

Distance learning in Libya between reality and exception in light of the COVID-19 crisis

Aisha Hamed Bubaker

Nadia Mohamed Senussi

Aisha.hamed@uob.edu.ly

Nadia.senussi@uob.edu.ly

University of Benghazi-Education-Qmens Branch

المخلص

خلال جائحة كورونا COVID-19 تآثرت جميع القطاعات وخصوصا قطاع التعليم حيث أغلقت جميع المؤسسات التعليمية في كل دول العالم. تم تطبيق التعليم عن بعد في بلدان مختلفة ولكن في ليبيا لا تزال إلى هذه اللحظة معظم المؤسسات التعليمية مغلقة تحت توصيات من اللجنة العليا لمكافحة وباء كورونا ومنعا لانتشار الفيروس. يقوم هذا البحث على المنهج التحليلي الوصفي حيث يتم دراسة البحوث التي تطرقت لتجارب الدول التي طبقت نظام التعليم عن بعد وكيفية استمرار التعليم في ظل جائحة كورونا وكيف تم التغلب على هذه الأزمة. تم جمع البيانات عن طريق الاستبيان الإلكتروني الذي استهدف المدارس والجامعات الخاصة في مدينة بنغازي-ليبيا التي طبقت نظام التعليم عن بعد بنجاح. بعد جمع البيانات تم تحليلها باستخدام برنامج التحليل الإحصائي Spss. أظهرت النتائج أن التجربة كانت ناجحة للمدارس الخاصة التي طبقت التعليم عن بعد بالرغم من وجود بعض الصعوبات. أخيرا يقدم هذا البحث بعض التوصيات المستخلصة من الدراسات السابقة وتجارب بعض الدول و المدارس والجامعات الخاصة لتنفيذ التعليم عن بعد كأفضل حل بديل للطوارئ.

Abstract

Education sector has been affected by COVID-19 pandemic and all the educational Institutions have been closed, not only in Libya but also everywhere around the world. Most of the developed countries around the world have been immediately transitioned to remote learning fluently, on the other hand, there are other countries that are closing their educational institutions and facing the difficulty of transition to online learning just like Libya. The study used a descriptive analytical method through the review of the literature conducted on the experience of some countries and how they deal with the pandemic in saving education and using distance education as an alternative solution. Online questionnaires were then developed to collect the necessary data targeting the students, parents and teachers whose private school and university implemented distance education in Benghazi Libya. After data was collected, it was analysed using the SPSS statistical analysis software. The results showed that the experience went successful for private schools and universities that have applied the remote learning even if there were some difficulties. Finally this research provides a basis for the implementation of distance education as the best alternative Emergency solution, supporting the argument that learning need not be stopped, too in Libya.

Keywords: Distance learning, online study, education, Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Introduction

According to World Health Organization (WHO) Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is “an infection disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus” (WHO, 2020) even though there

was not any case recorded in the beginning of the second semester of the 2020 year (spring), the schools and the universities were closed. They were closed due to rapid exposure of the virus in the neighbouring countries and the country is not ready for this situation. The learning process in Libya was totally stopped from the 14 of March 2020 by the recommendation of the Ministry of Education, until the time this paper was written June 12 (2020) to avoid the rapid spread of the virus but with no alternative solution while this closing is affecting millions of children and youth of Libyan's student population.

-Impact of coronavirus on education

Most countries of the world were affected by COVID-19. The Coronavirus crisis has a big Impact on the education sector; for instance, many universities and schools are closed and moved towards distance learning. However, education in Libya is based on traditional methods only and requires the students to attend the school classes every day, and have never used the e-learning tools before. Therefore, to change the education system in the schools those were based on basic methodology like a traditional classroom (where teacher use books and blackboard) into remote learning that based on technology there are some aspects and challenges that should be considered like: Infrastructure Support, Staff Readiness, Student Accessibility, (Wahab, A. 2020). During coronavirus distances learning has become part of the curriculum in many schools and universities (Plancher KD, Shanmugam JP, Petterson SC, 2020) worldwide and should be in Libya.

