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Exploring attitudes of English department students towards online education in Afghanistan Universities

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Abstract
Online education has nowadays become quite widespread around the world due to COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas, in Afghanistan there is conflicting ideas and believes about online education. This study is based on quantitative methods using a survey instrument to gather descriptive data regarding the attitudes of EFL students majoring English language and literature towards online education in Afghanistan universities. The data for this study has been gathered from 149 male and female students from 15 different universities majoring English language and literature. The data has been collected using an online questionnaire. The data has been analyzed using SPSS. The gathered data indicate that majority of the participants have had a negative attitude towards online education in Afghanistan universities. In addition, the findings indicate online education has not been very effective for the participants and that is due to low internet quality and unavailability of a standard and effective tool for online classes. The study recommends more research in this area so as to watchfully investigate the factors behind ineffectiveness of online education in the country.

Keywords: Online education, attitude, Afghanistan universities, teaching

1. Introductions
Online education refers to a course, program or degree that is completed online (Salamat, Ahmad, Bakht & Saifi, 2018, p. 2) [9]. Also, Hadadnia, Hadadnia and Shahidi (2012), stated that in education through virtual instructor, students and teachers are physically distanced. He added that providing educational services requires electronic means such as texts, computer, and internet.
According to Mubaslat (2012) [6], the use of technology affects students' learning equally inside and outside of the classrooms. In addition, Simon (2015) stated that online teaching is very important for teachers' perceptions and deep understanding of using technology. Moreover, technology creates good opportunities for technical training to teachers in online teaching duties. Montelongo (2019) [5] discussed that online education is an effective cost-reduction strategy for teaching. However, online education has some problems such as low quality.
Online education provides time flexibility and motivation for the learners to perform their tasks autonomously (Salamat, *et al*, 2018) [9]. Everyone is benefitted from new technology in many ways, particularly, the ones who are interested take the opportunity of being online. For instance, students can be more familiarized with the internet and its use through using it (Shabibi & Ku Rusli, 2017) [12].
Sadaf, Martin and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019) [8] described that online learning was effective for the students. They also pointed that students learn a lot, practice more, and have a lot of interaction with each other. Whereas, the use of technology in EFL writing classes is not more effective and does not increase students' skills in writing (Wihastyanange, Kusumaningrum, Latief , & Cahyono, 2020) [15].
Sun and Chen (2016) [14] conducted a research on 160 students. The results showed that online teaching was more suitable than traditional teaching. Furthermore, they found that online classes normally take place in various places, requiring communication by using technology. Moreover, Elfaki, Abdulraheem and Abdulrahim (2019) [2] stated that online classes are more effective and successful than traditional classes. As they discussed, in e-learning classes the experimental group's score was 8. 74 and the control group's score was 6.26. The quality of feedback and communication through mixing technology and reinforcement from the side of faculty member play significant roles in students' learning and satisfaction.

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Moreover, the instructional videos and additional internet links positioned students' place and worth in faculty communication (Santelli, Stewart, & Mandernach, 2020) [11].

Yusnilita (2020) [16] found in her research that 80% of students were satisfied and fascinated to learn and continue their lessons through using technology by their teachers. As well as, the students mentioned that online learning is easier than face to face classes.

According to Rienties (2013) [7], teachers who were trained online were really benefitted from the training programs. Those teachers who are using the ICT (Information and Computer Technology) in their teaching and practices have developed more and their scores were considerably higher than those who were not using technology. Since they could use technology well, they were able to complete the program. Lee and Mojica (2020) [4] described that online learning and teaching develops teachers' expertise in teaching statistics. They added that online courses were a professional development opportunity for educators.

Chen, Dobinson and Kent (2020) [1] discovered in their study that students preferred not to be present in face to face classes. Also, the students were not eager to query the expediency of the BC (blackboard collaborate) technology and the timing of lectures. According to Saleh (2020) [10], the online teaching and learning enhanced the students' learning process and their level of education.

Research Questions
RQ1: Do English department students in Afghanistan universities have positive or negative attitude concerning online education?
RQ2: How effective is online education for English department students in Afghanistan universities?

2. Method
This is a quantitative study which involved a survey research with the purpose of exploring the attitudes of English department students towards online education in Afghanistan universities. To this end, a questionnaire with close-ended and open-ended questions was designed and published online.

3. Participants
The data for this study has been collected from 149 undergraduate students majoring English language and literature. 103 of the participants were male and 46 were female. They were between 18 to 33 years old and they were from the four different classes, freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior. The participants were from 15 different universities in Afghanistan. They participated in the study voluntarily.

4. Instrument
The data for this study has been collected through an online questionnaire using google forms. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen close-ended questions and one open-ended question.

