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Lebanese Teachers' Perceptions of Online Learning



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ABSTRACT:As countries around the globe have moved towards closures of educational institutions as a preventive measure to limit the spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19), teachers worldwide were forced into a full, unprecedented shift to online education. Overnight, many teachers found themselves running virtual lessons, communicating with their learners online while trying to provide the best possible education. This research aims to examine teachers' views of online teaching. It serves to highlight Lebanese teachers' views of their own abilities to impact students during the pandemic-induced shift to full online education. It also aims at estimating the percentage of teachers who believe that they are efficient in delivering online instruction. The participants of the study consisted of Lebanese teachers in two private schools in Mount Lebanon District. Data collection was done through a survey questionnaire that explored teachers' perspectives on current online teaching practices. Results of the study revealed that teachers seem to have a high sense of comfort with online teaching, particularly with their impact on their students' learning. Even though teachers seem to give more value to face to face instruction, they believe they are efficient in creating positive learning environments and that actual learning took place in their online classes.

KEY WORDS: teachers, self-efficacy, online teaching, instruction, student engagement, instructional strategies, classroom management, online school climate, COVID.

I.INTRODUCTION

A. Background and Need for the Study

With its worldwide widespread, the Corona virus brought about an unprecedented move towards full online teaching at schools and universities around the globe. Along with the life-threatening aspect, the Corona virus actually changed the way people around the world function in different professions, more so in the field of online learning and virtual classrooms. The Corona lockdown started an unparalleled shift in education with the push for full online learning in different levels of the educational sectors. The shift to the remote learning format has also been assessed as a good opportunity for teachers and students to become stronger, more creative, and innovative (Yokozeki, 2020).

It is within this framework that teachers' readiness to embark on this journey is being investigated. Overnight, teachers were requested to gear up to provide online classes within the same week, a solution which was possibly foreseen in well-established educational institutions, but not in regular, middle range private or public schools.

Teachers are at the core of the learning experience in the way they design lessons, tailor the learning environment, direct students' learning, and influence students in unlimited ways inside and outside the classroom borders. Suddenly with the COVID-19 outbreak, teachers found themselves in a situation where they had to believe in their impact on their students through online learning when they were losing yet again another contact with them. Due to the scarcity of studies conducted in the Lebanese context on online teaching, this research study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of their online practices. It will serve to explore teachers' perceptions of the online learning initiative in two private schools in Lebanon, and the key areas where teachers find themselves as efficient with online instruction, while looking into attitudinal factors.



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B. Problem Statement

Prior to the Corona Lockdown, there was a big number of educational institutions that were running hybrid programs combining face to face classrooms with virtual ones. This approach was namely adopted in tertiary education or at college level due to the nature of the self-driven approach to students' learning and the need for qualified educators with the right technological experience to meet the requirements of such a hybrid method of teaching. Educational institutions are facing a major challenge today everywhere: how to ensure teachers are well-prepared to cope with today and tomorrow's evolution in learning and learner needs. More importantly for teachers is how to maintain the same level of commitment to deliver instructional material online, engaging students remotely and managing their learning from far.

Since the situation is likely to extend over a longer period of time with online learning, it is of major importance to look into the challenges that teachers are facing through online teaching and investigate what might be the reasons behind a positive online teaching experience.

II. SIGNIFICANCE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The closing of many educational institutions as a preventive measure against the spread of the Corona virus has impacted the education system and the performance and wellbeing of all participants involved in and benefiting from the educational systems worldwide. Globally, with the push towards e-learning, more than 1.2 billion students are out of the classroom (World Economic Forum, 2020). While many educational institutions in different parts of the world shifted to full e-learning or to a hybrid approach of learning via online platforms, schools in Lebanon implemented an imminent move towards online teaching following the ministerial decree number 15 (MEHE, March 2020), whereby remote teaching was initiated in the private and public sectors. However, a number of factors related to the quality of education, teachers' online instruction and their role in delivering remote classes with little to no formal training are assumed to be contributing factors to teachers' perception of their online practices. The aim of this study is to explore and describe Lebanese teachers' perspectives of their online or remote teaching and their ability to create a positive school climate. The following study adopted the quantitative research design using a descriptive analysis. Through this study, the researcher aimed to gain understanding of the challenges teachers faced as they switched to online teaching by examining their online teaching practices.