-Shift to online study and e-learning during the pandemic

How long will this pandemic be there and why should we immediately begin the transition to e-learning for no further waste of time? No one knows! The country needs a solution for this situation since no one knows for how long this situation will continue. The traditional studying way is the used way in the education system with no support of technology. This made a big hole in the education system when the pandemic occurred. Now it is the time that the country should use the technology to support the educational process which should be supported by the government to ensure its success. Libya is a low resource country not well prepared Or rather saying not ready yet to fully rely on online education for a full school year. Only one way can make this happen if the government completely supported distance education by providing full access to high network speed and supporting families who are unable to provide devices and equipment for studying online. “Different countries worldwide have introduced various solutions during the pandemic to continue the education process. Online libraries, TV broadcasts, guidelines, resources, video lectures, online channels were introduced in at least 96 Countries” (Basilaia, G. & Kvavadze, D. 2020).

-Opportunities and Challenges

The new generations use technology very much and spend most of their time on smartphones, tablets and social media so it's the government opportunities to support the use of technology in the learning process. The integration of technology into the education process has become a worldwide trend. Providing educational materials through the mobile devices of this generation is a very attractive method of learning more than the traditional

way. “The use of mobile learning allows learning anytime, anyplace, and anywhere. Mobile Learning is an unavoidable alternative during COVID-19” (Naciri, A., Baba, M. A., Achbani, A., & Kharbach, A. 2020). Moreover, the learning by using mobile devices can be effective and “helps students to develop technological skills, conversational skills, find answers to their questions, develop a sense of collaboration, and allow knowledge sharing “(Naciri, A.Baba, M. A, Achbani, A., & Kharbach, A. 2020). Today, most of the universities use what are called "learning management systems." In light of the Corona crisis experienced by the world; the majority of educational institutions have moved towards e-learning as a more appropriate alternative to ensure the continuity of the educational process. The use of online video chatting applications such as Zoom, Google, Meeting, and WebXmate has increased significantly in different parts of the world (Perez, S. 2020). According to Perez; the downloading of these programs reached 62 million times between 14-21 March 2020 (Perez, S. 2020) that was, with the start of the movement bans in many countries. The use of many educational applications and programs have also Doubled as shown in figure (1). Such as Google Learning Case, Office 365 ", Apple applications, evaluation service sites and interactive activities. According to the same site techcrunch.com (Perez, S. 2020); IOS, Google software downloads increased by 45% in a week and the growth of downloading video conferencing apps has increased exponentially in different parts of the world as shown in (figure 2and 3).

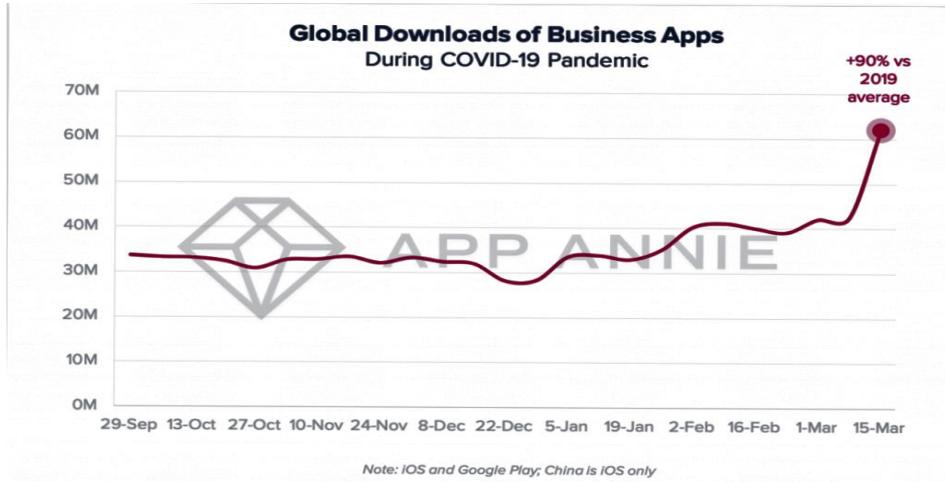


Figure.1. Downloading of business apps during COVID-19 Pandemic (Perez, S. 2020)