5. Procedure
First of all, we prepared and published the questionnaire online. Second, we shared the link to the questionnaire with the teachers from 15 different universities to share it with their students. We left the questionnaire active for two weeks and 149 students from 15 universities filled the questionnaire. After that, we downloaded the form and analyzed the quantitative data using SPSS and the qualitative data using thematic analysis. Finally, the data analyzed were shown and described in pie chart.

6. Findings
The current study has been conducted to find out the effects of online teaching on English proficiency of English department students in Afghanistan universities. The findings of this study are shown and described in the following and pie charts.
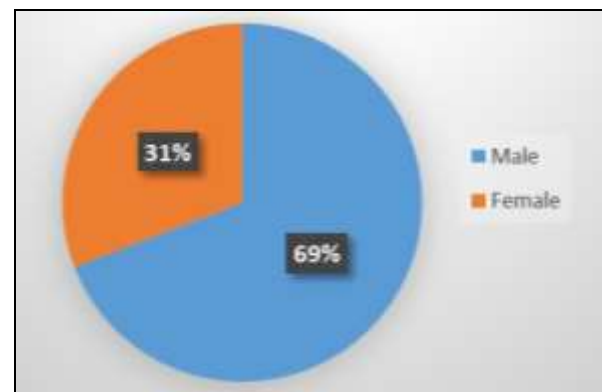

Chart 1: Gender

This data for this study has been collected from 149 subjects. 103 of the participants, 69% were male and 46 participants, 31 % of them were female.
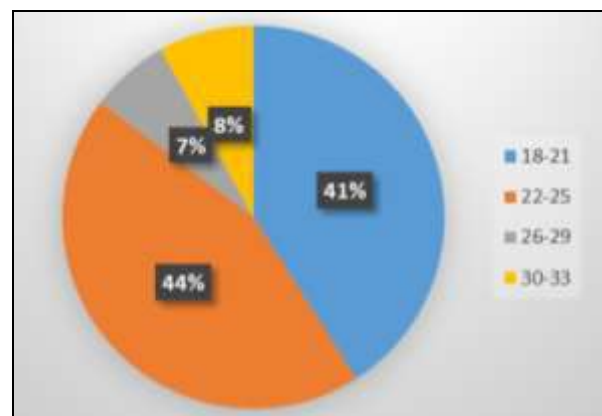

Chart 2: Age Category

As shown in chart 2, the participants were between ages 18 to 33. 41% of the participants have been between ages 18-21. 44% of them were between ages 22-25. 7% of the participants were between ages 26-29 and 8% of them have been between 30-33 years old.
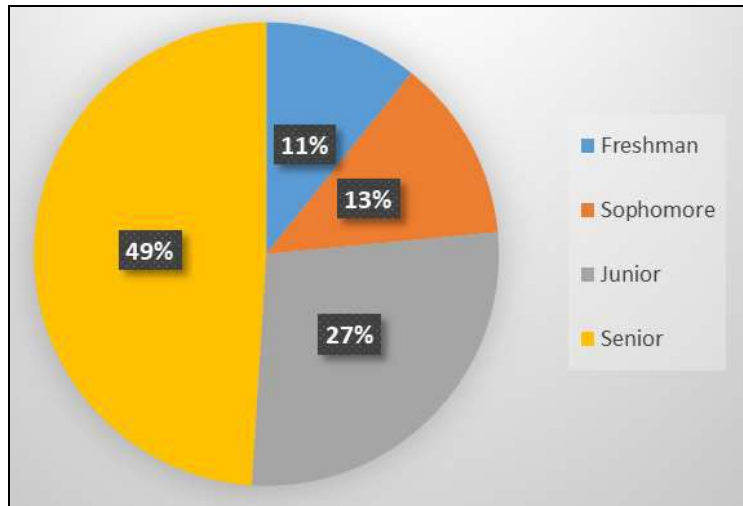
Chart 3: Classes

The participants have been from the four classes. 11% of the participants were freshmen. 13% of the participants were sophomore. 27% of them were junior and 49% of the subjects were senior. As the data show, most of the participants were senior.
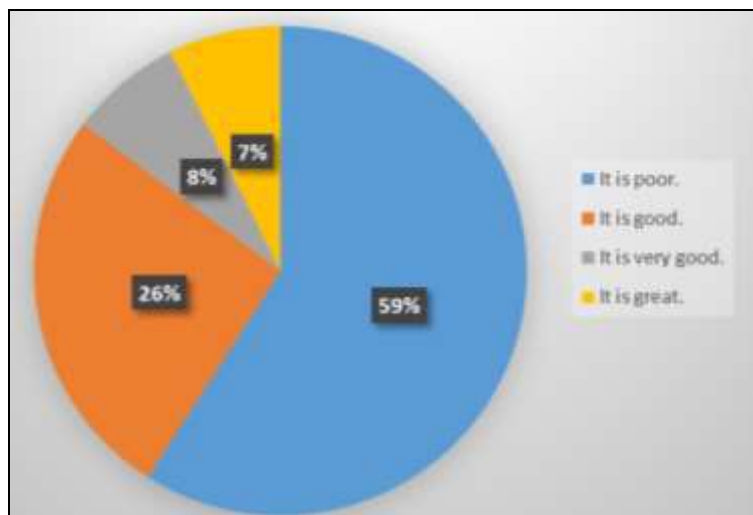