B. Research Questions

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Lebanese teachers' attitudes towards online teaching?
2. What are Lebanese teachers' views of online teaching versus face to face instruction?
3. Do teachers in Lebanon believe they can create a positive online school climate?

C. Limitations of the Study

Several factors were identified as main limitations to the outcomes of the current study. One of the most prominent limitations was related to changing teachers' mindset to adopt a shift in their instructional method. At the start, teachers were faced with the challenge of adapting their attitude towards the way they prepare for online classes versus preparing for traditional classroom setup. With a heavy reliance on face to face instruction, teachers were challenged to address their students' needs remotely. In fact, teachers' readiness to change this attitude and get into the habit of preparing for online classes constituted a big challenge. Teachers' motivation might have represented a possible limitation to the findings of the study. The fact that teachers were spending long periods of time preparing for their online classes with little guidance might have impacted their perspectives, which might have affected the results of their responses to the questionnaire. Another limitation was due to the relatively small sample size, which could not represent a true reflection of different teachers' views of online teaching. The size of the sample was found to limit the findings, as the participation of a bigger population in different regions would have given more accurate results that can be better generalized. Likewise, the sector was another limitation that could have impacted the results of the study.



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Since most of the respondents were from Mount Lebanon, this might have impacted the findings of the study. Perhaps investigating teachers' views of online teaching in another context might have yielded other findings in different regions and school systems. However, the value of this study lies in revealing certain facts about online teaching in two private Lebanese schools which are more mature with online learning.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Teacher Effectiveness and Online Learning

Research has shown that teacher effectiveness is the most significant factor impacting students' learning and achievement (McCaffrey et. al, 2004). Teachers are central to the education system, and schools are as good as the teachers within them (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

Teacher effectiveness refers to a teacher's ability to utilize approaches, strategies, and a particular set of attitudes that lead to improved student learning and achievement. It is "the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance." (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978, p.84). DuFour (2008) stressed that teachers who believe in their abilities to influence students' achievement are most likely to benefit from professional development (DuFour, 1991).

Teachers' effectiveness has been strongly connected with student achievement (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000) and teachers' sense of their own efficacy makes them more prone to adopt new behaviors (Kimberley et al., 2001). This is true for both physical and online classes. The higher the teacher effectiveness, the better is students' achievement be it online or in a traditional classroom. Teaching effectiveness has been investigated extensively in traditional classrooms, but research has now become more directed towards teaching effectiveness in online or virtual classes.

With the sudden need for online education following the outbreak of Covid-19, the physical "brick and mortar" classroom lost its role as the only place of learning. The Internet made online learning possible, and many researchers and educators have shown interest in online learning to enhance and improve student learning outcomes. Online Learning or e-learning also meaning distance learning; it necessitates internet connectivity and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. Online learning may be synchronous – in real time with a live instructor or asynchronous - self-paced allowing learners to go through courses at their own pace (Arshavskiy, 2013).

One form of online learning is blended learning, in which instructors combine face to face instruction with online learning activities to create a richer learning experience. Learners complete some elements online and do others in person. On the other hand, Hybrid learning is a learning approach where some individuals participate in person and others participate online. This approach was adopted in certain schools during the pandemic. Hybrid learning combines both synchronous and asynchronous approaches to create a flexible learning environment.

Several studies have been conducted to look at teachers' views of online learning. A review by Horne and Sandmann (2012) stated that more studies are needed that evaluate online programs. Frazer et. al (2017) examined nursing instructors' perceptions of teaching effectiveness within the online environment. The study revealed effective online teaching strategies with several recurrent themes of collaborative activities such as discussion boards, instructor presence, and using a variety of instructional methods. Lee and Tsai (2010) investigated teachers' self- efficacy with regards to online teaching (web-based). They identified significant correlations between web-based teaching self-efficacy and positive attitudes toward web-based instruction.

Richardson et. al (2016) ran a study to examine online instructors' perceptions related to online presence, beliefs about actions, and the perceived impact of instructional presence. Results indicated that instructors viewed presence as an important component in online courses; the instructors explained a number of communication strategies to connect with students, and the potential impact on student learning. Kulal and Nayak (2020) conducted a study to analyze the perceptions of teachers and students in online classes. They found that the main factor behind teachers' preference of physical classes over online classes was due to technical issues and their belief in the value of traditional face to face instruction.

