

# Distance Learning During COVID-19: EFL Students' Engagement and Motivation from Teachers' Perspectives

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## Abstract

The present mixed-method study aimed to explore 114 female secondary-level English teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of distance education in public schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding students' motivation and engagement during COVID-19 using a Google Forms questionnaire. Additionally, the challenges teachers faced in distance education and their attitudes toward teacher-training programs during the pandemic were investigated in semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated an overall positive view toward the effectiveness of distance education. However, the interviewed participants expressed their preference for traditional in-class teaching due to their familiarity with it compared to distance teaching. Online classes gave students the opportunity to become more actively engaged. Distance education was also found to promote students', especially shy students, motivation for learning and participating in class activities. Teachers indicated some challenges in distance teaching, such as a lack of internet connection and human interaction, technical issues, assessment reliability, increased workload, and students' unwillingness to learn. Finally, recommendations for more effective distance education were provided, namely, technological and pedagogical training for teachers, the need for technical support, and proper training for students on online learning.

**Keywords:** distance education, engagement, motivation, online learning, online teaching, teacher's training

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

Distance education is an interdisciplinary field that has evolved over time and has made significant contributions to accommodating educational demands and coordinating open teaching activities (Bozkurt, 2019). An unexpected shift to distance education occurred across the world in early 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a massive increase in e-learning. In e-learning, remote teaching and learning take place online on multimedia platforms (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). Online distance education has enabled teachers to provide high-quality educational opportunities to large numbers of students who would otherwise be unable to learn in group settings because of COVID-19-related social-distancing considerations (Tesar, 2020).

The advancement of educational technology has provided learners in the 21st century with vastly more learning options than were previously available. Online classes, according to research, offer students flexibility in terms of time, place, and pace (Gedera, Williams, & Wright, 2015, p. 13). With distance education, which is structured in a knowledge context, students can gain independence in task performance, as well as improve their cognitive and creative abilities (Jabbarova, 2020).

However, the anonymity of virtual-learning systems may lead to demotivation and disengagement among students (Gedera et al., 2015, p. 13). Researchers have paid close attention to student engagement when assessing the extent to which technology-enhanced language instruction improves or weakens students' language learning (Sari, 2020). Foreign-language teachers, who account for many of the language courses in schools, have been at the forefront of the ongoing transformation of teaching methods and have been searching for new ways to boost students' learning motivation (Jabbarova, 2020).

When education shifts from in-person classrooms and campuses to virtual ones, as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic, students who prefer the traditional classroom experience to the virtual classroom may lose interest in online learning (Sharma, 2021). Therefore, motivation is essential in the process of language learning. In a recent survey of English teachers regarding their perceptions of classroom activity during the pandemic, the

teachers' main concern was student motivation (Wright, 2021). In whatever environment a classroom activity takes place, the interaction between a teacher and students constitutes a critical factor affecting students' motivation; it is necessary for their engagement in learning activities and thus for effective learning.

It is important to determine how teachers' perception of a situation influences their teaching and to examine their opinions about teaching via remote platforms. This knowledge has become particularly important recently, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, educators should strive to understand how teachers' teaching has changed throughout the pandemic while keeping in mind that online education is a process that may very well continue after the pandemic is over (Colón, 2021). Despite the challenges that many educators and students alike experienced when transitioning to online contexts, the new experiences stimulated the development of new abilities and enhanced existing knowledge. The present study explores these topics as they concern the perceptions that teachers have of student engagement and motivation.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore Saudi Arabian teachers' perceptions regarding their use of distance education in their EFL teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study has two main objectives:

- 1) To explore teachers' perceptions of students' motivation and engagement in EFL distance education
- 2) To investigate teachers' perceptions of teacher-training programs

### 1.3 Research Questions

Five research questions guide the current study:

- 1) What are teachers' attitudes toward teaching online via Madrasati?
- 2) How do teachers perceive their EFL students' *engagement* in Madrasati-based classes?
- 3) How do teachers perceive their EFL students' *motivation* in Madrasati-based classes?
- 4) What are the challenges that teachers face in Madrasati-based classes?
- 5) How do teachers perceive Madrasati-oriented teacher-training programs and their role in promoting teachers' distance education competency?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Distance Education During COVID-19

Distance education, by definition, involves temporal or geographical separation among learners, teachers, and even learning resources. This separation necessarily depends on various kinds of connecting networks, almost all of which today are internet based (Riggs, 2020). Recently, distance education has offered teachers many opportunities to deliver expanded forms of education to much broader groups of students, including those who, for various reasons, were unable to attend conventional schools (Tesar, 2020). Therefore, distance education enables students to gain a high degree of independence in their task performance and to improve their cognitive abilities (Jabbarova, 2020). However, while some students succeed in a distance education environment, others get disengaged and unmotivated (Ferrer, Ringer, Saville, Parris, & Kashi, 2020). This dichotomy illustrates the continuing debate in educational circles regarding whether or not—and if so, to what extent—these technological implementations strengthen teaching and learning (Ally, 2004).

Teaching methods can have a major influence on student achievement, and research has suggested that the greatest influence of all comes from interactive teaching. For instance, using a sample of 1,024 participants, Yao, Rao, Jiang, and Xiong (2020) recorded instances of online teaching techniques in video-recording and livestreaming contexts. Specifically, the researchers examined the effects of these techniques on student performance and found that livestreaming education, because of its greater teacher–student interaction, had a more favorable effect on students' academic achievement than was the case with recorded video lessons. According to the study, the more engagement a teacher conveys during a livestreamed class, the more efficient the teaching will be. The study's findings also demonstrated that, in online classes, teachers must be more than information providers; teachers must also be mentors and companions to their students, just as should be the case in offline, conventional classes.

Many researchers have argued that when leading a real-time online class, teachers should not only impart information to their students but also interact with them as a “leader” and “accompanier.” Fandiño and Velandia (2020) set out to explore teachers' roles in distance education environments. For this purpose, the researchers assembled a group of research participants consisting of EFL tutors and then identified and analyzed various aspects of students' motivation relative to the online roles these tutors played in EFL learning. The findings

indicated that, in general, the roles of tutors and teachers can strengthen students' motivation to learn a foreign language and the social practices students adopt in these learning contexts.

In contrast to the above findings, some research has uncovered evidence that distance education, because it lacks substantive, real-life interactions, can negatively affect students and teachers. As the findings from Aliyyah, Rachmadtullah, Samsudin, Syaodih, Nurtanto, and Tambunan (2020) revealed, in distance education, the lack of real interaction reduces teachers' motivation to teach. Similarly, Orhan and Beyhan (2020) found that distance education is ineffective and cannot satisfactorily replace the real human interactions characteristic of traditional education.

### *2.2 Distance Education and EFL Learners' Engagement*

Throughout the literature, the term "engagement" has been presented in many contexts. This diversity stems from who perceives the engagement, how it is perceived, where it is perceived, and how the wider educational and societal environment shape it. For example, Bundick, Quaglia, Corso, and Haywood (2014) found that the interplay between a classroom's main factors—the student, the teacher, and the lesson content—can affect involvement. Although this finding might seem obvious, many people forget that students' involvement in the teaching and learning process is crucial because they encourage each other to collaboratively participate in school activities (Farizka, Santihastuti, & Suharjito, 2020). According to Darmawansah and Indartono (2019), students' engagement in classroom activities may improve as a result of web-based learning technologies, teachers' support, and a motivating atmosphere in the classroom. The researchers also emphasized that EFL students' engagement in their studies can signal the extent of the students' eventual academic achievement and the strength of teachers' instructional techniques.