Chart 4: What is your overall understanding of online teaching?

To get the participants' overall view of online teaching and learning, we posed the question, "What is overall understanding of online teaching?". The participants' answers were as follow: 26% of the total participants stated that online teaching is poor in Afghanistan. More than half of the total participants, 59% of the total participants stated that online teaching is good. 8% of the total participants stated that online teaching is very good and 7% stated that it is great.
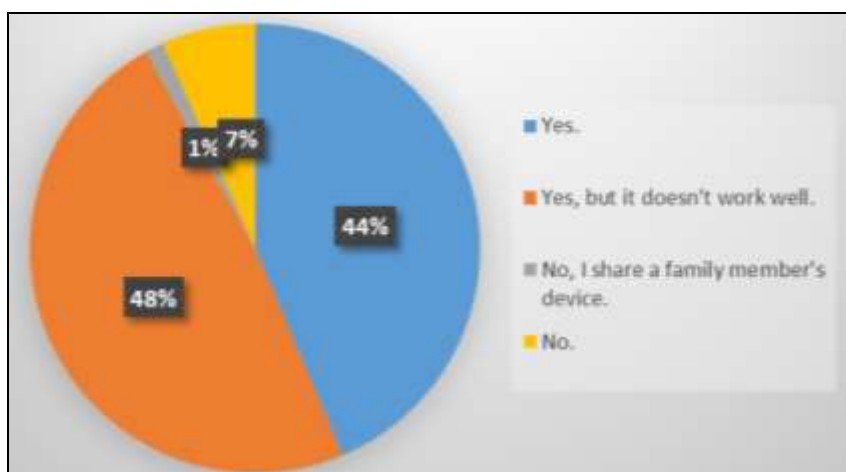

Chart 5: Do you have access to a device for online learning?

To find out whether the participants have access to a device for online learning or do not, we posed the question, "Do you have access to a device for online learning?". 44% of the participants answered "Yes". 48% of the total participants stated, "Yes, but it doesn't work well.". Only 1% of the participants stated that they shared a family member's device. 7% answered "No". Thus, it is implied that more than 90% of the subjects had access to a digital device for online learning. However, more than half of them could not take benefit from online teaching because their devices did not work well.
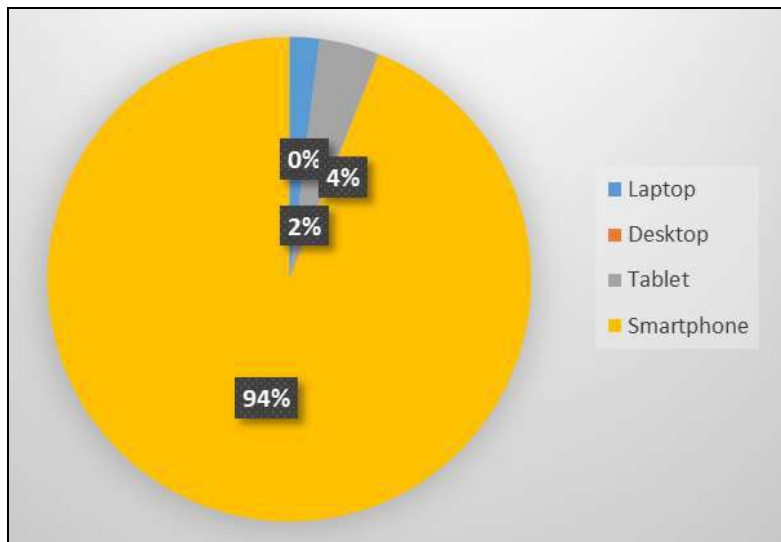

Chart 6: What device do you use for online learning?

In order to discover what device was mostly used by the participants for online learning, we asked the question, "What device do you use for online learning?". Only 2% of the total participants used laptop for their online lessons. None of the participants used desktop for their online lessons. 4% of the total participants used tablet.

