

# Impact of Online Learning on Saudi Elementary School Students Literacy Skills

Prof. Hashem A. Alsamadani

Umm Al-Qura University

## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the impact of online learning during the covid19 pandemic on students' literacy skills. The data was collected by google form questionnaire. The sample was 250 elementary teachers from different Saudi regions. The result showed that a high percentage of teachers believe that online learning has a negative impact on literacy skills. The results also show that some teachers are not entirely sure of the impact online learning had on students' literacy skills. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating the two types of learning and directing teachers' attention to evaluate their students' literacy skills regularly.

## Keywords:

*elementary, online learning, literacy skills learning, COVID19, Saudi teachers.*

## 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic started in December 2019 in China and then spread around the world in a few months. It affected all aspects of life, including Education. In Saudi Arabia, the sudden closure of schools forced the ministry of Education to shift to online learning. This kind of learning was available before the closure, but Saudi Education generally depended on traditional learning. During the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers were required to use online teaching, so it became a must after it was an optional decision. "The pandemic required teachers to work in new ways, teaching online and adapting teaching styles to a locked-down world" [1].

"This closing of schools, colleges, and universities resulted in a stressful event for educational administration with highly limited options. The Saudi Ministry of Education announced online classes to continue the learning process safely and securely" [2]. The Ministry of Education provides many tools for teachers and students to keep the educational process in progress; one of the main tools is the "Madrasati" platform which provides a virtual classroom experience. The ministry developed other tools, like the specialized TV channels called "EIN" channels, to aid students in their learning process.

There are many advantages of both kinds, and some challenges are facing both. The face-to-face learning experience cannot happen without proper planning, which encourages students' commitment. Moreover, the face-to-face learning experience improves the ability of students to discuss, collaborate, practice, and role play, with guidance from a teacher. Being part of a group and being held accountable are powerful learning tools. It can as well improve the social skills of students, in addition to other advantages. On the other hand, online learning saves money and time; it is flexible and consistent. Furthermore, many students can join the course, which means it is not limited in numbers of students as in face-to-face learning, and the most important point is that learners now want quality programs they can access from anywhere and at any time.

Conversely, online learning requires less commitment, there are also plenty of distractions in online learning, and online learning might make learners falsely think they are ready to progress. Other issues related to the weak connection and the troubleshooting of the tools may affect the progress in online learning. Besides, "Online learning is perceived as lack interactivity compared to face-to-face learning, and it is mainly due to the lack of social presence, lack of social interaction, and lack of students' satisfaction" [3].

On the other hand, "classroom instruction is known to be teacher-centered and requires passive learning by the student, while online instruction is often student-centered and requires active learning" [4]. In teacher-centered learning, the teacher controls the class, lectures, and comments, while the student listens, takes notes, and asks questions.

Many studies showed that teachers had challenges when they were required to transfer to online learning due to the pandemic, like the study of Albaqami, which confirmed that even though some teachers had positive attitudes toward the new experiments, they were not adequately prepared. They suffered due to the obligation to acquire new digital skills within a short period [5]. Kar proved that more experienced teachers show less interest in ELearning than less experienced teachers [6].

Then, after the opening of schools, both teachers and students are now aware of the importance of online learning, and they have acquired the required skills to accomplish this

type of learning. One more important point to be announced is that the Ministry of Education is still asking the teachers and students to keep working within the "Madrasati" platform, and it requires the teachers to submit their daily planning of lessons on the platform as well as the activities and homework that must be put in the platform to keep students working on the platform. The activities and home works must be submitted through "Madrasati". That kept online learning as an alternative learning opportunity for teachers and students.

From this point of view, the current study examines elementary school teachers' perspectives on the impact of online learning on students' literacy skills. The study answers two main questions:

- What is the impact of online learning on elementary students reading skills at the levels of decoding, phonemic awareness, fluency, and reading comprehension?
- What is the impact of online learning on elementary students' writing skills at the spelling and written expression levels?