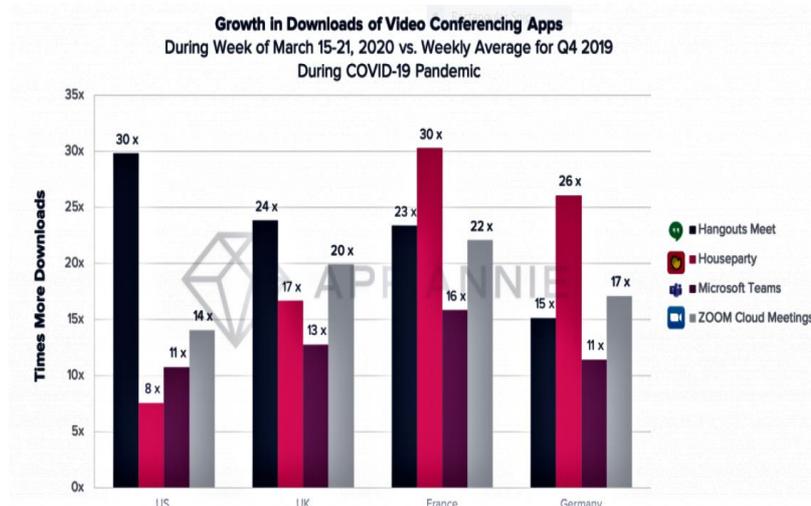


Figure.2. Growth in downloading of video conferencing apps during the COVID-19 pandemic in (US, UK, France, and Germany) (Perez, S. 2020)

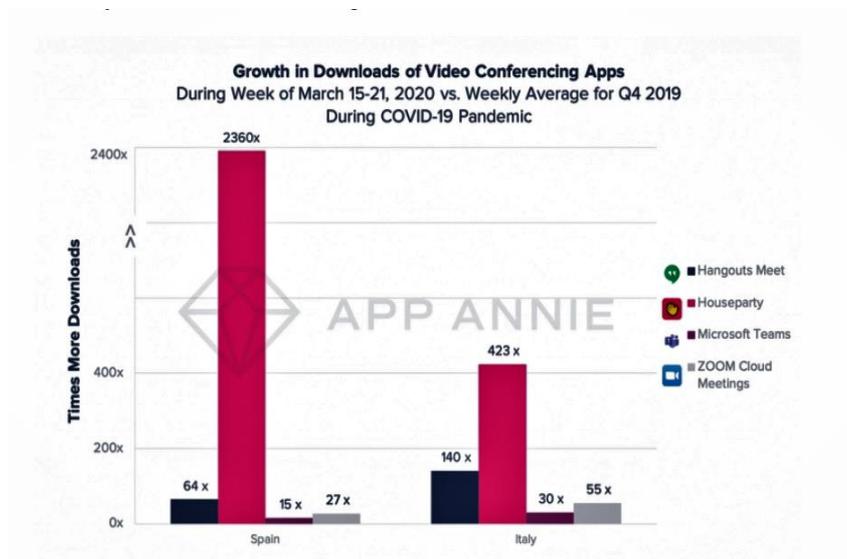


Figure.3. Growth in downloading of video conferencing apps during the COVID-19 pandemic in (Spain and Italy) (Perez, S. 2020)

Despite the positives of the use of e-learning, is it a total alternative solution to the traditional methods and the extent of preparation for that? What are the challenges facing e-learning?

E-learning challenges in light of the pandemic

1 - Internet coverage and accessibility

Despite the widespread use of the Internet in the region, many countries have not previously tested the technologies offered by E-learning. According to the Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data, the current population of Libya is 6,866,054 as on Friday, June 12, 2020. “There were 5.10 million internet users in Libya in January 2020” (Kemp, S.2020) as shown in figure

(4). “The number of Internet users in Libya increased by 600 thousand (+13%) between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Libya stood at 75% in January 2020.”(Kemp, S.2020). Moreover; “There were 11.40 million mobile connections in Libya in January 2020; the number of mobile connections in Libya in January 2020 was equivalent to 167% of the total population.” (Kemp, S.2020) as shown in figure 4.