Surprisingly, 94% of the total participants used smartphone for online learning. As we will discuss later, majority of the participants have had their online lessons through Whats App application. Therefore, it is implied that the most comfortable device for using Whats App for online lessons is smartphone.
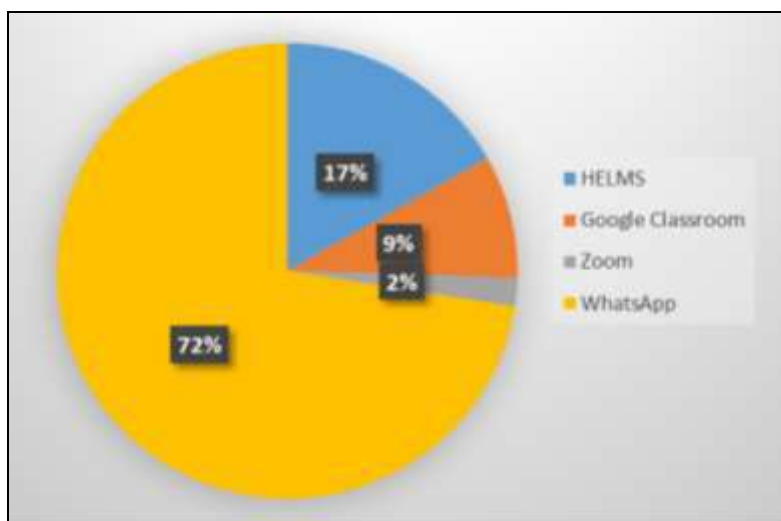

Chart 7: What system or application do you use for online lessons?

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, these days, higher education in the world is taking place online. However, there is not only system or application used for online education. In Afghanistan, various systems and tools are used for online education. As shown in the chart 7 above, four different tools are currently used for online education in Afghanistan universities. 17% of the total participants have used HELMS (Higher Education Learning Management System) for their online lessons. 9% of the total participants stated that they used Google Classroom for their online lessons. Only 2% of the total participants stated that they used the Zoom application for their online lessons. Unpredictably, 72% of the total participants pointed that they used Whats App for their online lessons. It is understood that majority of the participants have used Whats App for their online lessons. It is inferred that it might be due to the simplicity of the application use.
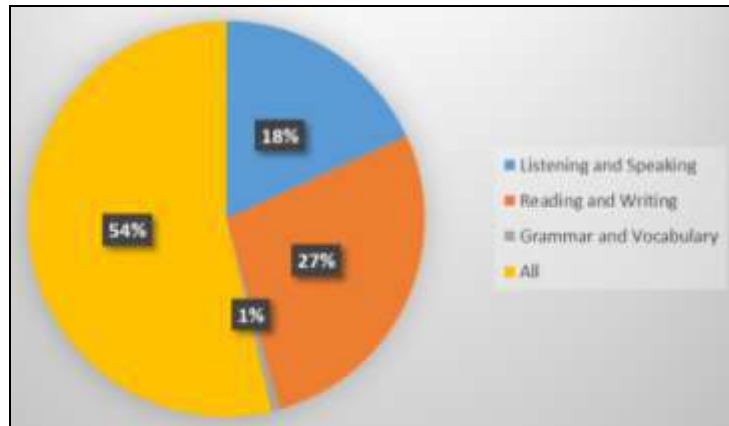
Chart 8: What language skill or system is mainly practiced in online teaching?

To find out the practice of language skill or system in online education, we asked the question, "What language skill or system is mainly practiced in online teaching?". As shown in the chart 8, 18% of the participants answered, 'listening and speaking'. However, 27% answered 'reading and writing' as the mainly practiced skills. Just 1% stated that grammar and vocabulary are practiced. Though, 54% stated that listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary are practiced in online education.
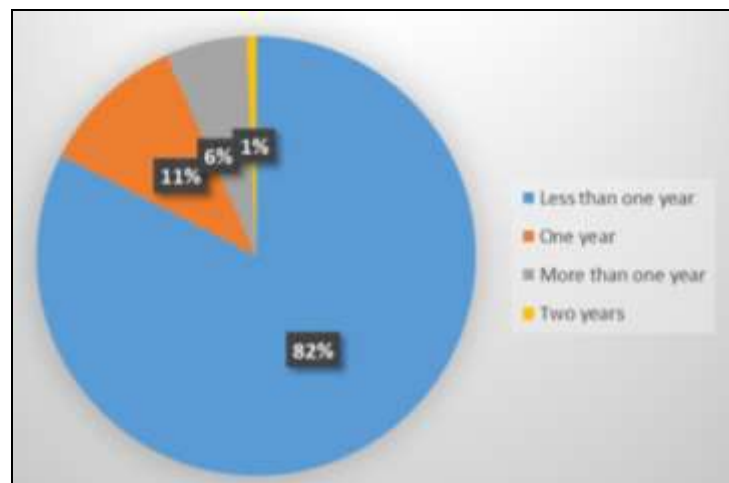

Chart 9: How long have you been taught online?

