students who are unable to access the session because they live in remote areas. For teachers, it is a must to make sure that every device is working fine before sessions. Also, always having alternatives/plan B is essential, i.e. pre-recording video lessons or lectures may be one solution.

Another challenge is students' unfamiliarity and lack of comprehension of the tools, applications, or websites used online. They need to receive appropriate training on the application(s) their school/college

uses to avoid wasting time explaining how to use the applications themselves during classes and avoid students getting disconnected or not being fully engaged during sessions. Regarding this problem, the English language department at Ahram Canadian University prepared tutorials to help them sign in to Google classroom and Microsoft Teams and how to use different technological apps for submitting assignments (see Appendix 1, Figure1).

In addition, many students are not engaged in the process of online learning. They also need more online engaging activities that will give them the opportunity to participate and link the content they are working on to their real-life situations. The curriculum must be tailored to be more skill-based and career-oriented to help prepare students for their future careers. In response, the English Language department provides teachers with well-prepared PowerPoint presentations and video materials with interactive tasks and activities to encourage students to participate and promote their interpersonal skills through interactive platforms such as Poll Everywhere, Mentimeter, Kahoot!, Padlet and Pigeonhole Live( see Appendix 1, Figure2, 3).

Moreover, teachers' inability to completely control online sessions is a major challenge. Unfortunately, it is a visual world after all. Controlling everything during online classes is almost impossible. However, one way to overcome this is to regularly check students' presence and attention to the session. In addition, turning on cameras may help notice students and increase their attention to the lectures or class activities. Furthermore, teachers could think of as many anticipated problems as possible before classes to find solutions and avoid any unpleasant surprises. The better the communication between teachers and students, the fewer the problems!

Finally, Online teaching is the only and safe solution amid this pandemic, but having solutions across this scale is inevitable in keeping up with the technological changes. On the other hand, this is the safety valve while the world is witnessing a major crisis due to such a dreaded disease.

#### V- Conclusion:

The current study examined the EFL teachers' beliefs towards the impact of technology-integrated online classrooms and the challenges they experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic at Ahram Canadian University, Egypt. Based on the current study's findings, most participants, teachers, have a positive attitude towards online classrooms; they believe that it offered students an opportunity to actively participate in learning from a distance, in their comfort zone and under secure conditions while also keeping up with their lessons. As a result, the integration of technology into language classrooms leads to improved teaching and learning with a positive impact on language learner's proficiency level. Moreover, the

interview results revealed that EFL teachers reported different challenges in implementing online classes, such as the speed of the internet in Egypt as the principal problem. Other teachers clarified the need for taking some training courses to improve teaching through technologies to overcome any technical challenges, and using the internet to increase their knowledge of technology in teaching would be helpful during the current situation. One of the utmost importance of online classes is that teachers are available and open to students' needs. This, in turn, increases their engagement and participation in the educational process. When students, for instance, encounter any technical difficulties, teachers should come up with solutions to help students access the information provided during courses either by recording, posting the lectures on the platform, or offering supplementary materials. The current situation has offered many great potential opportunities to implement online applications and platforms to enhance learner's language proficiency. Hence, the use of technology-integrated online classrooms is highly productive as it manages to focus on strategic skill-based learning and establish a strong virtual rapport between the instructors and learners.

#### **VI- Recommendations:**

Based on the study results and discussions, the following can be recommended:

1. Specialists of education should pay attention to enhancing the culture of distance learning among students and instructors and eliminating their digital literacy as an integral part of the educational process to provide appropriate support if students stay in their homes.
2. Great efforts should be exerted to develop the digital education system, improve Internet services, empower students with technical skills, and qualify teachers to effectively implement technology in education.
3. More extensive professional development training sessions are required to equip EFL teachers with the needed applications for online classrooms.
4. EFL teachers should do their best to enhance students' performance by using technologies in the absence of face-to-face teaching, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. EFL teachers should exploit every opportunity to create a cooperative atmosphere in online classrooms in educational centres and institutions.
6. Universities' authorities can assist language learners in solving their technical problems and helping them adapt to technological demands and potential pressures in language settings.
7. English language curriculum designers and material developers should integrate more motivational and self-regulated learning strategies in

future teachers' books by providing clear and practical examples to use in online classrooms to motivate students, especially in challenging situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **VII- Suggestions for further research:**