El Rouadi and Anouti (2020) explored the online teaching experience in Lebanese intermediate and secondary schools and identified teachers' dissatisfaction with online teaching where teachers raised a concern over their ability to assess students online. A study by ELDaou (2016) on teachers' self-efficacy in relation to their ICT skills in Lebanon revealed that teacher's self-efficacy in the level of technology use, and attitudes have significant effects on the grades and interaction of students with special needs. The results indicated that knowledge and beliefs can influence teachers' disposition to use technology in the classroom, especially when they are trained.



IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Participants and Instruments

In order to gather information about the Lebanese teachers' views of online learning, the researcher sought permission from the administrators of two private schools in Mount Lebanon where technology integration was established prior to the outbreak of the corona virus and the imposed lockdown. The schools were selected due to their existing online practices and the familiarity of the teachers with the use of technology for online teaching. Teachers in the two sample schools had been exposed to the use of different online platforms and learning management systems; therefore, it was expected that their participation in the study would help the researcher form an idea of teachers' views of online teaching. The study participants included teachers of Languages, Mathematics and Sciences at the high school levels. The study participants had been following a blended online learning approach where virtual lessons were conducted, complemented by additional resources posted online for students.

To obtain the opinions from the participants ($N=31$) about their evaluation of the newly adopted teaching method, an online questionnaire consisting of 24 items was administered. The questionnaire was split into three main sections. The researcher employed a 5-point Likert scale on Sections 2 and 3 of the online survey questionnaire.

The first section sought to gather demographic information about the participants, such as age, gender, academic achievement, etc. Section two included five questions which aimed to gather teachers' beliefs on their ability to create a positive online school climate. Section three consisted of eleven items that gathered attitudinal information from teachers on the effectiveness of online teaching.

B. Data Collection

The questionnaire was created as an online Microsoft Form split into three main sections. The link to the questionnaire was shared via WhatsApp with the group of teachers in the two schools that constituted the sample. The online questionnaire remained open for responses for a period of two weeks to enable participants to complete it. The participants' pool included different high school grade levels teachers who had been teaching online since March 2019 in the two schools. Potential participants were contacted and invited via WhatsApp to take the survey in the month of June 2020. This yielded 31 responses. Around 81 percent of participants were females, and 55% of them taught languages. For the aim of this study, the researcher relied on the purposive (non-probability) sampling technique (Glen, 2015), and used this technique for their research study to select the participants.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative design to obtain the opinions of the respondents. The quantitative data analysis revealed findings as detailed below.

Research Question 1: *What are Lebanese Teachers' attitudes towards online teaching?*

To answer the first research question, the researcher conducted an analysis of teachers' responses on Section 3. Based on the examination of teachers' responses and their overall sense of effectiveness with online teaching, teachers in these schools in Lebanon were generally found to exhibit a high degree of comfort with online teaching. Although around half of the participants confirmed not receiving prior training to shift to online teaching, the other half seem to have found the training given useful. As seen in table 1 below, a relatively good percentage of teachers have strong opinions of the effectiveness of online teaching. In fact, it was found that approximately 70 percent of the participants expressed that they are convinced of the effectiveness of online teaching. With regards to the question about any training opportunities provided at their school prior to the shift to online teaching, the study participants expressed that the training was very "helpful" and that it "facilitated work"; others stated that the training "helped in teaching", "taught how to manage and function", and led to them being "able to easily communicate with students and transmit explanations creatively". Even though the shift to full online education was imminent, it seems that the training supported the teachers in these schools to improve their performance, which is commonly expected following a set training. On the other hand, the main challenge that study participants faced to engage in trainings was the "lack of time", "the financial crisis", "the impromptu online session" and the "exceptional circumstances" which have hindered the process of teacher training. Overnight, teachers had to design lessons to suit an online virtual class and adapt to the needs and methods of online education to engage their students differently.

A notable trend is identified in teachers’ responses to their satisfaction with online teaching and their computer skills. The study participants seem to believe they have “High” to “Medium” ability with their technological skills despite their age diversity. No one rated themselves as having “Low” technological skills, which is an indication that these teachers consider themselves knowledgeable with the technical content knowledge and teaching methodologies. This means that these teachers are self-conscious of their technological abilities, and it would be expected that this would serve to increase their satisfaction with online teaching. More specifically and as seen in table 1 below, 77 percent of the teachers in the two sample schools were “Very Satisfied” and “Somewhat Satisfied” while only 3 percent were “Very Dissatisfied” with online teaching. These same teachers specified that they felt “Little” to “No Pressure” from their school department to engage in online teaching. Therefore, teachers in these schools believe in the positive impact of online education and are quite satisfied with their technical and pedagogical abilities to reach their students virtually.