To find out whether the period of online learning had any effects on the learning process of the learners, we asked them about the length of time they have been being taught online. 82 percent of the total participants had been taught online for less than a year. 11 percent of the participants had one-year experience of learning online. 6 percent of the participants had more than one-year experience of learning online and only 1 percent of the participants had been taught online for two years. This reveals that majority of the learners have been taught for less than a year.
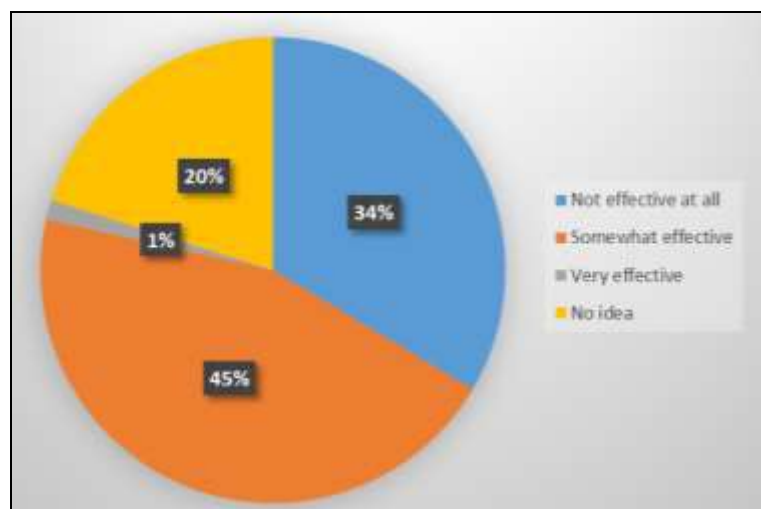

Chart 10: In your opinion, how effective is online teaching for Afghan students?

In order to discover the participants' opinion concerning the effectiveness of online teaching, we asked them how effective online teaching is for Afghan students. 34% of the participants responded, "not effective at all". On the other hand, 45% of the participants answered that online teaching is somewhat effective. However, 1% said that online teaching is very effective. Yet, 20% had no clear idea about the effectiveness of online teaching. It is implied that online teaching has not been very effective for Afghan students so far.
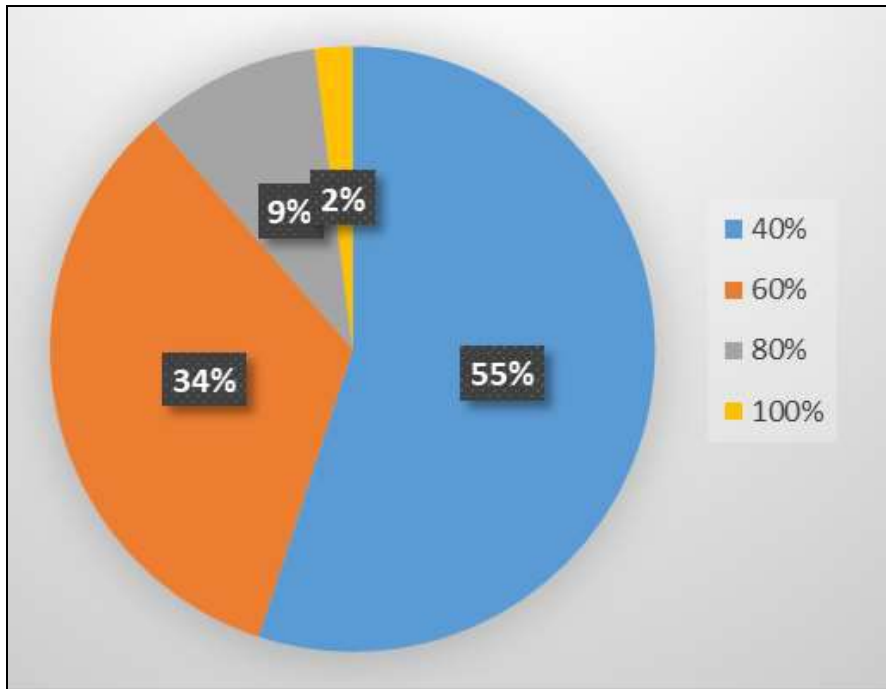
Chart 11: How much are you satisfied of learning English online?