Based on the current study results, the following suggestions are presented for further research:

1. This research can be extended by the triangulation approach using different methods and techniques to get more valid and reliable results.
2. Further studies towards motivational strategies, reflective teaching, and criticism of online classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic are required.
3. Further studies towards conducting a longitudinal study to see how universities adapted to teaching and learning exclusively online, how teachers adapted (teaching style, interaction with students), and if students' attitudes towards online learning improved should be carried out.

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## Appendix (1)

The figure displays a collection of tutorial materials for Microsoft Teams. At the center is a large graphic featuring a blue square with a white 'T' and a blue silhouette of a person, with the text "How to Install Microsoft Teams & to join the English sections" below it. To the left, three smaller panels provide additional instructions: the top one discusses receiving an email address on a Canadian University domain; the middle one shows a Google search for "Outlook" with a red box highlighting the "Outlook - Free personal email and calendar from Microsoft" result; the bottom one shows a Microsoft account sign-in page with red boxes around the "Sign in" button and the "Create free account" button. To the right, a larger panel shows a Google search for "outlook mail" with a red box around the "Outlook - Free personal email and calendar from Microsoft" result, and a screenshot of the Outlook sign-in page with a red box around the "Sign in" button.

Figure (1) Student's tutorial on how to sign in to Microsoft Teams

# EFL Teachers' beliefs and Challenges towards Technology-Integrated Online Classrooms during the Covid-19 Pandemic at Ahram Canadian University