In examining whether distance education strengthens or weakens student engagement, Oraif and Elyas (2021) explored the level of engagement learners who were using a designated school platform in online courses within the context of Saudi Arabia exhibited. The study's findings stemmed from a survey involving a sample of 379 female EFL students who were enrolled in a general English-language course at a Saudi high school. The findings of the study showed that the Saudi EFL students were very engaged in their online coursework.

Similarly, Sari (2020) explored the perceptions that Indonesian students had of their engagement in the online learning process. The study focused on the prominent roles learners played in the online learning environment and the possible factors affecting the learners' engagement in the online learning process. The sample comprised 165 undergraduate students from the English Literature Department and the English Education Department at Teknokrat University. Most of the students expressed satisfaction with their online engagement and identified their favorite learner tasks, the three most popular being active-learning, problem-solving, and knowledge-seeking tasks. Regarding leading sources of demotivation, most students cited four in particular: an excessively heavy workload of assignments, difficult course content, unstable internet access, and insufficient internet data.

However, Chen, Kaczmarek, and Ohyama (2020) conducted research in which "course directors" used live Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, San Jose, CA, USA) polling during an optional postcourse feedback session in which learners anonymously filled out a multiple-choice questionnaire that measured students' perceptions and preferences with regard to recorded lectures and other course modes. The sample consisted of 39 second-year students at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. On the whole, students stated that, since switching to e-learning, their learning had worsened, with 44% saying that their learning had "somewhat worsened" and 26% saying that it had "significantly worsened." According to polling data, the introduction of virtual lectures exacerbated student burnout and reduced student engagement and retention while leaving attendance unchanged. The poll further revealed that synchronous recorded live lectures and asynchronous prerecorded lectures with synchronous follow-up sessions were much preferred to nonrecorded live lectures.

### *2.3 Distance Education and EFL Learners' Motivation*

Motivation is one of the most significant aspects of second language (L2) learners' achievement in the language-acquisition process. According to Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), motivation is the initial and most important requirement for tackling a learning activity as well as the engine that drives the process. Regarded as an essential component of the challenging work of L2 learning, motivation, when absent, leads to learners' underperformance, even if they possess exceptional skills. The researchers also argued that motivation is intimately linked to engagement, and that to enhance student participation, motivation must be maintained. Recently several studies have investigated student motivation in distance education environments. For instance, Meşe and Sevilen (2021) examined how students perceived distance education and how it affected their motivation to learn. The findings indicated that online education negatively affected students' motivation

because of a lack of face-to-face interaction, a misalignment of anticipation, and preexisting curriculum and management issues.

In contrast, Muslimin and Harintama (2020) conducted a study involving a small group of EFL learners in an Indonesian school. The results showed that students' motivation and academic performance improved. A critical factor in the students' successful completion of the course was their motivation, which helped them overcome such obstacles as unstable internet connections, WhatsApp feature limitations, and online-learning anxiety. The study's findings indicated that, in the absence of sufficient motivation, learning challenges can sabotage the academic aims of students.

Moreover, Gedera, Williams, and Wright (2015) found that an LMS-based online classroom promotes students' motivation and engagement through three specific factors: instant feedback; audio, video, and texting features; and teachers' active membership role in the classroom's online community. Interestingly, this membership manifested in improved teaching and feedback methods.

Undoubtedly, in distance education situations, students' motivation is partly a function of teaching methods, curricula, and other materials. According to Konecki (2020), students who participated in distance education were satisfied with it and considered it to be at least as effective as—and more exciting than—traditional classroom learning. The study demonstrated that the course content was intelligible, that students provided the required degree of involvement, and that the applied technology was suitable for the learning objectives. Most of the participating students exhibited improved motivation, although some students preferred face-to-face learning.

When measuring the influence of online distance education on students' motivation, Almaleki, Alhajaji, and Alharbi (2021) found evidence that distance education via an internet-based platform was associated with strong student performance, which stemmed in part from the interesting and pleasant nature of the platform's e-features.

#### *2.4 Challenges in Distance Education*

As a result of the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, school systems around the world rapidly shifted their courses online, resulting in significantly disruptive changes for both teachers and students. A full online course, in general, needs a detailed lesson plan, teaching resources such as audio and video devices, and a technological support team. Additional problems, such as a lack of tech savviness and preparation on the part of teachers, exacerbated these deficiencies (Bao, 2020). Previous research (e.g., Alea, Fabrea, Roldan, & Farooqi, 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020) has discussed the highly disruptive consequences of poor internet connections, which can seriously undermine the effectiveness of distance education. Daniel (2020) found that, in online classes, lack of interaction among students increased their anxiety and decreased the effectiveness of online teaching.

Other major challenges include the technological competency of teachers, the credibility of online assessments, and the demanding teacher workloads associated with online distance education (Heng & Sol, 2020). According to two recent studies (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Ramadani & Xhaferi, 2020), the urgent shift to distance education has created unexpected workloads and increased the unreliability of online assessments because student cheating is particularly difficult to police in online distance education settings.

#### *2.5 Teacher-Training Programs in Distance Education*

When teaching is viewed as a profession based on a combination of advanced cognitive and higher-order competencies, it becomes clear that teachers require highly integrated methods of teaching and learning, sophisticated interpersonal skills, and firmly established personal values. For this requirement to be satisfied, teachers should receive training in how they should transfer what they have learned (theory) to a variety of concrete circumstances (practice) (Kirschner, 2015). Habibi, Razak, Yusop, and Mukminin (2019) stated that preservice teachers lack sufficient training in the application of digital tools to classrooms. Therefore, the school administration should invest in teacher professional development today more than ever to keep their educators up to speed on successful educational approaches (Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia, & Koole, 2020).

Regarding training programs, research findings in Pozo-Rico, Gilar-Corbí, Izquierdo, and Castejón (2020) showed that, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, teachers who had attended training programs reported greater technological competency and perceived ability to manage stress than teachers who had not attended such programs. Therefore, professional teacher-training programs in technological skills seem to be highly useful and indeed necessary preparatory features of distance education systems (Giovannella, Passarelli, & Persico, 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020; Lie, Tamah, Gozali, Triwidayati, Utami, & Jemadi, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020). When the COVID-19 crisis ends, educators should not assume that the results of the forced leapfrog into technological integration will completely cede place to traditional learning; in other words, for the foreseeable future,

high-quality education will likely depend, at least in part, on distance education (Lie, Tamah, Gozali, Triwidayati, Utami, & Jemadi, 2020).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research follows the convergent parallel mixed method. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “It is a form of mixed methods design in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem” (p. 15). Mixed-methods approaches have recently risen to prominence because of the growing belief that concurrently executed qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection and data analysis can significantly improve validity and reliability measurements (Zohrabi, 2013).