Table 1: Percentage of Teachers’ Responses on Attitudinal Information

Section 3 Items	Scale	Percentage
Did you receive any training prior to carrying out online teaching?	Yes	52
	No	48
Are you convinced of the effectiveness of online teaching?	Yes	71
	No	29
Did you feel any pressure from your department or the institution to teach online?	Little Pressure	45
	A Lot of Pressure	16
	No Pressure	39
How would you rate your computer or technological skills?	High	58
	Medium	42
	Low	0
How satisfied are you with online teaching?	Somewhat Satisfied	55
	Very Satisfied	22.5
	Somewhat Dissatisfied	13
	Very Dissatisfied	3
	Neither	6.5

Research Question 2: *What are Lebanese teachers’ views of online teaching versus face to face instruction?*

It is imperative to consider the effectiveness of online learning compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. An analysis of the data available showed that the study participants have similar beliefs on the benefit of online teaching for both students and teachers. When asked to compare between the classical way of teaching and online teaching, the study participants expressed preference of face to face instruction versus online teaching. In fact, around 90 percent of respondents viewed face to face instruction as better for teachers and 94 percent confirmed that face to face instruction is better for students. This contradicts with the assertion and satisfaction that these same respondents expressed about the value of online teaching. As seen in table 2 below, there seems to be a consensus in teachers’ beliefs that in their opinions, and when compared to online teaching, traditional face to face teaching is more advantageous and beneficial for both students and teachers. This is possibly due to the resistance to change that humans tend to adopt when pushed to adapt to a new environment or a new approach. It could also be possibly due to the exceptional circumstances under which teachers were asked to make the fast shift to full online teaching. It seems that although teachers are finding the online teaching to be effective, due to this novice move to the online learning approach, teachers are facing an internal conflict and thus are reluctant to admit the benefit of online teaching. This could possibly be linked to the fact that there was not enough time for a smooth transition from face to face to online teaching that would prepare teachers to acquire a progressive mindset, experience the value of online teaching before fully engaging in online teaching.

Another evidence of this resistance to agree to the benefit of online teaching is with the strong confidence in the quality of learning that students were gaining from their online classes. Teachers in the study showed a high interest in continuing to teach online and a strong belief that their students learned a great deal in their online course(s). More specifically, as seen on table 2 below, 74 percent of study participants showed a strong interest in continuing to teach



online if need be. This is a good indicator in teachers’ sense of responsibility and adaptability if contrasted with their belief that face to face instruction is more advantageous than online teaching for both students and teachers. In addition, around 65 percent of these private school teachers believed they could promote deep understanding online as they stated that their “students learnt a lot in their online classes”.

Table 2: Percentage of Teachers’ Responses on Attitudinal Information Related to Willingness to teach online

Section 3 Items	Scale	Percentage
If you are asked to compare between the classical way of teaching and online teaching, which one do you think is better for you?	<i>Face to Face</i>	90
	<i>Online</i>	10
If you are asked to compare between the classical way of teaching and online teaching, which one do you think is better for students?	<i>Face to Face</i>	94
	<i>Online</i>	6
Would you be interested in continuing to teach online?	<i>Yes, if I need to</i>	74
	<i>Yes, definitely</i>	13
	<i>No, definitely not</i>	13
My students learnt a lot in their online classes.	<i>Agree</i>	64.5
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	13
	<i>Disagree</i>	19
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	3.5
	<i>Neutral</i>	0

Research Question 3: *Do teachers in Lebanon believe they can create a positive online school climate?*

Upon examining teachers’ beliefs with their ability to create a positive online school climate, it can be stated that the participants seemed to believe they are highly efficient in creating positive online school climate. There was a commonality between teachers’ conviction of the effectiveness of online teaching and their ability to create positive learning environments. Teachers taking part in the study believed they are capable of creating positive online learning environments where they can collaborate with other teachers on enhancing practices and build the same trust, engagement and interaction with their students online as opposed to a traditional face to face class.