د. هدى علي علي

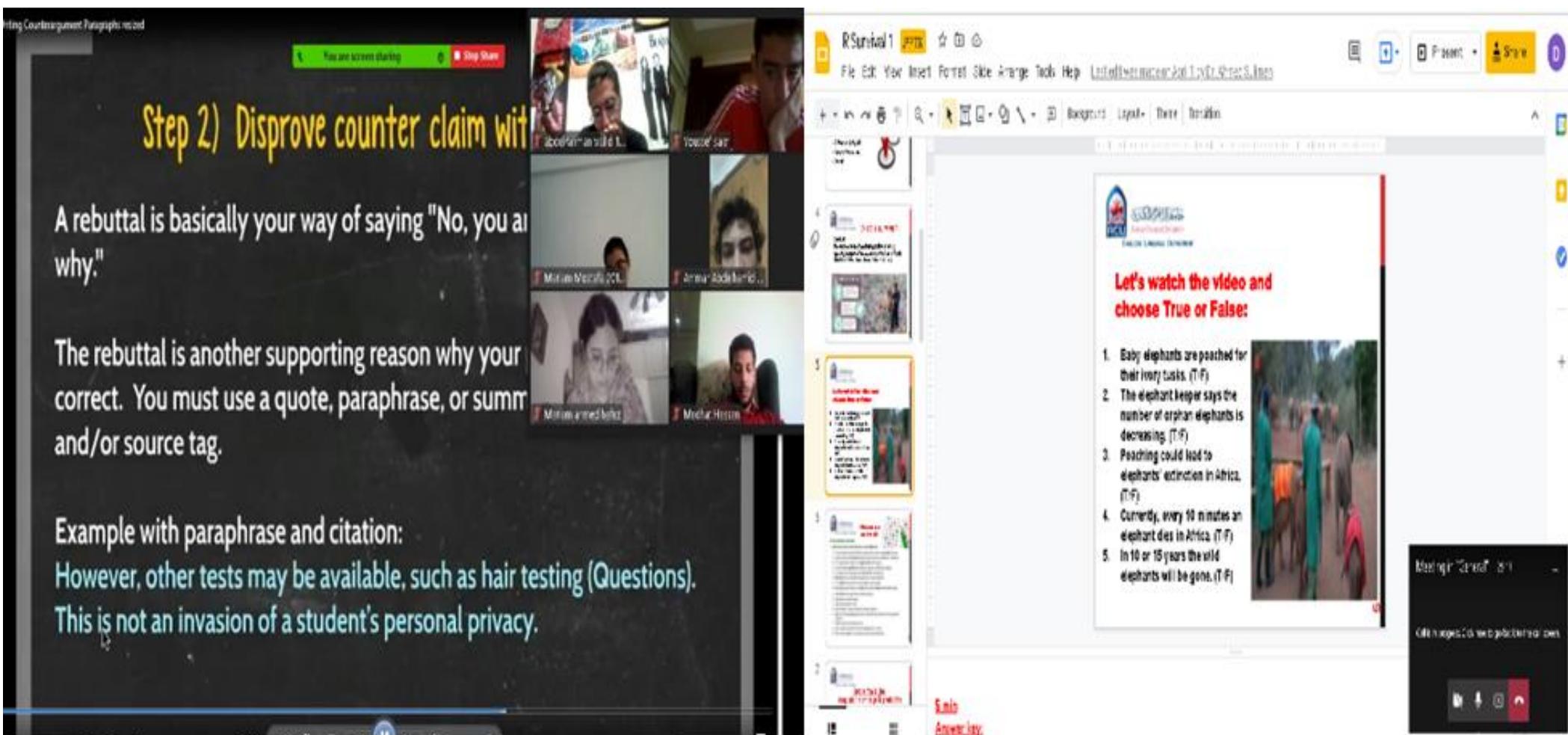


Figure (2) An Example of an online class during the Covid-19 Pandemic

## EFL Teachers' beliefs and Challenges towards Technology-Integrated Online Classrooms during the Covid-19 Pandemic at Ahram Canadian University

د. هدى علي علي

File Name	Author	Date	Size	Category	Owner	Last modified	File size
zoom Eng 102.1 w4.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 24, 2020	50 MB		Owner	Last modified	
zoom eng 102.9 tues w4.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 24, 2020	105 MB	Audio Materials	me	Feb 19, 2020	–
zoom Eng 102.11 tues w4 CGNT.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 24, 2020	47 MB	Week 1	me	Feb 19, 2020	–
zoom Eng 102.11 tues w4.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 24, 2020	54 MB	Week 2	me	Feb 26, 2020	–
zoom Eng 102.1 w4 CGNT.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 24, 2020	22 MB	Week 3	me	Mar 3, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 1PM CGNT.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Apr 14, 2020	18 MB	Week 4	Dr. Ahmed Suliman	Mar 13, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 1PM WS CGNT.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 31, 2020	31 MB	Week 5	me	Mar 25, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 1PM WS.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 31, 2020	64 MB	Week 6	me	Apr 2, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 1PM.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Apr 14, 2020	53 MB	Week 7	me	Apr 10, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 9AM CGNT.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Apr 14, 2020	16 MB	Week 8	hoda ahmed	Apr 22, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 9AM.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Apr 14, 2020	67 MB	Week 9	me	Apr 30, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 11AM CGNT.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Apr 14, 2020	22 MB	Week 10	me	May 7, 2020	–
zoom_102.Tues 11AM WS CGNT.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 31, 2020	27 MB		me	Mar 3, 2020	546 KB
zoom_102.Tues 11AM WS.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 31, 2020	85 MB		me	Feb 26, 2020	630 KB
zoom_102.Tues 11AM.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Apr 14, 2020	60 MB	101 Course Outline spring 2020.pdf	me		
zoom_102.Tues WS.mp4	Shereen Mahmoud	Mar 31, 2020	70 MB	ing 101-Students in-class orientation.pptx	me		

Figure (3) Recorded material for EFL students during the Covid-19 Pandemic