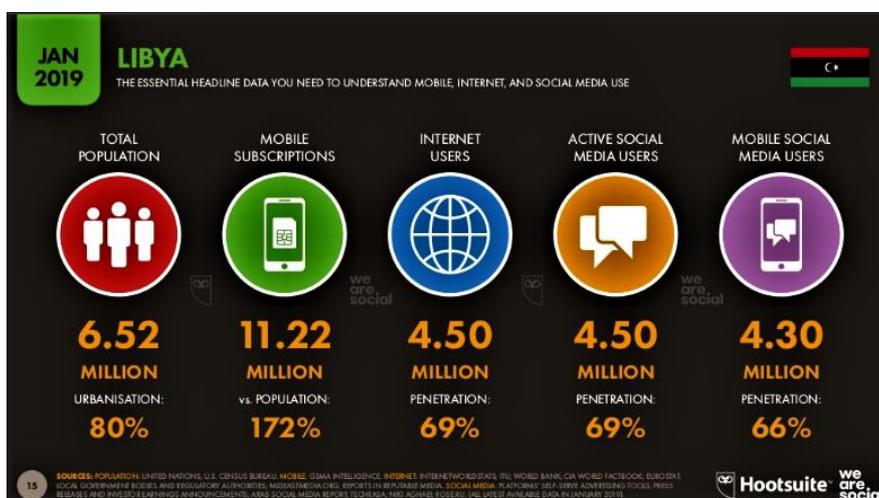


Figure.4.Total population of Libyan people and percentage of mobile internet and social media users in Libya (Kemp, S. 2020)

Even Though, the Statistics of Internet users in Libya are very promising that most Libyans can benefit from it in continuing the educational process; Most of them are invoking the bad speed of the internet service and the high price of subscribing to the network. The numbers compared to the rest of the countries are good, but what is required is to take advantage of this growth in the number of users of the Internet and the country should work on building an electronic educational platform that is appropriate for

the Libyan culture to take advantage of the Internet use and to communicate knowledge and support exist educational Platforms. In addition, when teachers and students have sufficient understanding to the types of online learning, then transferring to the remote learning in Libya would be facilitated Types of online learning are: “Knowledgebase, online support, asynchronous training, synchronous training, Hybrid training”(Basilaia, G, & Kvavadze, D. 2020)

2 - Readiness of the teacher

The involving of the ICT in the education domain helps in enhancing lessons delivery and that because the technology supports staff members (teachers) in the lesson preparation and delivery. Though, some of the staff members at universities and schools willing to integrate the ICT tools in their lessons especially during lectures and tutorials and some of them unwilling using technology because of different reasons one of them is the Confidence. The administration of the different tools and learning platforms could be the reason for the lack of confidence. Therefore, staff members also need to have the ability to use the ICT tools effectively to submit lessons in such a mode (Wahab, A. 2020). Moreover, the Ministry of Education should look for teacher’s need to be supported technically, socially and morally so that they can effectively deliver online classes (Wahab, A. 2020).

This could be by setting up courses and workshops to develop the teaching staff to remain ready to use technology in education, especially in such circumstances.

Opportunities for improvement

The current crisis has a major role in highlighting the role of smart education in saving time and preserving the environment not only in the educational process but also in various forms of life. In addition, it is playing a major role in changing educational roles between the student, teacher and parent, and the role of smart education in supporting and developing educational institutions. The remote learning environments promote supplemental learning experiences where students can interact, collaborate, and take ownership of their own learning at their own pace and time (Wahab, A. 2020). Moreover, in online classes can drive and monitor who receives web training, when, how many times, and in what succession. The online learning system can provide a satisfactory result, especially in the condition of higher education when educators manage time and implement smooth programming that helps to reduce their frustration while maximizing their productivity (Wahab, A. 2020).

Related work

There are many studies touch on the same topic as this research. Be specifically on the topic of the transition to distance education as an alternative solution at present and dealt with it from different perspectives. These studies have varied between Arabic and others. In addition, this study will review a number of studies that have been used with reference to the most prominent features with a comment on it that includes aspects of agreement, difference and statement of the scientific gap addressed by the current study. We would like to point out that the studies that will be reviewed came in the time period in which many countries were imposed a curfew between March and April 2020 and included a

number of countries and regions, which indicates their temporal and geographical diversity. From those studies a study was done by Basilaia, G & Kvavadze, D, which was focusing on the transition of education in Georgia to distance education and how it was? The authors mentioned that “the capacities of the country and its population to continue the education process at the schools in the online form of distance Learning”. This study was focused on the situation in general education in Georgia. The authors explain how the state of Georgia experience in distance learning was very successful through a case study that was conducted for some private schools that have successfully applied the system. Such an experiment should be able to encourage the country to immediately transfer to remote learning before losing more time. “Based on the first-week statistics of the online teaching process at one of the private schools in Georgia, we can conclude that transition from the traditional to the online education systems at the school was Successful.” (Basilaia, G., & Kvavadze, D. 2020). Moreover, the authors suggested “easy way to use Google’s G Suite for education to make an addition to the existing school management system for video conferencing” (Basilaia, G., & Kvavadze, D.2020).