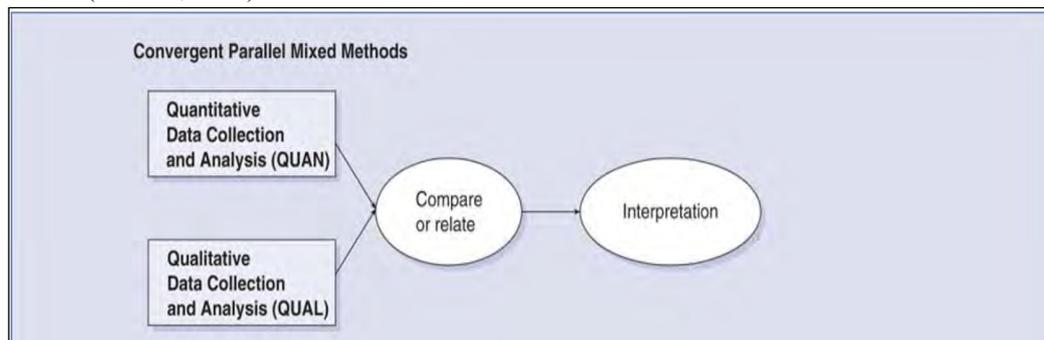


Figure 1. Research design

#### 3.2 Participants

The current study used a convenience sample of 114 female EFL teachers at the secondary level (grades 1, 2, 3) across Saudi public schools. To obtain quantitative data, 104 teacher participants responded to a questionnaire. To obtain qualitative data, 10 teachers participated in semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

#### 3.3 Setting

The present research was conducted during the first semester of the 2021–2022 academic year in Saudi Arabia.

#### 3.4 Research Instruments

The study used two types of research instruments: questionnaires and interviews.

##### 3.4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire's items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated high disagreement and 5 indicated high agreement (see **Appendix 1**). Completed questionnaires were collected electronically with WhatsApp, Telegram, and Twitter applications via a Google Forms link. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections:

- 1) Section One—Personal information (educational level and years of experience)
- 2) Section Two—Items grouped into six sub-sections covering the following themes:
  - Teachers' attitudes toward online teaching (7 items)
  - Teachers' perceptions of students' engagement (7 items)
  - Teachers' perceptions of students' motivation (6 items)
  - Teachers' perceptions of students' academic performance (7 items)
  - Teachers' perceptions of time and class management (6 items)
  - Teachers' perceptions of teacher-training programs (8 items)

##### 3.4.2 Interview

The second instrument used in this research was the interview. It was prepared for and conducted in Arabic to reduce any anxiety the participants felt (see **Appendix 2**). The interview questions were sent to the participants via WhatsApp one hour before the interview so that they could prepare their responses. For the actual interview, each participant joined a private one-on-one Zoom meeting with the researcher.

### 3.5 Questionnaire Validity

To verify the content validity, the researcher asked the questionnaire questions in a pilot study. Specifically, the purpose of the pilot study was to establish whether the questionnaire items were clear enough to elicit analyzable responses. The questionnaire was modified based on the pilot study's results.

### 3.6 Questionnaire Reliability

The questionnaires' internal reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha reliability test, as Table 1 shows:

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha for each section of the questionnaire and for the entire questionnaire

No.	Section	Cronbach's Alpha
1.	Teachers' attitudes toward online teaching	<b>0.762</b>
2.	Teachers' perception of students' engagement	<b>0.810</b>
3.	Teachers' perception of students' motivation	<b>0.698</b>
4.	Teachers' perception of students' academic performance	<b>0.758</b>
5.	Teachers' perception of time and class management	<b>0.779</b>
6.	Teachers' perception of teacher-training programs	<b>0.832</b>
<b>All questionnaire items</b>		<b>0.821</b>

Table 1 presents the Cronbach's alphas for each sub-section of the questionnaire. The values of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were relatively high, reflecting the high reliability of the questionnaire items and thus of the entire questionnaire.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

The collected data from the questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science program version 26. For the qualitative data, the answers were transcribed and then translated into English and finally coded using the ATLAS.ti program. Moreover, frequencies and percentage were used and organized in tables to describe the collected data.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

#### 4.1.1 Background Characteristics of Respondents

##### • Educational Level

Table 2. Educational level

Educational level	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor's	85	81.7
Master's	19	18.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>

As Table 2 shows, 85 respondents (81.7%) fell under the category of "bachelor's degree," and the 19 remaining respondents (18.3%) fell under the category of "master's degree."

##### • Years of Experience

Table 3. Years of experience

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
1–5 years	27	26.0
6–10 years	30	28.8
11–15 years	30	28.8
More than 15 years	17	16.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows that 27 respondents (26.0%) had between 1 and 5 years of experience, 30 (28.8%) had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 30 (28.8%) had between 11 and 15 years of experience, and 17 (16.3%) had more than 15 years of experience.

#### 4.2 Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Engagement in and Motivation for Distance Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic

##### 4.2.1 Teachers' Attitudes Toward Online Teaching

As Table 4 illustrates, item 2 had the highest mean score (4.13), with an RII of 82.60% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, it was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, item 1 had the lowest mean score (3.12), with an RII of 62.40% and a P-value of 0.299. Therefore, the item was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Generally, all the items had a mean score of 3.88, with an RII of 77.63% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the items in total were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4. Teachers' attitudes toward online teaching

No.	Item	Mean	SD	RII (%)	T-value	P-value
1.	I believe online learning is as accurate as in-class learning.	3.12	1.13	62.40	1.05	0.299
2.	I support learner-to-learner interaction and collaborative activity as a central means of teaching.	4.13	0.71	82.60	16.25	0.000
3.	I can develop online activities that promote critical thinking in students.	4.09	0.66	81.80	16.91	0.000
4.	I believe online learning is no longer an option but a necessity.	4.00	0.99	80.00	10.35	0.000
5.	I believe online classes suffer from a lack of human interaction, which weakens students' performance.	3.96	1.06	79.20	9.25	0.000
6.	I feel comfortable communicating in online classes with students.	3.88	0.89	77.60	10.20	0.000
7.	I feel comfortable communicating online with stakeholders (e.g., principals, supervisors, parents).	4.01	0.85	80.20	12.11	0.000
	<b>All items</b>	<b>3.88</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>77.63</b>	<b>21.09</b>	<b>0.000</b>

##### 4.2.2 Teachers' Perception of Students' Engagement

As Table 5 shows, item 7 had the highest mean score (4.17), with an RII of 83.40% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the item was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, item 5 had the lowest mean score (2.84), with an RII of 56.80% and a P-value of 0.158. Therefore, the item was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Generally, all the items had a mean score of 3.52, with an RII of 70.45% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the items in total were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5. Teachers' perceptions of students' engagement

No.	Item	Mean	SD	RII (%)	T-value	P-value
1.	Students attend online class regularly.	3.74	0.96	74.80	7.80	0.000
2.	Students often participate during class.	3.49	1.01	69.80	4.89	0.000
3.	Students tend to participate actively in small-group assignments.	3.57	0.95	71.40	6.15	0.000
4.	After class, students often keep in contact with me via WhatsApp.	3.51	1.22	70.20	4.23	0.000
5.	After class, students often keep in contact with me via e-mail.	2.84	1.11	56.80	-1.42	0.158
6.	Students often search for additional sources for the course topics and discuss them in the online class.	3.34	1.12	66.80	3.09	0.003
7.	Students always ask for my guidance when they face problems regarding the online submission of an assignment.	4.17	0.66	83.40	17.98	0.000
	<b>All items</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>70.45</b>	<b>8.73</b>	<b>0.000</b>