To further investigate the learners' view on online teaching, we asked them about the percentage of their satisfaction. More than half of the total participants which makes 55% stated that they were 40% satisfied of online teaching. Whereas, 34% pointed that they were 80% satisfied of learning online. 9% percent answered that they were 80% satisfied. Just 2% were 100% satisfied of online learning.
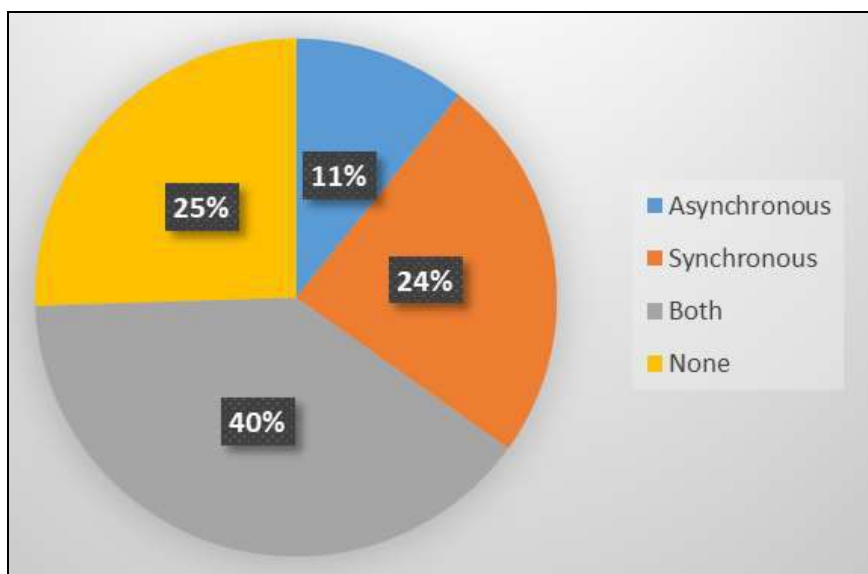
Chart 12: What type of online class do you prefer?

We asked the participants about the type of class they prefer. 11% answered, "asynchronous", 24% answered, "synchronous", 40% answered, "both", and 25% answered, "none". The data indicate that the participants had different preferences. It is understood that majority of the participants preferred both, asynchronous and synchronous classes.
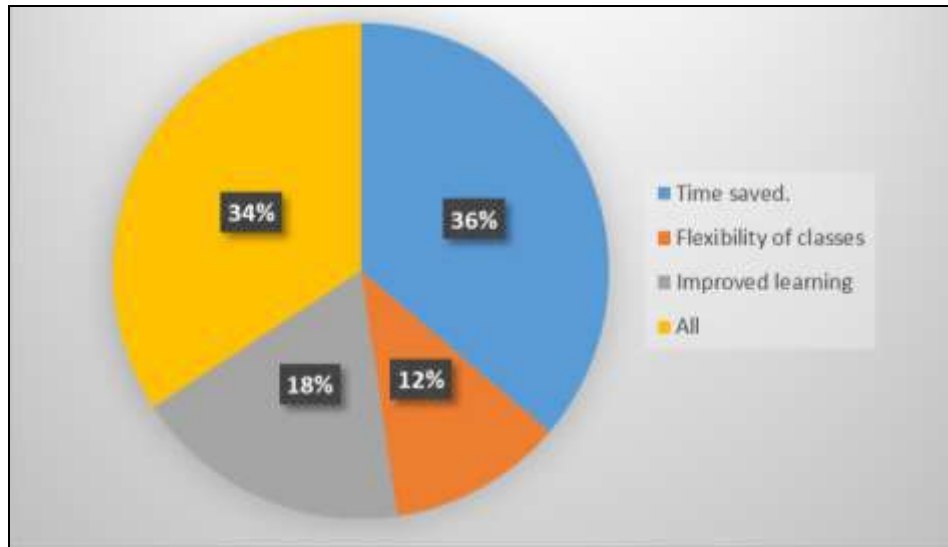
Chart 13: In your opinion, what are the advantages of online teaching?

