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Readiness of EFL Instructors for Online Teaching: Attitudes and Technological Skills

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جاهزية أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية للتدريس عبر الإنترنت: مواقف ومهارات تكنولوجية

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Abstract:
This study examined the readiness of Libyan university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors for online teaching by exploring their attitudes and technological skills. A quantitative research design was employed, utilising a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, gathering data from 48 participants. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that instructors held a positive attitude (M = 3.44) and high technological skills (Mdn = 4.81) towards online teaching, a sign of high instructor readiness for online teaching. Moreover, a Spearman-Rho correlation test was run to determine the relationship between instructors' attitude and technological skills. The test revealed a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables (rs = .432, n = 48, p = .002). The findings enriched the existing literature and offer valuable insights for university decision-makers and EFL instructors aiming to adopt online teaching. The study was limited to employing a single data collection method. Thus, future research involving qualitative/mixed-methods research approaches was recommended to either confirm the study findings or provide new insights into instructor readiness for online teaching implementation.

Keywords: Online Teaching, EFL Instructors; Readiness, Attitudes, Technological Skills.

الملخص
فحصت هذه الدراسة جاهزية أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات الليبية للتدريس عبر الإنترنت، وذلك من خلال استكشاف مواقفهم ومهاراتهم التكنولوجية. وقد استُخدم تصميم بحث كمّي، باستعمال استبيان منظم ذي مقياس ليكرت خماسي النقاط، لجمع البيانات من 48 مشاركاً. وكشف التحليل الإحصائي الوصفي أن الأساتذة أظهرو موقفاً إيجابيّاً ومهارات تكنولوجية عالية تجاه التدريس عبر الإنترنت، مما يشير إلى مستوى استعداد عالٍ تجاه تطبيق التدريس عبر الإنترنت. علاوة على ذلك، أُجريَ اختبار سبيرمان للإرتباط لتحديد العلاقة بين موقف الأساتذة ومهاراتهم التكنولوجية. وكشف الاختبار عن علاقة إيجابية متوسطة وذات دلالة إحصائية بين المتغيّريْن. تُثري هذه النتائج الأدبيات وتقدم تصوّرات قيّمة لصانعي القرارات وأساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات الليبية الذين يهدفون إلى التدريس عبر الإنترنت. اقتصرت الدراسة على استخدام أداة واحدة لجمع البيانات. لذلك، يوصَى بإجراء بحوث مستقبلية تتضمن أساليب بحثية نوعية أو مختلطة (كميّة ونوعيّة) إمّا لتأكيد نتائج الدراسة الحالية أو تقديم تصوّرات جديدة حول جاهزية أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية لتطبيق التدريس عبر الإنترنت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريس عبرالإنترنت، أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، جاهزيّة، مواقف، مهارات تكنولوجيّة.

Introduction

In recent years, online technology has significantly developed, introducing online platforms through which education can be implemented partially online (blended) and/or fully online (Allen & Seaman, 2016). These platforms facilitate interaction and broaden access to education, offering flexibility in scheduling and allowing instructors to work anywhere and anytime (Thaufeega, 2016). Recently, online teaching was notably implemented worldwide when the COVID-19 pandemic spread to resume educational processes (Seden et al., 2022); however, education was totally disrupted in Libya as a response to the pandemic, due to instructor readiness-related deficiencies (Saleh, 2020; Hamed & Senussi, 2020). This necessitates a study to explore Libyan university EFL instructors' readiness for adopting online teaching. Thus, the research questions that guide this inquiry are as follows:

1- What attitude do Libyan university EFL instructors hold towards online teaching?
2- What level of technological skills do Libyan university EFL instructors possess for online teaching?
3- Is there a significant relationship between instructors' attitude and their technological skills?

Literature Review

Conceptualising Instructor Readiness for Online Teaching

Readiness is defined as being "prepared mentally or physically for some experience or action" (Merriam-Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary). Instructor readiness refers to the willingness to "effectively prepare, design, and facilitate courses within an online environment" (Yang & Xu, 2023, p. 6), which is a prerequisite for accommodating student needs in online classes. In simpler terms, Machado (2007) defined readiness for online teaching as the ability of educational institution stakeholders' (e.g., teachers) to establish learning opportunities through the use of online technology.