#### 4.2.3 Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Motivation

As Table 6 illustrates, item 6 had the highest mean score (4.17), with an RII of 83.40% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, it was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, item 2 had the lowest mean score (3.60), with an RII of 72.00% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the item was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Generally, all the items had a mean score of 3.81, with an RII of 76.23% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the items in total were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6. Teachers' perceptions of students' motivation

No.	Item	Mean	SD	RII (%)	T-value	P-value
1.	Students are always having fun in online class discussions.	3.69	0.99	73.80	7.04	0.000
2.	Students are motivated to participate in online class discussions and debates.	3.60	1.02	72.00	5.94	0.000
3.	Students are always early to their online classes.	3.79	0.91	75.80	8.73	0.000
4.	Students often support and cooperate with each other in online classes.	3.77	0.90	75.40	8.66	0.000
5.	Students are responsive to homework and assessments.	3.84	0.81	76.80	10.54	0.000
6.	Students in online classes are always interested in provided materials such as videos, PowerPoint presentations, and interactive books.	4.17	0.77	83.40	15.44	0.000
	<b>All items</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>76.23</b>	<b>12.04</b>	<b>0.000</b>

#### 4.2.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Academic Performance

As Table 7 shows, item 2 had the highest mean score (4.23), with an RII of 84.60% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, it was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, item 1 had the lowest mean score (3.62), with an RII of 72.40% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the item was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Generally, all the items had a mean score of 3.91, with an RII of 78.12% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the items in total were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7. Teachers' perceptions of students' academic performance

No.	Item	Mean	SD	RII (%)	T-value	P-value
1.	Students' desire to learn English increased owing to online classes via the Madrasati LMS.	3.62	0.95	72.40	6.63	0.000
2.	Students often receive good grades in online tests.	4.23	0.69	84.60	18.17	0.000
3.	Students always feel confident in themselves while doing online tests.	3.90	0.95	78.00	9.70	0.000
4.	Students always feel confident in themselves while participating in online class discussions.	3.82	0.87	76.40	9.50	0.000
5.	Students can submit online assignments on the LMS platform.	4.06	0.65	81.20	16.50	0.000
6.	I always provide students with instant feedback on their participation in an online class and on their exam scores.	3.96	0.76	79.20	12.82	0.000
7.	Students make an effort to complete online class projects.	3.74	0.80	74.80	9.38	0.000
	<b>All items</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>78.12</b>	<b>17.01</b>	<b>0.000</b>

#### 4.2.5 Teachers' Perceptions of Time and Class Management

As Table 8 shows, item 5 had the highest mean score (4.33), with an RII of 86.60% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, it was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, item 3 had the lowest mean score (3.89), with an RII of 77.80% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the item was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Generally, all the items had a mean score of 4.17, with an RII of 83.35% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the items in total were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 8. Teachers' perceptions of time and class management

No.	Item	Mean	SD	RII (%)	T-value	P-value
1.	I can easily attend my online classes on time.	4.27	0.75	85.40	17.24	0.000
2.	Online classes are well organized.	4.14	0.73	82.80	15.70	0.000
3.	Students always listen carefully to my online instructions.	3.89	0.83	77.80	10.84	0.000
4.	I am flexible in dealing with my students on issues such as due dates, absences, and online assignments.	4.16	0.77	83.20	15.10	0.000
5.	I am responsive to my students, answering their questions and giving them feedback about assignments online.	4.33	0.63	86.60	21.03	0.000
6.	Internet connection problems often disturb classes.	4.23	0.88	84.60	14.10	0.000
	<b>All items</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>83.35</b>	<b>23.94</b>	<b>0.000</b>

#### 4.2.6 Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher-Training Programs

As Table 9 illustrates, item 3 had the highest mean score (4.36), with an RII of 87.20% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, it was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Meanwhile, item 1 had the lowest mean score (3.03), with an RII of 60.60% and a P-value of 0.828. Therefore, the item was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Generally, all the items had a mean score of 3.78, with an RII of 75.70% and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the items in total were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 9. Teachers' perceptions of teacher-training programs

No.	Item	Mean	SD	RII (%)	T-value	P-value
1.	I received training about online teaching before the COVID-19 pandemic.	3.03	1.38	60.60	0.22	0.828
2.	I received training about online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic via online courses.	3.80	1.08	76.00	7.51	0.000
3.	Prior training is necessary to equip teachers with sufficient technological knowledge and skills for online courses.	4.36	0.70	87.20	19.64	0.000
4.	During the lockdown, I received training about conducting online student assessments.	3.58	1.03	71.60	5.68	0.000
5.	I received training during the lockdown about online class management.	3.45	1.11	69.00	4.12	0.000
6.	After the pandemic, training courses for teachers who engage in distance education should cover up-to-date teaching approaches and strategies.	3.89	0.87	77.80	10.40	0.000
7.	The English department is supportive and cooperative regarding teachers' needs and suggestions.	3.79	1.02	75.80	7.88	0.000
8.	I believe preservice teachers need intensive training for online teaching as well as for in-class teaching.	4.33	0.79	86.60	17.10	0.000
	<b>All items</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>75.70</b>	<b>11.98</b>	<b>0.000</b>

#### 4.2.7 The relationship between Teachers' Perceptions of Distance Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Teachers' Educational Status

The results of independent samples T-tests, which Table 10 illustrates, showed that there was no statistical evidence that respondents' educational status corresponded to significant differences among the respondents regarding their perceptions of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 10. Results of the test of differences (i.e., the independent samples T-test) for the “educational qualification” variable

Questionnaire section	T-test	P-value	Means	
			Bachelor's	Master's
Teachers' attitudes toward online teaching	0.422	0.677	3.87	3.94
Teachers' perceptions of students' engagement	0.512	0.614	3.54	3.43
Teachers' perceptions of students' motivation	0.193	0.848	3.82	3.78
Teachers' perceptions of students' academic performance	0.489	0.626	3.92	3.85
Teachers' perceptions of time and class management	1.062	0.291	4.19	4.06
Teachers' perceptions of teacher-training programs	0.196	0.845	3.79	3.76
<b>All sections</b>	<b>0.676</b>	<b>0.506</b>	<b>3.84</b>	<b>3.75</b>

#### 4.2.8 The Relationship between Teachers' Perceptions of Distance Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Years of Experience

Table 11 presents the results of one-way ANOVA. There were no significant differences in the respondents' perceptions of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the respondents' years of teaching experience.

Table 11. Results of one-way ANOVA regarding perceptions and years of experience

Section	F-test	P-value	Means			
			1–5	6–10	11–15	More than 15
Teachers' attitudes toward online teaching	0.397	0.755	3.87	3.94	3.87	3.80
Teachers' perceptions of students' engagement	1.026	0.384	3.43	3.55	3.46	3.74
Teachers' perceptions of students' motivation	1.584	0.198	3.58	3.95	3.83	3.91
Teachers' perceptions of students' academic performance	1.788	0.154	3.71	3.99	3.93	4.04
Teachers' perceptions of time and class management	0.215	0.886	4.12	4.22	4.17	4.14
Teachers' perceptions of teacher-training programs	0.880	0.454	3.83	3.72	3.69	4.00
<b>All sections</b>	<b>0.485</b>	<b>0.694</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>3.88</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>3.87</b>

#### 4.3 Qualitative Data Results

More than half of the participants (six teachers) preferred the traditional teaching approach. For example, Teacher 1 reported, “I prefer the traditional method in teaching because I think it is more beneficial for students than distance education is.” However, the preferred method of instruction for the four remaining teachers was distance education. For instance, Teacher 6, explained, “I prefer distance education because it improves teaching and adapts to the social-media revolution, which mirrors our real-life situation.”