As indicated in the chart 13, online education has had various advantages. 36% of the participants considered saving time as an advantage of online education. Whereas, 12% have considered flexibility of classes as an advantage. Yet, 18% believed that improved learning is an advantage of online education. However, 34% believed that all the three above are advantages of online education. Thus, it is implied that majority of the participants believed that saving time, flexibility of classes and improved learning are all advantages of online education.
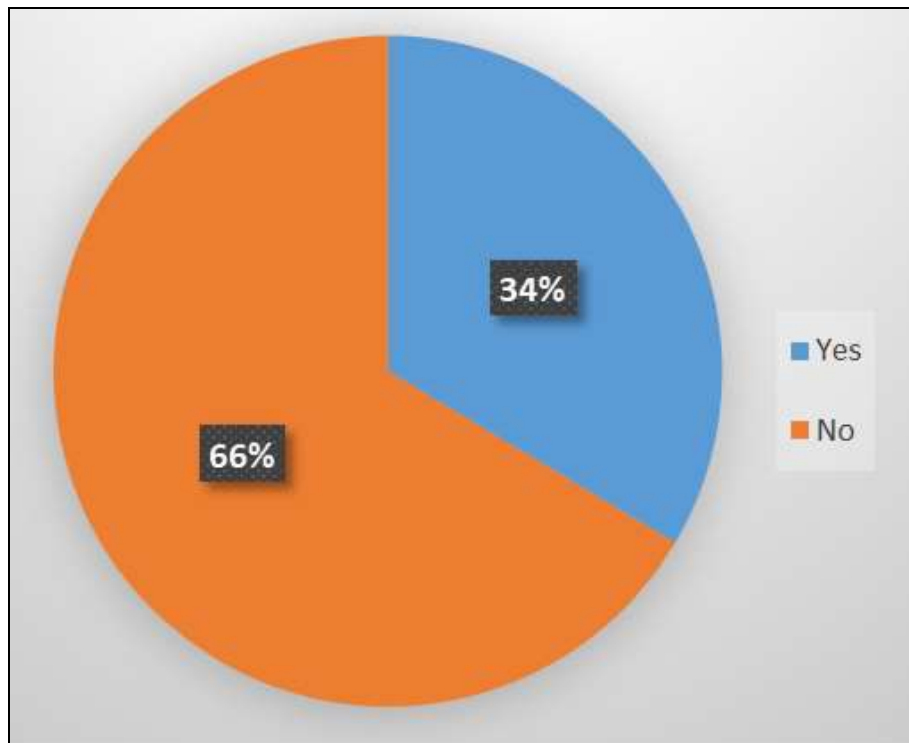

Chart 14: Do you enjoy learning English language through online courses?

In response to the question "Do you enjoy learning English language through online courses?", we got two answers. 66% of the participants stated that they enjoyed learning English online. Whereas, 34% stated that they didn't enjoy learning English online. Therefore, it is understood that majority of the participants enjoyed learning English online.
In response to the question, "What are the challenges of teaching English online?", the participants have had various answers. Most of the participant stated that weak or no internet connection in Afghanistan is the biggest challenge they face with during online learning. In addition, some have stated that since there is no in-person communication between teacher and students and students and students, it lowers the learning process. Furthermore, the few of the subjects pointed to lack of feedback from the teacher to students as one of the challenges of teaching online. Moreover, the cost of internet was described as another difficulty in learning online. Therefore, it is implied that the main challenge of teaching and learning English online in Afghanistan has been the internet quality and expense.
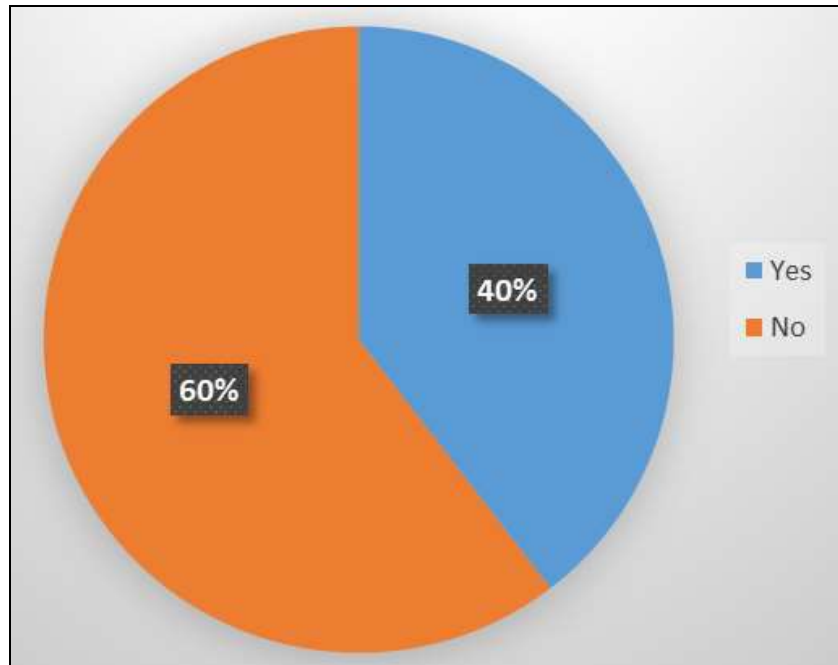
Chart 15: Do you agree with online teaching?