In another context and a different experience from one of the Arab countries, the Egyptian Ministry of Education took care of the problem of interactivity, and launched for this purpose Edmodo website.(Edmodo.org) This platform was launched in March 2020 and the Ministry of Education was interested in providing a guide for student and teachers in how to use and deal with the online platform, such as how to create classes and others. The platform allows students and teachers to communicate about lessons. The Libyan Ministry of Education should follow the example of the

Egyptian Ministry of education and support distance education, not necessarily creating new educational platforms, but with the support of existing ones. A Corona crisis would lead to a change in the way the world views distance education. Despite its disadvantages, which observers believe are only temporary and will be overcome in the future, distance education remains an alternative to traditional education in critical situations.

In addition, to the previous study there was another study that was done by Professors Seth C. Oranburg Assistant Professor of Law “Distance Education in the Time of Coronavirus: Quick and Easy Strategies “the author provides some strategies for distance education in this time of coronavirus. The professor indicates an introductory technology section for the teachers who are required now for shifting from traditional to remote education, and it provides easy steps to start quickly teaching online. Moreover, the author clearly states that this study is not only useful for law school but for every school (Oranburg. 2020). Furthermore, there is another study in India that was done by Dr. Kavita Saxena (2020) "Coronavirus Accelerates Pace of Digital Education in India". This study pictured the experiences and government support shifting to remote learning by offering the cost of the education suitable to raise (Massive Open Online Courses) (MOOCs). However, the author has mentioned some challenges that Indian educational institutions are facing shifting their teaching to online learning platforms under the pandemic of coronavirus circumstance “Converting teaching resources and material into digital formats in such a short time was a challenge. It was a difficult task to move the class of more than 50 students to the e-learning platform in the middle of the trimester” (Saxena, K. 2020) In addition, she laid some of the ICT

tools that the educational institution used like Google Hangouts, Skype, Adobe Connect, Zoom and directed some advice or tips that they learned from their experience of teaching online, one of them was “ Create smaller groups for discussion/classroom activities by using appropriate features like Zoom’s Breakout Room, this will help the faculty to track students’ participation in the assigned tasks” (Saxena, K. 2020). Moreover, she navigated students' experiences in learning online that divided into two trends, some of them found that learning online more interactive, empowering, comfort and increased their concentration in the course, on the other hand, some of the students found impediment on the speed and connectivity of the internet. The essence of this paper, after the encounter with some challenging of shifting into e-learning, effectively using these digital tools that can create an interactive and enjoyable learning environment for both teachers and students (Saxena, K. 2020). After reviewing all these previous studies, we draw one important thing, which we fully support and agree with, that the government has a large and very effective role in supporting distance education, which is necessary to move toward it to preserve the remainder of the school year.

Data collection

The descriptive-analytical method was used and online questionnaires targeting 200 students, parents and Teachers as participants. The study was conducted on a group whose private school and universities implemented distance education. Some of them are International University of Medical Science, Harvest International School and Young Genius School were the first private university and schools that implement distance education in Benghazi Libya. The participants

were chosen randomly from those institutions. The sample was about 200 persons, including students, teachers, and Parents what concerns us in this study is the opinion of students and parents as shown in figure(5). The opinion of the parents is very important since this study focusing not only private universities but more on private schools.

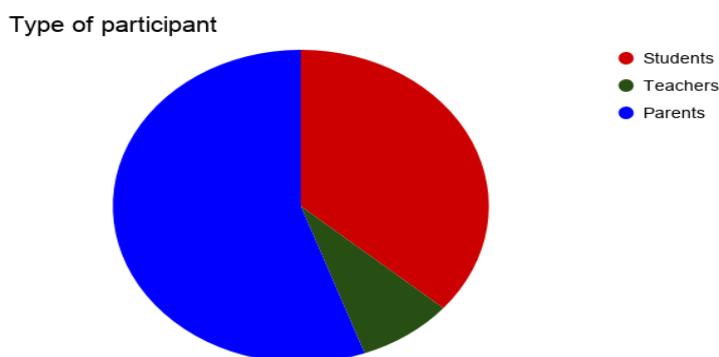


Figure.5. shows that most of the participants are student and parents

Data were collected using questionnaires that included questions related to distance education, for instance but not Limited, if it was the first experience for participants, if they have faced any difficulties, what kind of devices they have used for distance learning, and finally if it was a successful experiment. The validity of the questionnaire was assessed in two ways face and content validity. Test-retest method and internal consistency were used for questionnaires reliability. Data was collected and analysed by SPSS 25 software.