Instructor readiness for online teaching has been examined through several factors. Based on a review of the relevant literature, instructor readiness to teach online hinges on crucial factors, including attitude and technological skills (Zgheib et al., 2023; Rohayani et al., 2015). This study is, thus, conducted to explore the readiness of instructors for online teaching by investigating their attitudes and technological skills.

Attitude toward Online Teaching

Attitude can be defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). Instructors' attitude towards online teaching is a vital element, affecting its implementation (Idris & Osman, 2017). In the context of online technology, an instructor's attitude towards online technology can be referred to as an instructor either liking or disliking the technology (Hew & Brush, 2007). By possessing a positive attitude, instructors are not only encouraged or comfortable with online platforms and video conferencing tools in online teaching, but they are also prepared to overcome any potential barriers that may arise (Bajabaa, 2017). While an attitude is an intrinsic factor affected by external elements, such as support, access, and professional development, Asiri et al. (2012) argue that an instructor's negative attitude significantly affects adopting online teaching greater than the external elements, and cannot simply be improved by a change in the physical settings (as cited in Bajabaa, 2017, pp. 81-82), which stresses the pivotal role attitudes play.

The literature points out that several factors determine instructors' attitudes toward online teaching. Example factors include knowledge and beliefs about technology (Nair & Das, 2012). In addition, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the most crucial indicators that shape attitudes toward online technology (Huang et al., 2019). Kianinezhad (2024) conducted a synthetic literature review on instructor attitudes towards online teaching and concluded that beliefs about technology, external factors such as infrastructure (e.g., reliable internet access and resources), and training also play significant roles. Gill and Dalgarno (2008) found that instructors' beliefs significantly impacted their readiness to adopt online technology, in addition to other key components influencing their attitude, such as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Likewise, Elkaseh (2015) reported an instructor's positive attitude towards online teaching. Such positivity was attributed to the perceived usefulness and ease of use of online technology. Elzawi et al. (2013) carried out a study investigating Libyan EFL instructors' attitudes towards internet-based teaching. The study revealed that university EFL instructors held a positive attitude stemming from their keenness and enthusiasm for online teaching. Similarly, confidence and online technology liking shaped instructors' positive attitudes toward online teaching in Qazaq's (2012) research.

The literature emphasises the importance of instructors' attitudes for teaching online, indicating affective internal and external factors act as decisive constructs in forming an attitude as an indicator of instructors' readiness for adopting online teaching. By embracing these influencing factors, university decision-makers are encouraged to foster instructors' attitudes toward successful online teaching adoption.

Technological Skills in Online Teaching

Parasuraman (2000) defined readiness pertaining to technological skills as "people's propensity to embrace and use new technologies for accomplishing goals in home life and at work" (308). Instructors being computer-literate is of paramount importance in the online teaching realm. Anderson (2008) advises that online instructors possess basic computer skills such as familiarity with: creating and managing (backup) files; file structuring, i.e., copying, saving, moving, and opening files; and functions of web browsers (p. 254). Furthermore, Varvel (2007) enumerates a set of web-browsing skills, including:

1- Browsing and searching the internet.
2- Printing from a browser.
3- Changing browser settings, such as font size and security.
4- Troubleshooting common browser issues.

Albrahim (2020) claims that instructors, having acquired adequate technological skills, should be able to do the following:

1- access various technological tools and platforms such as browsers, email, and video and text chat applications.
2- realise the weaknesses and strengths of the tools mentioned in item 1.
3- understand the prospects that online content offers, such as tutorial videos and e-books.
4- keep abreast of the latest updates and trends associated with online technology.