Although majority of participants enjoyed learning English online, more than half of them disagreed with online education. 40% of the participants agreed with online education, but 60% disagreed with it. Their disagreement with online education might be due to the remarkable difference between online and in-person education.
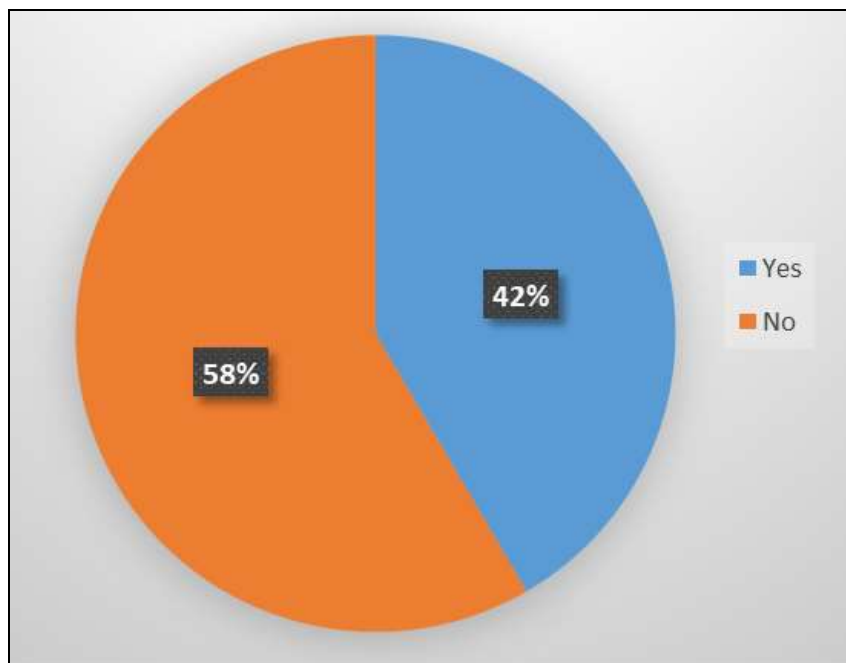

Chart 16: Does online teaching provide good opportunity to learn English?

As shown in the chart 16, 42% of the participants believed that online teaching provides a good opportunity to learn English. However, 58% believed that it does not provide a good opportunity to learn English.

In response to the question, "What are the positive effects of online teaching?" the participants had different ideas. However, majority of them stated that online teaching saves time. In addition, they stated that you can teach and learn very comfortably from your home. Thus, the above two items have been the noticeable positive impacts on teaching and learning online for Afghan students.

7. Discussion
The current study has been conducted to answer two questions. The first question probed the positive/negative attitude of the English depart students towards online education in Afghanistan universities. Whereas, the second question inquired the effectiveness of online education for students of English department in Afghanistan universities. The participants for this study ranged from freshmen to senior, 18 to 33 years old, male and female. Yet, their class, their age, and their gender did not have significant effects on their responses.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, majority of the participants believed that online education is good. Second, majority of the participants, 72%, (refer to chart 7) have been using Whats App groups as an application for their online lessons. Thus, it indicates that the application used for online lessons is not a very interactive, interesting, and useful tool. Although the system or application used for online lessons is not very effective, the participants, yet stated that all language skills and systems are practiced in online education. In addition, most of the university students in Afghanistan have had less than one-year experience of online education (refer to chart 9). Therefore, they might not have been familiar with using more interactive and interesting tools for online lessons. Furthermore, the results show that 46% (chart 10) of the participants stated that online education is effective for Afghan students. Also, it is inferred that majority of the participants, 66%, (chart 14) enjoy learning English through online courses. This indicates that online education has been effective for the English department students in Afghanistan universities.

However, 58% of the participants stated that online teaching does not provide a good opportunity to learn English. Also, 60% (chart 15) disagreed with online teaching in Afghanistan universities. The data reveal that the participants' overall attitude towards online education in Afghanistan universities is negative. Although they enjoy online lessons and stated that it is somewhat effective, they behave with online education negatively. It is implied that the participants have judged about online education in comparison to in-person education.

8. Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Research
To conclude, online education has got widespread these days. As Mubaslat (2012) [6] stated, the use of technology affects students' learning equally inside and outside of the classrooms. However, Chen, Dobinson and Kent (2020) [1] discovered in their study that students preferred not to be present in face to face classes. The findings of this study indicate that EFL students at Afghanistan universities have had a negative attitude towards online education. It is implied that the main reasons behind students' attitude towards online education are lack of quality internet, unstandardized tools for university level, and lack of interactivity of the lessons. The limitation of this study is that it was conducted on students from 15 different universities. Therefore, we recommend further researches on this topic to include participants from all of the universities in Afghanistan.

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