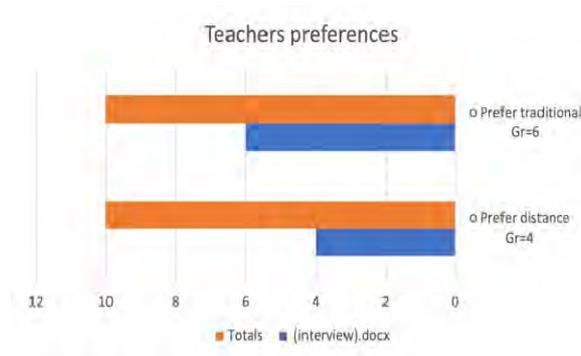


Figure 2. Mean scores for interview responses regarding teaching preferences

The next question concerned the effect that distance education had on students’ motivation. **All participants** agreed that distance education affected students’ motivation positively. For example, Teacher 7 explained, “Distance education was effective and provided an opportunity for shy students to participate, interact, and be innovative, especially on writing assignments and class projects. This fact made the delivery of information more fun and motivating for students.” However, two of the teachers offered an opposing view. Specifically, they noted that at the beginning of distance education, students’ motivation observably decreased, likely because of the sudden shift from conventional classroom settings to internet-based distance education.

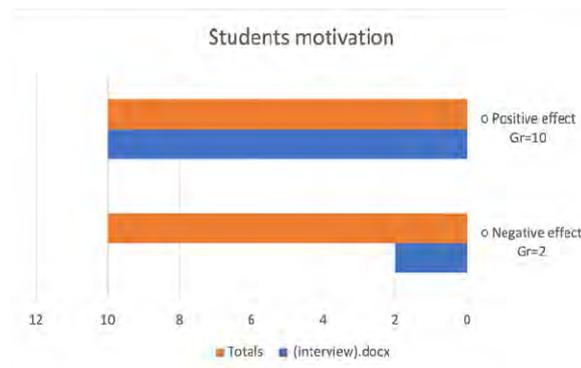


Figure 3. Mean scores for interview responses regarding students’ motivation

For the third interview question, most of the participants (eight teachers) agreed that students’ engagement in class activities increased after the shift from conventional learning to distance education. One salient change in the new setting was that students kept in touch with their teachers after as well as during classes. For example, Teacher 2 explained, “In distance education, the participation of the students increased and the communication between us during class continued after class.” However, four participants stated that traditional education is better than online education because the latter lacks face-to-face interactions, which, in the view of these teachers, are critical to maximizing a student’s engagement—and success—in academic pursuits. As Teacher 6 put it, “In traditional education, the teacher is in the classroom, and this makes the students more motivated to participate and be attentive in the class, which is better than distance education.”

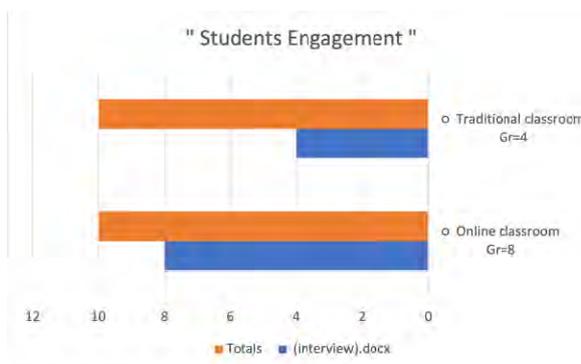


Figure 4. Mean scores for interview responses regarding students’ engagement

Regarding the fourth interview question, more than half of the participants (six teachers) stated that the Saudi Ministry of Education and the public schools under its management were ready for the rapid implementation of distance education the COVID-19 pandemic required. Teacher 8 succinctly commented on the matter: “Our schools are equipped for distance education.” In contrast, the other four teachers were not satisfied with the transition. Indeed, they believed that public schools were properly equipped for neither conventional in-class education nor Internet-based remote education. Teacher 7 summarized this view: “Schools are generally ill-equipped, whether for traditional or remote education, and I suffer from a lack of educational materials in both cases.”

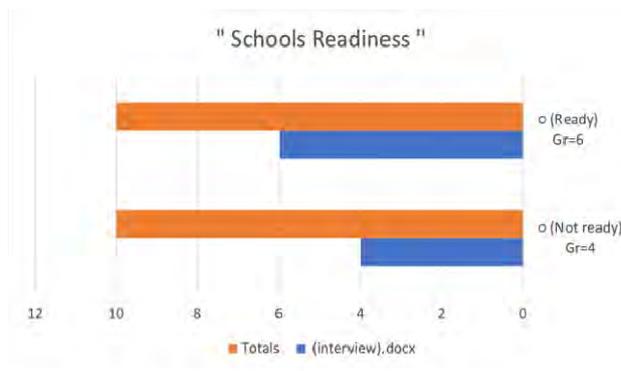


Figure 5. Mean scores for interview responses regarding schools’ readiness

All participants discussed various challenges they had been facing regarding distance education. Interestingly, of all the interview questions, question five received the highest response frequency. According to eight of the teachers, the most frequent technical issues initially plaguing the distance education classes involved, for example, malfunctions in the Madrasati platform and persistent internet connection problems. In addition, five teachers claimed that assessment credibility had been a major challenge in teaching English remotely. Commenting on this matter, Teacher 5 stated, “The credibility of the tests was not guaranteed, as the students could rather easily cheat. Also, [the online tests] did not measure the real performance level of the students.”

Three teachers lamented the burdens associated with back-to-back classes and exhausting instructional tasks, and the near impossibility of satisfactorily preparing for classes. For instance, Teacher 1 stated, “The classes were very close to one another, which led to a lot of pressure and took a lot of time and effort to be well prepared for.” Another obstacle that three teachers mentioned was the lack of face-to-face interaction between not only teachers and students but also students and students. Last, four teachers mentioned that some students exhibited a troubling lack of interest in attending online classes and, sometimes, in responding to a teacher’s prompt during an online class.

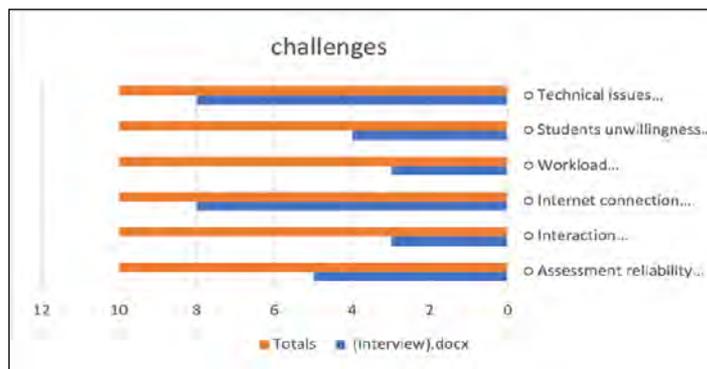


Figure 6. Mean scores for interview responses regarding distance education challenges

For the sixth interview question, most of the participants (seven teachers) stated that the current training programs were useful and effective and were important support mechanisms for teachers in terms of their professional development and interaction with workmates. Teacher 9 stated that they “were excellent and useful. We need more training courses for creative teaching methods.” Three teachers did not share this positive view, asserting that greater efficiency and innovativeness were needed in training programs to raise teachers’ competency, especially in online teaching. Teacher 7 explained her dissatisfaction thus: “The training programs

were limited and did not include all aspects of development, so we had to participate in training courses outside the Ministry's training programs.”