Result and discussion

After exploring the different cases of how different countries driving their educational process during the COVID-19 pandemic, We are looking for rolling down the best and successful method that has been used so far in Different countries. Many countries, according to previous studies, have implemented the immediate and compulsory transition of distance education as an ideal solution to save the rest of the school year. The successful experiment in the actual transition to distance education was not only global, but there are local experiences. There are private schools and universities that have adopted distance education as an alternative solution, although the number is very limited and some of them have only finished the curriculum and the final Exams have not taken place yet, but it is a successful, relative, and close example for distance education as a temporary Solution. The infrastructure is very weak. There is a weakness in the internet, blackouts, and a high price for internet service. All these are the reasons for the difficulties students facing in obtaining distance Education. Figure (6) shows that most of the participants were facing difficulty with distance learning Not only difficulty but also obvious from figure (7) that this is the first experience for most of the participants with distance education. On the other hand, despite the existence of difficulties, a very large percentage of respondents confirmed that the experience was very successful figure (8).

Have you faced any difficulties during the distance learning

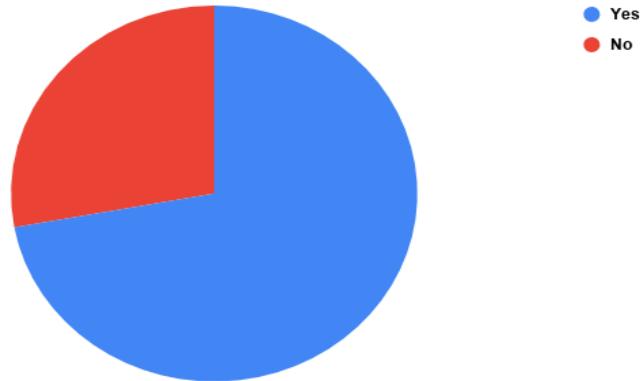


Figure.6. shows that most of the participants were facing difficulty

Have you ever taken online courses or lessons before this experience

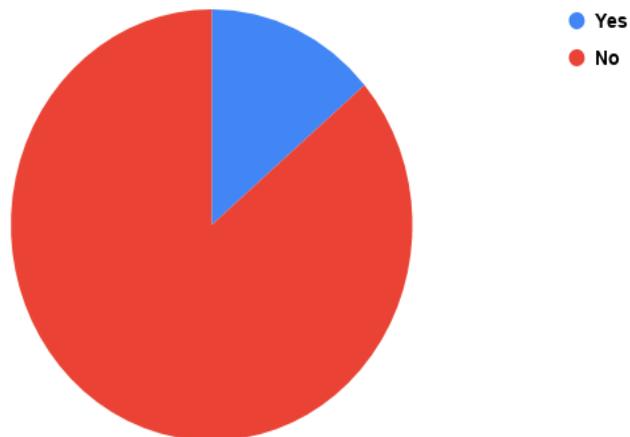


Figure.7. shows that this is the first experience for most of the participants

Is this experiment was successful?

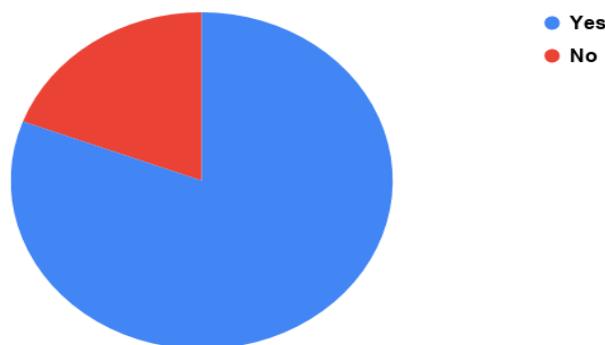


Figure.8. shows distance learning went successful

Results confirm that the rapid transition to distance learning went successful as shown in figure (8). The experience and studies can be useful for other schools and universities with big support from the government. Quick and emergency transition to distance learning must be considered by the ministry of education to finish the school year. Because of the financial issues that the private schools are facing with their client's payments, they can follow their own methods of how to solve the problem of completing the school year due to the Pandemic even though by using a very simple ITC tool. Nevertheless, public schools must be supported by the government with all Possibilities. The government must ensure the establishment of an electronic educational platform to support e-learning and support pre-existing educational platforms. Best example is the experience of the state of Georgia in the United States of America in the application of smart distance education in a record period during the crisis in Corona. Likewise, the need for concerted efforts of all sectors from private companies to provide support by providing computers for students and