Similarly, Varvel (2007) further states that technologically skilled instructors can make effective use of online teaching platforms/sites, such as podcasts, wikis, blogs, and vodcasts. Moreover, they have skills in multi-tasking on computers, e.g., moving between open applications, such as application sharing during a synchronous online teaching session. Previous research revealed high instructor technological skills, supporting readiness for online teaching (Junus et al., 2021; Saleh, 2020; Hbaci, 2018; Elzawi et al., 2013). Similar to attitudes, technological skills are formed by influencing factors. Hasyim et al. (2024) found that institutional support enhances instructors' technological skills, contributing to better student outcomes. Access to resources and technological assistance significantly influences instructors' technological skills (Polovkova, 2023), highlighting the importance of support for instructors.

Methodology

Several previous studies have employed a quantitative research design to investigate instructors' attitudes and technological skills as indicators of readiness for online teaching. Thus, this study employed a structured questionnaire to gather data required to answer the research questions. The questionnaire comprised two categories: instructor attitude and instructor technological skills, utilising a 5-point Likert scale to measure the two variables. Validity of the questionnaire was achieved by adopting and adapting its items from previous research (e.g., Zgheib et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2019; Hbaci, 2018; Mutambik, 2018), in addition to consulting three research experts who provided useful feedback. The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms, the link to which was posted in Facebook groups hosting the target population—Libyan university EFL instructors—48 of whom responded. These 48 participants were affiliated with Almergib University, University of Tripoli, Bani Waleed University, and Subratha University.

The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, the results of which are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Reliability Scores of Questionnaire Variables

Variable	Number of items	Likert scale type	Cronbach's alpha
Attitude	9	Agreement	.791
Technological skills	11	Quality	.911
Questionnaire as a whole	20		.893

With alpha scores ranging between 0.0 and 1.0, a score of 0.90 or above indicates excellent reliability, 0.70–0.90 implies high reliability, 0.50–0.70 refers to moderate reliability, and 0.50 or below means low reliability (Hinton et al., 2004). Thus, Table 1 shows that Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranged between high (attitude variable) and excellent (technological skills); moreover, the questionnaire as a whole had high reliability.

Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, the data entry of the attitude items procedure involved coding the scale options as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree, except for items 5 and 6, which were reverse-coded, given that they were negatively worded. On the other hand, the technological skills variable items were coded as: 1 = Very Poor, 2 = Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, and 5 = Excellent.

To carry out an appropriate analysis, a test of normality was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Field (2009) elaborated that the data distribution is normal if the p-value of the Shapiro-Wilk test is more than 0.05; however, if the p-value is less than 0.05, the distribution is not normal. In this study, data for the attitude variable were normally distributed ($p = 0.13$), while the data for the technological skills variable were non-normally distributed ($p = 0.00$).

In data analysis, descriptive statistical analysis was performed. On one hand, the attitude variable, the data of which proved normally distributed, was analysed using the mean for central tendency and the standard deviation for variance, as stated by Hinton et al. (2004). On the other hand, the technological skills variable, the data of which were non-normally distributed, was analysed by calculating the median and interquartile range, as recommended by Lang and Secic (1997).

Results and Discussion

In this section, data analysis is presented, and the findings are discussed.

Attitude

To conduct a precise analysis of the attitude variable, 5-point-Likert-scale-based mean scores were calculated using Pimentel's (2009) cut-off points at an interval of 0.8. The following table illustrates this procedure.

Table 2. Likert Scale, Mean Score Range, and Attitude Interpretation

Likert scale options	Range of mean values	Interpreted attitude state
Strongly Agree	4.21 – 5.00	Very high/Very positive
Agree	3.41 – 4.20	High/Positive
Neutral	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate/Neutral
Disagree	1.81 – 2.60	Low/Negative
Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.80	Very low/Very negative

The items of the attitude variable were analysed by adopting the interpretive framework of means in Table 2. Thus, the following table shows the mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) scores of the attitude variable items.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores for Attitude Items

No.	Item	*M*	*SD*
1.	I believe that online classes are beneficial to students.	3.94	.93
2.	It is effective to teach online.	2.77	1.0
3.	Online teaching offers convenience.	3.17	.95
4.	I enjoy teaching through online technology.	3.46	1.1
5.	Online teaching reduces the quality of knowledge obtained by students.	2.85	1.1
6.	Teaching online is uninteresting.	3.54	1.2
7.	I would like to be involved in online teaching courses.	4.04	.98
8.	There should be more online teaching programmes in the local context.	3.79	1.1
9.	Online teaching offers flexibility.	3.39	1.0
	Overall attitude variable	3.44	.64