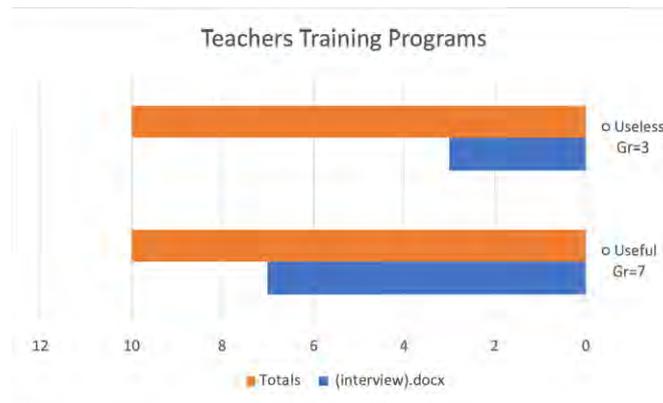


Figure 7. Mean scores for the interview responses regarding teacher-training programs

The seventh and final interview question addressed teachers' hopes and suggestions for future distance education. No mean scores were calculated for the responses to these open-ended questions. All participants shared their sincere hopes their country would grow to become a leader in all fields and especially in education, in conformity with Vision 2030, the strategic blueprint for Saudi Arabia's growth-oriented reform of its public and private sectors. As Teacher 6 stated, "I hope that our education system will undergo even greater development so that our schools and curricula can meet the aims of Vision 2030." Several teachers suggested establishing specialized centers equipped with highly qualified and distinguished specialists whose task it would be to train teachers from every district across the country.

Several teachers expressed their hope that, by developing curricula and equipping schools with up-to-date devices and materials, the Ministry of Education would successfully promote teaching and learning in the coming years. Finally, all the teachers shared with the interviewer their sincere wish that the Saudi government would continue to require distance education as an official approach to education at all levels. Summing up this general attitude, Teacher 3 stated, "I hope that the future is better and distance education continues and develops."

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Teachers' Attitudes toward Teaching Online via the Madrasati Platform

In general, the results of this study reveal that most of the participating teachers (78.54%) had positive attitudes toward distance education. The results indicate that, from the teachers' perspective, distance education technology is a helpful and dependable way to support student–student and student–teacher communication. This finding is compatible with those of Yao, Rao, Jiang, and Xiong (2020), who revealed that schools' adoption of various online-teaching techniques managed to improve student–teacher interactions, student achievement, and teaching efficiency. Regarding teaching preferences, the findings of the current study are diverse. On the one hand, four interviewed participants preferred distance education to conventional instruction patterns because, in the view of these teachers, only the former approach could capitalize on the revolution in social media and digital technology that has been permeating all aspects of life. This set of findings comports with those of Hakim (2020): distance education gives educators access to a wide range of resources, including cutting-edge technologies that can innovatively forge strong bonds among students and teachers.

On the other hand, most interviewed participants (six of the ten) expressed their preference for traditional in-class settings rather than distance education. This finding is consistent with those of Ramadan and Khaferi (2020) and Orhan and Beyhan (2020): distance education is ineffective and cannot replace face-to-face human interactions in traditional in-class education. Furthermore, in the current study, several participants explained that the lack of gestures and facial expressions in distance education could weaken student achievement. For example, Teacher 8 stated, "I prefer traditional teaching, because direct communication between the teacher and the student is better at improving students' academic performance, and this major factor is not found in distance education." This finding aligns with Aliyyah, Rachmadtullah, Samsudin, Syaodih, Nurtanto, and Tambunan (2020), who revealed that, in distance education, a lack of human interaction decreases teachers' motivation to teach.

A middle-of-the-road opinion surfaced during the interviews: Teacher 7 stated, “Traditional teaching is effective for the foundational stages because [students] need physical interaction with the teacher and peers in the classroom, but for the secondary stage, distance education is better because [students] can acquire information from other sources.” Another teacher (Teacher 5) mentioned that she preferred blended learning to purely traditional methods and to purely distance education methods because a mix of the two elevates the interestingness and innovativeness of the entire learning process. This finding was consistent with Bataineh and Mayyas (2017), which revealed that certain types of blended learning improved students’ proficiency in reading comprehension and grammar.

Most of the participants (83.40%) indicated that in distance education, students always ask teachers for guidance in class projects and assignments. Such interaction emphasizes the important roles that teachers play as guides, supporters, and leaders in students’ learning process. This finding supports Fandina and Velandia’s (2020) argument that the teacher’s role can strengthen students’ motivation to learn and eventually strengthen their adoption of social practices in learning contexts. Another important finding of the current study rests on the fact that 79.20% of the interviewed teachers believed they had provided students with instant feedback about their classroom participation, academic performance, and exam scores. According to what was presented in the reviewed literature, feedback promotes students’ engagement and motivation in online classes. Therefore, the rapidness of feedback might be a major reason for improvements in students’ online performance (Yao et al., 2020).

### *5.2 Students’ Engagement in Distance Education*

In general, about 70.45% of the participating teachers positively perceived students’ engagement in distance education. The teachers indicated that students attended online classes regularly, participated in activities, and communicated with teachers during and after class, usually to ask for guidance and feedback. This general finding is consistent Fariska, Santihastuti, and Suharjib (2020), who found that students’ involvement in online classes led to their active engagement in group projects and class discussion. In the present study, 71.40% of the participating teachers agreed that distance education students tended to participate actively in peer and small-group projects. According to the reviewed literature, students’ engagement in coursework and their interaction with peers and teachers might be better in online classes than in conventional classes (Darmawansah & Indartono, 2019; Sari, 2020; Oraif & Elyas, 2021).

In contrast, some teachers in the present study indicated that distance education affected students’ engagement negatively. For example, Teacher 4 explained that, in online classes, “I noticed that students’ engagement and interaction decreased, and I found that students rarely participated.” This finding is echoed in Chen, Kaczmarek, and Ohyama (2020), who observed that students’ engagement and retention were worse in online courses than in traditional courses. According to some teachers in the present study, students can exhibit a lack of engagement in online classes. For instance, Teacher 2 stated, “In online classes, some students were unwilling to respond to the teacher and to participate in other ways. From my perspective, this lack of enthusiasm might reflect the students’ boredom with online learning, which therefore decreases their motivation to participate.” This finding agrees with that of Aliyyah et al. (2020) that student engagement in online learning seems to decrease over time.

Most of the participating teachers (78.12%) indicated that distance education promotes students’ academic performance. For example, 84.60% of the teachers explained that students’ exam scores were significantly better in online classes than in conventional classes. Moreover, 74.80% of the teachers revealed that students expend more effort on assignments in online classes than in conventional classes. These findings are compatible with those of Muslimin and Harintana (2020): students’ academic performance increased 10% after the shift from conventional classes to online classes, in which students enthusiastically studied in pursuit of knowledge.