provide software for all educational levels to facilitate the process of distance education, as happened in the United States of America where Microsoft and Google had a major role in the success of the educational process in these circumstances. Internet service providers have to improve services and obtain government support. The Internet can be made at the expense of the government when entering the online educational platform, as happened in some countries. Where the government should supported free browsing in the event of entering the electronic learning platform.

The government should improve the use of technology in education and distance education approach if it follows the guidelines that some organizations represent in the time of pandemic such as the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) "these organizations published suggestions for how to use remote education to benefit students during the COVID-19 pandemic."(Morgan. 2020)

Conclusion and Recommendations

In Libya, COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing imposes educational institutions to close and stop face to face learning without alternative solutions until June 12 2020. Subsequently, they should roll down emergency remote teaching even by basic ICT tools. At least the public schools should get support from the government, but the private schools had to find their way to continue the education process online. The world is changing and developing rapidly, and is being matched by a rapid development in technology. On the other hand, the Libyan government must keep pace with development and support distance education, not

only for this pandemic, but for any emergency that may happen. Therefore, all students in different social classes can continuing learning and finish their degree on time that is why we recommended that:-

-Higher education institutions and schools in Libya need to have requisite ICT Infrastructure to effectively deliver distance learning.

-Teachers and students need appropriate guidelines for using technology to make the educational process more efficient and convenient.

-The Ministry of Education needs to have basic ICT Infrastructure to effectively introduce online learning.

-Universities and schools need to confer with internet dealer to help supply access to online learning for students as well as teachers for free or at least a cheaper rate.

-The Ministry of Education must study and evaluate the experience of distance education, which was conducted by the International University of Medical Sciences and some private schools in preparation for transition to distance learning for the rest of the Libyan schools and universities.

More research needs to be done about applying distance learning and the future study would be the quality of the remote learning after the first experience to get an accurate result. Last but not least more research needed for distance education for people with special needs.

References

Basilaia, G., Kvavadze, D., 2020, Transition to Online Education in Schools during a SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic in Georgia, Pedagogical Research, 5(4), em0060.
<https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/7937>

Kemp, S. , 2020,DIGITAL2020:LIBYA.
<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-libya>

Morgan. Hani, 2020, Best Practices for Implementing Remote Learning during a Pandemic, The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 93:3, 135-141, DOI:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00098655.2020.1751480>

Naciri, A., Baba, M. A., Achbani, A., & Kharbach, A, 2020, Mobile Learning in Higher Education: Unavoidable Alternative during COVID-19. Aquademia, 4(1), ep20016.
<https://doi.org/10.29333/aquademia/8227>

Oranburg, Seth.(March 13, 2020), Distance Education in the Time of

Coronavirus: Quick and Easy Strategies for Professors .
Duquesne

University School of Law Research Paper No. 2020-02.
Available at

SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3553911> or
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3553911>

Perez, S., 2020, Videoconferencing apps saw a record 62M downloads

during one week in March.techcrunch.com.

<https://techcrunch.com/2020/03/30/videoconferencing-apps-saw-a-record-62m-downloads-during-one-week-in-march/>

Plancher KD, Shanmugam JP, Petterson SC, 2020, The Changing Face of

orthopedic Education: Searching for the New Reality After COVID-19,

Arthroscopy, Sports Medicine, and Rehabilitation , doi:
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asmr.2020.04.007>

Saxena, K., 2020, Coronavirus Accelerates Pace of Digital Education in

India:<https://edtechreview.in/e-learning/3984-coronavirus-accelerates-pace-of-digital-education-in-india>

Wahab, A., 2020, Online and Remote Learning in Higher Education

Institutes: A Necessity in light of COVID-19 Pandemic:
<https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n3p16>

World Health Organization (WHO), 2020, Coronavirus.

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=1>