As shown in Table 3, instructors' attitude towards online teaching can be adjudged as a positive attitude, with moderate dispersion among all responses. Instructors' willingness to be involved in online teaching scored the highest mean, as their belief in the benefits of online teaching was rated highly, indicative of a positive attitude. With a similar attitude, instructors showing support for online teaching programmes, interest in such teaching format, and joy in teaching with online technology registered high mean scores. Additionally, instructors scored moderate means for the flexibility and convenience that online teaching offers, reflecting a neutral attitude. Similarly, online teaching reducing qualities in student outcomes and the effectiveness it offers as a teaching format produced moderate means, demonstrating a neutral attitude.

Overall, instructors expressed a general positive attitude, aligning with Elzawi et al. (2013), who also found a positive attitude among instructors towards teaching through online means. In this study, instructors were reluctant to agree that online teaching offers convenience, flexibility, effectiveness, and student outcome quality, slightly affecting their overall attitude. Lack of readiness and low confidence, as stated by Saleh (2020) and Hamed and Senussi (2020), could justify such reluctance. Qazaq (2012) found that instructors' positive attitude toward online teaching was influenced by factors such as confidence and liking for online technology. Similarly, Albaqami and Alzahrani (2022) reported that instructors' positive attitudes were shaped by their enthusiasm for adopting online teaching. Similar positive attitudes towards online teaching were found in research by Wang et al. (2021), wherein EFL instructors believed that online teaching provided flexibility and convenience, contrasting with the present study. Inconvenience was also found to be a factor resulting in negative attitudes towards online teaching in a study conducted by Demir and Sönmez (2021); such inconvenience is attributed to an instructor's perception that teaching EFL learners online is less effective than teaching them face-to-face.

Technological Skills

As previously mentioned, items of this variable were analysed by calculating the median and interquartile range scores. Peck and Devore's (2012) classifications of median scores (from a 5-point Likert scale) were adopted to interpret the median scores of the technological skills variable (as cited in Noor et al., 2021). The table below provides further details.

Table 4. Peck and Devore's (2012) Interpretation of Median Scores

Range of median values	Interpretation
4 – 5	High technological skills
2.01 – 3.99	Moderate technological skills
0 – 2	Low technological skills

The analysis of items related to the technological skills variable adopts the median evaluations in Table 4 as a framework for rating instructors' technological skills. The following table shows the median and interquartile range scores for each item.

Table 5. Median (Mdn) and Interquartile Range (IQR) Scores of Technological Skills Items

No.	Item	Mdn	IQR
1.	Downloading PDF files then viewing them.	5.00	0.00
2.	Dealing with emails, e.g., composing, replying, and forwarding emails.	5.00	0.00
3.	Dealing with Word Processing documents in terms of typing, copying, and pasting.	5.00	0.00
4.	Using features of the PowerPoint software, e.g., creating slides and inserting images.	5.00	1.00
5.	Downloading files on different browsers such as Google Chrome and Firefox.	5.00	1.00
6.	Using a search engine on a browser.	5.00	1.00
7.	Moving between several applications opened at the same time.	5.00	2.00
8.	Downloading and saving images from websites.	5.00	1.00
9.	Managing files and folders, e.g., creating, copying, and moving files and folders.	5.00	1.00
10.	Using shortcut keys e.g., CTRL+C to copy, CTRL+S to save, and CTRL+X to cut files.	4.00	2.00
11.	Opening documents from removable storage devices or a hard disc.	5.00	1.00
	Overall technological skills variable	4.81	0.82

The table shows that instructor participants showcased high skills in managing Word documents, downloading PDFs and viewing them, and emails, with identical responses. With a slight spread in scores, participants reported high skills at using browsers to download files and search for information, saving images, and dealing with the PowerPoint application. Furthermore, at a high median score, participants exhibited skills at using keyboard shortcut keys and moving between open applications, with a moderate spread in responses. Participants also reported high skills in dealing with files and folders, and viewing documents from external storage devices, registering subtle response variability. Overall, participants demonstrated high technological skills for online teaching.