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study sample consisted of 250 male and female teachers teaching at the elementary stage, specifically years 2-4, from different Saudi regions. The number of male teachers was 150(60%), while the number of female teachers was 100 (40%). The academic qualification of the sample ranged from master's to diploma, where 88% of the sample were bachelor's holders, 10% were master's holders, while the rest of the percentage was distributed among the various diploma holders.

As for the school year, 45% of the sample teach in the third grade (their current students have spent the first two years in online learning). 25% of the sample teach the fourth grade (which means that the students have spent two years in online learning), while 30% are teachers of the second grade of elementary school (students who started school in online learning).

The researcher used an online questionnaire to collect data, which consisted of closed questions on the following topics:

- Impact of online learning on decoding
- Impact of online learning on phonemic awareness
- Impact of online learning on fluency
- Impact of online learning on reading comprehension
- Impact of online learning on spelling
- Impact of online learning on written expression

The researcher used a Likert scale of 1-5, where one means "strongly disagree" and five means strongly agree, to measure the responses of the sample members to the previous items.

## 3. Results

As for the study sample's evaluation of the impact of online learning on decoding skills, 37% of them do not know precisely about it (neutral), 26% agree that online learning had a negative impact, 17% strongly agree that it had a negative impact on students' decoding skill. On the other hand, 12% disagreed with the negative impact of online learning on decoding skills, and 8 % strongly disagreed with the same assumption.

As for the impact of online learning on phonemic awareness, 35% of the study sample did not know precisely about it, 23% agreed that it had a negative impact, and 15% strongly agreed with the same result. On the contrary, 19% disagreed with the idea that online learning had a negative impact on phonemic awareness, while 8% strongly disagreed with the same idea.

Concerning the impact of online learning on reading fluency, 40% of the study sample did not know precisely about it, 16% strongly agreed that online learning had a negative impact, and 19% agreed with the same idea. In contrast, 16% disagreed on the negative impact of online learning on reading fluency, and 9% strongly disagreed with the same assumption.

Regarding the impact of online learning on reading comprehension, 34% of the study sample did not know precisely about it, 14% strongly agreed that online learning had a negative impact, and 24% agreed with the same idea. In contrast, 22% disagreed on the negative impact of online learning on reading comprehension, and 6% strongly disagreed with the same assumption.

When the study sample was asked about their opinion regarding the impact of online learning on students' ability to spell out words correctly, 42% of them did not know precisely about it, 14% strongly agreed that online learning had a negative impact and 22% agreed on the same idea. On the other hand, 15% disagreed with the negative impact of online learning on spelling skills, while 7% strongly disagreed with the same idea.

Finally, 40% of the study sample did not know precisely about the impact of online learning on writing composition, 16% strongly agreed on its negative impact, and 22% agreed with the same result. On the contrary, 14% disagreed with the negative impact of online learning on writing composition, and 8% of the sample strongly disagreed with the same idea.

## 4. Discussion

By looking at the results of the current study, it is clear that elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia are not fully aware of the impact of online learning on literacy skills. The study's results related to the opinions of male and female teachers about the impact of online learning on student reading and writing skills showed that large percentages of them "do not know" about the impact or are completely "unsure" and cannot answer! For example, 37% are unsure about its impact on decoding, 35% on phonemic awareness, 40% on fluency, 33% on reading comprehension, 42% on spelling, and 40% on writing composition. This result puzzled the researcher because it showed that teachers had not systematically evaluated their students' basic literacy skills. Again, it may be attributed, though, to the lack of studies that dealt with this topic in the Saudi context and that teachers in the elementary stage did not feel the impact of online learning yet, which requires them to carefully observe and conduct some action research on different samples of students.

The results also show that many teachers consider online learning negatively impacts literacy skills. 43% of the sample agreed on this negative impact on decoding, 38% on phonemic awareness, 34% on fluency, 38% on reading comprehension, 36% on spelling, and 38% on writing composition.