### *5.3 Students’ Motivation in Distance Education*

Most teachers (76.23%) agreed that students’ motivation significantly increased when their class shifted from a conventional setting to an online one. Evidence of this positive effect can be found in the quantitative results: 73.80% of the participating teachers noticed that students attended online classes regularly. Additionally, 76.80% of the teachers revealed that students in online classes were responsive to deadlines for assignments. These findings mirror those of Muslimin and Harintana (2020), who noted that students’ motivation in distance education environments exhibited a 90% increase over students’ motivation in conventional classroom environments. The findings of the current research reveal that technology-rich online classrooms can promote student enthusiasm, engagement, and academic performance. Reflecting on this point, Teacher 1 commented, “Actually, distance education increased my students’ motivation to learn English. Because they could peruse all types of internet sources, the students’ language skills eventually developed.”

The reticence and low self-esteem of some students might benefit from distance education. Teacher 7 explained, “During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance education . . . provided an opportunity for shy students to participate in general activities, interact with the teacher and other students, and innovatively complete writing assignments and other class projects. All this made the delivery of information more fun and motivating for students.” The increased motivation and engagement of students, especially shy ones, perhaps rested on the fact that online classes provided fewer opportunities for students to be “put on the spot,” which can lead to embarrassment. These findings are consistent with previous findings (Hakim, 2020; Almaleki, Alhajaji, & Albarbi, 2021): students are more self-confident, less shy, and less afraid of making mistakes in front of classmates in online classes than in conventional classes. The current findings are inconsistent with those of Meşe and Sevilen (2021), who showed that distance education—and especially online communication with teachers—had a suppressive effect on students’ motivation.

Generally, distance education involves various interesting teaching and learning materials. This fact was not lost on the current study’s participating teachers, 83.40% of whom stated that the reason for students’ increased motivation in online classes was the teachers’ use of visually attractive materials such as interactive books, colorful PowerPoint presentations, and interesting videos. This finding is consistent with previous findings (Konecki, 2020; Almaleki et al., 2021), which reveal that visually arresting classroom materials promote students’ engagement in class activities. Over three-quarters (75.40%) of the participating teachers asserted that the more interesting the instructional materials are in distance education, the more mutually cooperative and supportive the students are. Similar findings are presented in Gedera, Williams, and Wright (2015): students effectively communicate with, give feedback to, and inspire their peers in online classrooms.

#### *5.4 Challenges in Distance Education*

In the present research, participating teachers associated distance education with increased flexibility and ease of class activities. However, teachers faced challenges in teaching remotely. Most of the participating teachers (84.60%) indicated that poor internet connections and other technical issues persistently disturbed online classes. In this regard, Teacher 8 stated, “In online classes, communication with the students was unstable because of internet connection problems.” This type of problem was noted in some previous research (Alea, Fabrea, Roldan, & Farooqi, 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020). In the present study, 79.20% of the teachers revealed that the absence of direct interaction in distance education could negatively affect the teaching and learning processes. Teacher 2 commented on this possibility: “To me, the most prominent challenge [in distance education] was the lack of face-to-face interaction with students. I think it may be a reason for students’ decreased academic performance.” This finding was discussed in previous research (Alea et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Daniel, 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020), with evidence surfacing that the lack of interaction in online learning can generate stress and feelings of isolation, resulting in decreased teaching effectiveness.

Regarding the reliability of teachers’ assessment of student performance, about half of the interviewed teachers asserted that online exams were unreliable measures of student proficiency because the students could quite easily cheat. Teacher 6 discussed this problem bluntly: “In online tests, the credibility of the results is not guaranteed. We simply cannot determine whether students are cheating or not. Therefore, we cannot confidently measure their real proficiency level.” This same concern was voiced many times in previous research (e.g., Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Ramadani & Xhaferi, 2020), with the main concern being that students might use the internet as a cheating method. Previous research on this topic also found that, in online assessments, teachers were unable to prevent cheating and could not ensure that students took exams without external assistance.

For many of the current study’s teachers, another challenge of distance education was the increased workload they faced because of (1) the sudden shift to online learning, (2) the back-to-back classes, (3) the increase in the number of assignments, and (4) the overall increase in time and effort consumed. Teacher 9 explained, “The situation was new and incomprehensible, which made it difficult in the beginning, and classes were scheduled so tightly, which led to a lot of pressure and took a lot of time and effort to manage.” This finding is in line with Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), who unearthed evidence that the sudden shift to distance education at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic created an unexpected workload for already heavily burdened teachers.

Yet another challenge for this study’s teachers was the readiness of public schools to implement distance education. More than half of the participants (six teachers) indicated that Saudi public schools were ill-prepared for the transition to online classrooms. Teacher 1 leveled criticism at the overall educational system: “Our schools are generally not equipped properly, and we suffer from a lack of educational materials in both traditional and distance education.” This view was by no means universally held; the remaining four teachers stated that Saudi schools had been sufficiently prepared to implement distance education. This minority view in

the current study is inconsistent with the findings of Alea et al. (2020): many schools in the Philippines lack the necessary equipment, facilities, and training for distance education, especially during difficult times.

### *5.5 Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher-Training Programs*

The majority of teacher participants highlighted the importance of efficient teacher-training programs for career development and for promoting teacher competency. A total of 75.70% teacher participants expressed the view that the provided training programs were indeed useful. Teacher 1 stated, "The training programs were very good and practical, and one of the most important things they did was to support teachers in terms of professional development and the benefits of shared experiences." This finding aligns with those of Pozo-Rico, Gilar-Corbí, Izquierdo, and Castejón (2020). In their study, teachers who had attended training indicated greater perceptions of proficiency when dealing with the stress resulting from handling the significant and growing technical demands COVID-19 has imposed on school systems around the world.

However, in the current study, 40.40% of the teacher participants revealed that they had received no training about online teaching before the sudden shift to distance education. As Teacher 10 stated, "There were shortcomings in terms of training courses. I didn't receive Ministry-approved training about teaching online; therefore, I had to resort to self-training for distance education, and I did so by signing up for different training courses on the internet." A host of other studies cited this phenomenon (Giovannella, Passarelli, & Persico, 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020; Lie, Tamah, Gozali, Triwidayati, Utami, & Jemadi, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020). Professional-development programs for teachers in digital skills are of critical importance if our schools are going to provide students with technically competent education.

Overall, a majority of the teacher participants (86.60%) indicated that preservice teachers need intensive training for both in-class and online teaching. This finding is consistent with Habibi, Razak, Yusop, and Mukminin (2019), who revealed that preservice teachers lack access to satisfactory training about digital integration in teaching. The available research suggests that the focus of teacher-training programs should be on sustainable professional development.

## **6. Conclusion**

The current research presented teachers' views regarding distance education delivered on the Madrasati platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research focused on five aspects of education under the threat of COVID-19 threat: teachers' attitudes toward distance education on the Madrasati platform, teachers' perceptions of students' engagement in distance education, teachers' perceptions of students' motivation in distance education, teachers' perceptions of challenges in distance education, and teachers' perceptions of teacher-training programs in distance education. Based on the results of both the questionnaire and the interview, many findings emerged regarding teachers' perceptions of distance education.