Seetal et al. (2021) reported that instructors held high degrees of comfort in using Word and PPT software and internet browsing skills, supporting findings of this study. In a study by Mutambik (2018), instructors showed high computer and internet skills; however, he concluded that instructors were not ready to teach through online means due to factors such as low teacher self-efficacy, e.g., ability in using an online lesson delivery platform, and inadequate institutional support. The instructor questionnaire in Mutambik (2018) seemed to have insufficiently measured the necessary technological skills for online teaching, hence the misalignment with the present study. Moreover, the technological skills findings in the present study are partially corroborated by Hbaci (2018), who found that instructors had basic computer skills, e.g., managing files and folders and running Microsoft Word, but lacked internet-related skills. The contrast between the findings of Hbaci (2018) and the current study could stem from the fact that the former targeted different higher educational majors, such as economics and law, whereas the latter exclusively focused on EFL instructors.

Correlation Between Variables

To test the relationship between attitude and technological skills variables, a Spearman-Rho correlation test was conducted. Hinton et al. (2004) point out that the statistical measures of correlation produce values that range from -1 to +1, with -1 indicating a perfect negative correlation and +1 implying a perfect positive correlation, with a statistic of zero indicates no correlation between variables (p. 297). The statistical results between the two figures (-1&+1) can be interpreted as follows: <0.10-0.20 = very weak correlation; 0.20-0.40 = weak correlation; 0.40-0.70 = moderate correlation; 0.70-0.90 = strong correlation; 0.90-1.00 = very strong correlation (Overholser & Sowinski, 2008). The following table shows the results of the Spearman correlation test.

Table 6. Spearman Correlation Test Results Between Attitude and Technological skills

			Attitude	Technological skills
Spearman's rho	Attitude	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.432
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
		N	48	48
	Technological skills	Correlation Coefficient	.432	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
		N	48	48

Table 6 shows that there was a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship between instructors' attitude and their technological skills (r_s = .432, n = 48, p = .002). This association indicates that as instructors' attitude increases, their technological skills tend to increase towards adopting online teaching. Therefore, the more technologically skilled an instructor is, the more likely they are to manifest a positive attitude toward online teaching. This result resonates with findings of Zainudin and Bakar (2023), Alieto et al. (2024), and Rama et al. (2020), who similarly found a statistically significant positive relationship between instructors' attitude and their technological skills across different educational contexts, e.g., maths, science, and kindergarten. This consistency of findings between the current study and previous research suggests that such attitude-technological skills association is meaningfully linked, highlighting the importance of the two factors for instructors' readiness for online teaching adoption.

Conclusion

Instructor readiness plays an instrumental role in the implementation of effective online teaching. Thus, this study explored instructors' attitudes and technological skills as readiness indicators for adopting online teaching. As evidenced by the statistical analysis of the data, instructors showed a positive attitude ($M = 3.44$) and high technological skills ($Mdn = 4.81$), indicating high instructor readiness for online teaching adoption. The study also revealed a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables ($r_s = .432$, n = 48, $p = .002$). These findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide valuable insights into Libyan university EFL instructors' attitudes and technological skills. Such insights assist university decision-makers and EFL instructors in adopting online technology into their teaching. For instance, readiness indicators (attitude and technological skills) were found to be led by influencing factors; thus, university decision-makers are urged to provide support focused on factors influencing attitudes, e.g., awareness-raising sessions on the benefits of teaching online. With such support, instructors' readiness and willingness to teach online are not only enhanced, but also encouraged to produce better student outcomes.

The study has limitations in utilising a sole data source, i.e., a structured questionnaire, and the obtained sample size (48 participants) being relatively small, affecting generalisability of findings. Thus, qualitative/mixed-methods research studies with a large sample size can be endorsed as future research on instructor readiness for online teaching implementation, potentially confirming the findings of this study or providing additional more insights.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