As seen in table 3 below, around 81 percent of the participants thought they can do “a great deal” and “quite abit” in making their online class a positive learning environment, and around 80 percent of the participants believe their students actually enjoy attending their online classes. What is more, almost 82 percent believe that their students can trust them online. Likewise, approximately 74 percent of participants believe they have the efficacy to help fellow teachers with their online classes, and 80 percent believe that they can build a better collaboration to make an online class run more effectively. No participants conveyed a negative belief in their ability to create an online positive school climate, which is an indication of a good self-efficacy. Teachers seem to show a sense of trust in building collaborative practices with other teachers online and with their students.

Table 3: Percentage of Teachers’ Beliefs on Creating Online Positive School Climate

	<i>How much can you do to make the online class a positive learning environment?</i>	<i>How much can you do to make students enjoy attending your online classes?</i>	<i>How much can you do to get students to trust teachers online?</i>	<i>How much can you help other teachers with their online teaching skills?</i>	<i>How much can you do to enhance collaboration between teachers and the administration to make the online class run effectively?</i>
A Great Deal	42	35	42	39	32
Quite a Bit	39	45	42	35	48



Some Degree	19	16	13	26	16
Very Little	0	4	3	0	4
None at all	0	0	0	0	0

VI.CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Conclusion and Study Implications

Throughout this past year since the spread of the Corona Virus, there has been much emphasis on the importance of online teaching and learning. The results of this study indicate that teachers generally have a high sense of self-efficacy with online teaching despite their previous lack of exposure to online teaching strategies on a full-time basis. Private school teachers in the research area were found efficient in online student engagement, classroom management and collaboration. Although many teachers expressed a preference to teaching in a physical setting, many of them believe in the value of online learning. They expressed satisfaction with online teaching and a readiness to continue to do so as and when needed.

Many implications are associated with the outcomes of this study. The study presented an analysis of Lebanese teachers' perceptions of online teaching during the Covid-19 period delving into their beliefs in their ability to engage students using instructional strategies and creating positive online classes. Its value lies in examining teachers' beliefs as they are highly associated with their online practices in private schools. The study investigates the potential benefit of adopting the online instruction versus the traditional face-to-face class interaction to promote a deeper understanding of teachers' views. This approach might be a potential suggestion for future research and educational policies that would improve online teaching in the formal educational systems today by identifying the practices at these two schools which may have led to this positive feedback relating to online teaching. It is a call to revisit school cultures to better equip the school administration, teachers and students with the soft skills and strategies for online learning. The study also holds implications to an educational change, which encourages the rethinking of school budgets and infrastructure to allow for efficient programs of online learning. Such an implementation would necessitate policy changes to be incorporated in the Lebanese schools to also align the learning outcomes and curricula with the online teaching methodology and adapt the learning environment accordingly to improve the learners' digital experience in different grade levels.

B. Recommendations

Through this research study, teachers' views of online teaching were analyzed. The outcomes of this study indicate that the sample of Lebanese teachers in the two private schools where the study was conducted strongly believe in the effectiveness of online teaching and their ability to create positive online school climates although they expressed preference to face to face instruction, which may be due to existing fossilized beliefs on the role of traditional face to face instruction and possibly to the lack of a smooth transition to full online existence. There is a fundamental need for future research to be conducted on a wider population in order to determine whether comparable results would occur between schools in the private and public sectors. For online teaching to be more impactful, it is essential to have structured programs and formal training sessions to equip teachers with the relevant methodologies to better engage students online and assess their learning. Establishing and providing additional training sessions targeting technical, pedagogical and content knowledge plays a vital role in appropriate online teaching enabling teachers to better teach and assess their students' learning virtually. Likewise, awareness needs to be raised with students to improve their online interaction for better learning and acquisition. Also, a longitudinal study on a larger teacher body of both genders is essential to provide more precise findings as the majority of the study participants were female teachers. A similar study can also examine the challenges that teachers face through the online instruction to better address any training gaps looking into the role of online assessments. This research has presented yet a new perspective of teachers' views as they are the engines that drive the learning experience be it physical or remote. Their self-efficacy is essential in ensuring their capabilities are preserved and up to speed with the requirements of this digital age.



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Mireille Farah

Mireille is a passionate, learner-focused educator with over 18 years of teaching experience. She is an English Language specialist who is dedicated to creating positive learning environments and nurturing lifelong learning. Keen on enhancing the use of technology for educational purposes and improving teachers' ongoing professional development, Mireille is interested in 21st century learning, teacher training and innovative learning experiences.



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