This is a call to reconsider full online learning by adopting the blended learning model. It is also vital that teachers do regular evaluations of their students' literacy skills, especially during the first three years of the elementary stage. Teachers can gain the benefits of both types of learning. Some studies suggest the same idea after investigating the effectiveness of blended learning, like the study of Bock, which revealed that blended learning improves the learning outcome for theoretical knowledge more than face-to-face learning or e-learning alone [7]. Furthermore, it showed that the students highly appreciate the blended learning approach. In addition, Berga's study supports the continued use and evaluation of blended learning as a pedagogical approach [8]. The study of Singh likewise showed an evidence-based approach to how instructors can combine traditional and online instruction best to offer engaging learning experiences for students [9].

## 5. Conclusion

Online learning during the Corona pandemic was a reality that the world experienced, including elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia. This study explored teachers' perspectives about online learning's impact on literacy skills. The study showed that elementary teachers

believed that online learning had a negative impact on students' literacy skills at all levels. From this point of view, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating the two types of learning and directing teachers' attention to regularly evaluate their students' literacy skills.

## References

- [1] Mann. Anthony, Schwabe. Markus, Fraser. Pablo, Fülöp. Gabor and Ansah. Grace Adoley. (2020). How the Covid-19 pandemic is changing Education. A perspective from Saudi Arabia. It was retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/education/How-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-changing-education-Saudi-Arabia.pdf>
- [2] Khalil, R., Mansour, A.E., Fadda, W.A. et al. (2020). The sudden transition to synchronized online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia: a qualitative study exploring medical students' perspectives. *BMC Med Educ* 20, 285 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02208-z>
- [3] Bali, S. and Liu, M. (2018). Students' perceptions toward online learning and face-to-face learning courses. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, Volume 1108
- [4] Paul J and Jefferson F (2019) A Comparative Analysis of Student Performance in an Online vs. Face-to-Face Environmental Science Course From 2009 to 2016. *Front. Comput. Sci.* 1:7. doi:10.3389/fcomp.2019.00007
- [5] Albaqami, S. E., & Alzahrani, D. (2022). Transition to Online EFL Teaching in Saudi Arabian Universities during the COVID-19 Outbreak. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) 2nd Special Issue on Covid 19 Challenges* (2) 216-232. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid2.14>
- [6] Kar. Sankar. (2020). Teachers' Attitudes towards Online Teaching (E-learning) during Covid-19 Lockdown. *Journal of Information and Computational Science*. V. 10 Issue 8. [www.joics.org](http://www.joics.org)
- [7] Berga, K. A., Vadnais, E., Nelson, J., Johnston, S., Buro, K., Hu, R., & Olaiya, B. (2021). Blended learning versus face-to-face learning in an undergraduate nursing health assessment course: A quasi-experimental study. *Nurse Education Today*, 96, 104622.
- [8] Bock, A., Kniha, K., Goloborodko, E., Lemos, M., Rittich, A. B., Möhlhenrich, S. C., ... & Modabber, A. (2021). Effectiveness of face-to-face, blended and e-learning in teaching the application of local anaesthesia: a randomised study. *BMC medical education*, 21(1), 1-8.
- [9] Singh, J., Steele, K., & Singh, L. (2021). Combining the Best of Online and Face-to-Face Learning: Hybrid and Blended Learning Approach for COVID-19, Post

Vaccine, & Post-Pandemic World. Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 50(2), 140-171.

**Hashem Alsamadani** received his MA and Ph.D. degrees from Ohio Univ. in 2008 and 2009. After working as an assistant teacher (from 2001), an associate professor (from 2014) in the Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction, Umm Al-Qura Univ., he has been a professor at Umm Al-Qura Univ. since 2018. His research interest includes reading instruction in EFL, CALL, and second LL techniques and strategies.