The findings showed that most of the teachers (78.54%) perceived distance education positively but preferred traditional teaching because of their familiarity with the traditional approach. The findings also indicated that distance education was boosting student motivation. Furthermore, teachers who positively perceived student participation in online classes attributed it to several factors: digital materials, regular attendance, group assignments, and flexibility of time and space. The research findings indicated that shy students were more likely to participate in online classes than in conventional classes. Online classes are less likely to embarrass students and more likely to raise their self-confidence and provide them with interesting materials than is the case in conventional classrooms. Nevertheless, the research findings showed that during distance education, teachers have faced various challenges ranging from poor internet connections and other technical issues to burdensome workloads and assessment-related reliability problems. Moreover, most participants highlighted the importance of efficient teacher-training programs for career development and teacher competency.

In general, the findings raise many questions regarding how distance education shapes teachers' attitudes toward and perceptions of language-teaching methods. The research findings should also help raise awareness of efficiency as it concerns the combination of technology and distance education in the field of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). Saudi educators should seriously consider implementing distance education as an official permanent form of schooling. This radical shift would necessitate properly training teachers in various technologies. It is hoped that the present study's quantitative and qualitative findings will contribute to future policies, practices, and research during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

### 6.1 Limitations

- The current study relied on a sample that consisted of exclusively female Saudi English-language teachers at public secondary schools. Future research could extend the scope by examining the topic of distance education in other parts of the world and from the perspective of other academic populations.
- The size of the current study's sample was quite small. Therefore, larger sample sizes can strengthen the generalizability of the subsequent findings.

### 6.2 Recommendations for Improving Language-Teaching Policies and Practices

The following recommendations are based on the findings of the current study:

- The findings indicate that “digital materials” in distance education help increase student motivation. This boost in motivation is especially notable among shy students. Therefore, curriculum designers should consider developing and implementing interesting digital sources in classrooms alongside traditional English-language textbooks.
- Several of the participating teachers reported that some students lack technical knowledge of digital tools. This knowledge deficit can diminish students' achievements. Thus, educators should note the importance of giving students, as well as teachers, proper training in the technological aspects of online learning.
- Future research should consider the impact of distance education on other factors such as student autonomy, teacher autonomy, and English-language proficiency. Rigorous quantitative and qualitative explorations of these topics could greatly enrich the field of EFL research.
- The findings of the current study strongly suggest that school systems should establish rigorous training programs for teachers who oversee distance education classrooms. The training should extend to assessment-related issues, which proved to be especially problematic for some of the study's participating teachers.

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**Appendixes**

**Appendix 1: Questionnaire questions**

**Teachers’ perceptions about distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Personal information						
Teachers’ degree		Bachelor’s	Master’s	Doctorate		
Years of experience		1–5 years	6–10 years	11–15 years	More than 20 years	
No.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A	Attitudes toward online teaching					
1	I believe online learning is as accurate as in-classroom learning					
2	I support learner-to-learner interaction and collaborative activity as a central means of teaching					
3	I can develop online activities that encourage critical thinking in students					
4	I believe online learning is no more an option; it is a necessity					
5	I believe online classes lack the feature of human interaction, which affects students’ performance					
6	I feel comfortable communicating in online classes with students					
7	I feel comfortable communicating online with stakeholders (principals-supervisors-parents)					
B	Students’ engagement					
1	Students attend online classes regularly					
2	Students often participate in class activities					
3	After the class, students often keep in contact with me via WhatsApp					
4	After the class, students often keep in contact with me via email					
5	Students tend to participate actively in small-group assignments					
6	Students often search for					

	additional sources for course topics and discuss them in the online class					
7	Students always ask for my guidance when they face problems regarding online assignment submission					
C	Students' motivation					
1	Students are always having fun in online class discussions					
2	Students are motivated to participate in online class discussions and debates					
3	Students are always attending online classes early					
4	Students often support and cooperate with each other in online classes					
5	Students are responsive in terms of homework and assessments					
6	Students are always interested in the materials provided in online classes such as visual materials (videos or Power Point presentations, interactive books)					
D	Students' academic performance					
1	Students' desire to learn English increased because of online classes via (MADRASATI) LMS					
2	Students often receive good grades in online tests					
3	Students always feel confident in themselves while taking online tests					
4	Students always feel confident in themselves during class discussions					
5	Students can submit online assignments on the LMS platform					
6	I always provide students with instant feedback on their participation in class and on their exam scores					
7	Students are exerting effort in doing class projects					

E	Time and class management					
1	I can easily post my online classes on time					
2	Online classes are well organized					
3	Students always listen carefully to my instructions					
4	I am flexible in dealing with my students on issues such as due dates, absences, and assignment submission					
5	I am responsive to my students, answer their questions, and give them feedback about assignments					
6	Internet connection problems often disturb classes					
F	Teachers' training programs					
1	I received training about online teaching before the COVID-19 pandemic					
2	I received training about online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic via online courses					
3	Prior training is necessary to equip teachers with sufficient technological knowledge and skills					
4	I received training during the lockdown about students' online assessment					
5	I received training during the lockdown about online class management					
6	Training courses for teachers in distance education equip them with up-to-date teaching approaches and strategies					
7	The English department in the education office is supportive of and cooperative with teachers' needs and suggestions					
8	I believe preservice English teachers need intensive training about online teaching besides in-class teaching					

**Appendix 2: Interview questions (Arabic version)**

- ١- هل تفضلين التعليم التقليدي أو عن بعد لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية؟
- ٢- بعد إطلاق منصة مدرستي في المملكة العربية السعودية أثناء الجائحة، هل تعتقدين أن التعلم عن بعد أثر على دافعية الطالبات لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟
- ٣- ما وجهة نظرك عند مقارنة التدريس التقليدي في الفصول الدراسية بالتدريس الحالي عبر الإنترنت خلال COVID-19 فيما يتعلق بمشاركة طالباتك في الفصل وبعده؟
- ٤- هل تعتقدين أن المدارس الحكومية السعودية مجهزة بما يكفي لتطبيق التعلم عن بعد؟
- ٥- ما هي التحديات التي واجهتها أثناء التدريس عبر الإنترنت خلال أزمة فيروس كورونا؟
- ٦- ما هو تقييمك لبرامج تدريب المعلمات في السعودية؟ هل هي مفيدة؟ وما هي الجوانب التي تعتقدين أنها تدعم المعلمة؟
- ٧- ما هي آمالك لمستقبل التعليم في المملكة العربية السعودية؟

**Appendix 3: Interview questions (English version)**

- 1- Do you prefer traditional or distance education for teaching English?
- 2- After launching (MADRASATI) LMS in Saudi Arabia during the pandemic do you think the distance learning affected the students' motivation to learn English?
- 3- What is your perspective when comparing the traditional classroom teaching with the current online teaching during COVID-19 regarding your students' engagement in and after the class?
- 4- Do you think that Saudi Arabian public schools are equipped enough to implement distance learning?
- 5- What are the challenges did you encounter while engaging in online learning during the covid-19 crisis?
- 6- What is your evaluation of Saudi teachers' training programs? Are they helpful? And in what aspects do you think they support the teacher?
- 7- What are your hopes for the future of education in Saudi Arabia?

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