

## **An Evaluation of Online Courses in English Departments at Palestinian Universities during Covid-19 Pandemic Using the IHEP 2000 Quality Benchmarks**

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Received: 14 July 2022

Accepted: 20 July 2022

Published: 31 November 2022

### **ABSTRACT**

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of educational institutions made a dramatic move from face-to-face (traditional) learning and teaching to online delivery. Accordingly, similar to other universities, Palestinian universities had to cope with this global pandemic and transform from traditional teaching and learning to online learning. This study aims to explore Palestinian university students' and instructors' attitudes toward the shift to online delivery. Precisely, this study aims to explore whether Palestinian Universities fulfilled the international standards of online learning. The researchers utilized two sets of questionnaires to collect data from the various Palestinian universities. The first questionnaire was used to collect data from university students and the second aimed to gather data from University instructors. The participants of the study were 375 students and instructors. The researchers found that those Palestinian university instructors have a tendency to agree that their universities met most IHEP benchmarks for online learning. However, the findings revealed that students had a tendency to have less agreement that online learning met IHEP benchmarks. Finally, the researchers suggested some recommendations

**Key Words:** Covid-19, IHEP 2000 Quality Benchmarks, Pandemic, online learning

## INTRODUCTION

With the appearance of technology, most educational institutions tried to it as a complementary choice in the educational process. Information communication technology (ICT) facilitated the learning process, made it more entertaining as it enthused new skills and learning tasks and stimulated learners' higher critical thinking skills (Farrah, 2006; Farrah, 2014; Farrah, 2015; Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018; Stosic, 2015 Abu Safiyeh & Farrah, 2020). However, owing to the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, most educational institutions were forced to implement online learning. Therefore, it has become to some extent compulsory worldwide (Farrah & Al-Bakry, 2020; Alodan, 2021; Guillen et al. 2022). Accordingly, most educational institutions (universities and schools) shifted to online learning to stay in touch with university students and school children and to resume the educational process after the sudden closedown of all educational institutions.

In fact, some higher education institutions had introduced some online programs to make use of hi-tech development before the COVID-19 pandemic (Farrah, 2006). Several institutions of higher education used to use blended learning, but never at the expense of in-class face-to-face learning or the physical classroom. And despite the presence of some studies that stated that students taking a face-to-face course had positive views about the instructor and overall course quality compared with students taking the same course via the online mode (Johnson et al., 2000: 29), face-to-face classes are still perceived by various education stakeholders as better and more valuable, especially in terms of interaction and social engagement. For example, Heirdsfield and associates' (2011) investigation of teacher perceptions of the online learning environment as cited by Downing, Dymont and Budd (2013) reveals that instructors rate face-to-face interactions and modelling provided in class as being more valuable to learners. Downing, Dymont and Budd (2013) further state that face-face learning provides genuine opportunities for social interactions between instructors and their students.

Though, the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic has augmented the rapidity of the evolution from old-style face-to-face learning to delivering online courses on a greatly larger scale. There are several studies on online learning in the ESL context. However, there were less studies that were carried out in the EFL environment particularly in reference to learners' attitudes about using fully-fledged internet-based learning programs during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, there have been fewer studies that investigated the quality of such programs from the perspectives of both learners and instructors.

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP 2000) corroborated seven benchmarks for Attainment in Internet-Based Distance Education in 2000 (Itmeizeh & Farrah, 2021; Nuraihan & Farrah, 2013; Farrah, 2006; Thompson, 2004). This study aims to explore Hebron University learners' and instructors' observations towards implementing online learning amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and the amount to which online learning fulfilled IHEP benchmarks. To reach the aims of the study, the researchers stated the following research question:

*What is the extent of meeting the IHEP benchmarks by the Palestinian Universities during 'Covid-19'?*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Conceptual background:*

As educational institutions worldwide moved to online learning amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic, a lot of raised questions about the needed measures to guarantee the quality of online provision (Karakose et al. 2022; Maksum et al., 2022; Mohtar & Yunus, 2022; Elfirdoussi et al., 2020; Farrah, 2021, Itmeizeh & Farrah, 2021; Nuraihan & Farrah, 2013; Jung, 2012; Farrah, 2006;

Thompson, 2004). The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP 2000) validated seven benchmarks for online Education in 2000 (Itmeizeh & Farrah, 2021; Nuraihan & Farrah, 2013; Farrah, 2006; Thompson, 2004). The benchmarks are related to supporting institutional, teaching and learning, structure and development of courses, supporting students and faculty and finally means of effective evaluation and assessment. Decision-makers in universities helped to create these benchmarks with the aim of evaluating the quality of their online learning. The researchers have the tendency to believe that such benchmarks that are essential to assess the quality of online learning (Twig, 2001; Elfirdoussi et al., 2020; Jung, 2012).

#### *Related literature:*

This section explores a number of related articles that addressed evaluation of online courses and programs in rigorous and well-planned ways. In a systematic review of 40 papers, Mohtar and Yunus (2022) conducted a study to explore students' attitudes to online learning and to what extent they are motivating, engaging and accepted. It is found that students' acceptance was the most discussed topic and ownership and accessibility are the chief factors that influence motivation and acceptance. In a quantitative study, Sümer and Yüner (2021) examined the support services that were offered by Turkish university administrations to the faculty. According to the findings of the study, administrative and technical support was available. However, there was a lack of the necessary support services and counseling support. Likewise, in a quantitative study, Al-Jarrah, Talafhah, and Al-Jarrah (2018) studied the barriers that may possibly come upon online learners. The outcomes indicated that learners had definite difficulties such as the absence of technical support and specialized improvement.

In the Palestinian EFL context, in a quantitative study, Itmeizeh and Farrah (2021) explored the extent two Palestinian universities (Palestine Ahliya University and Hebron University) met IHEP benchmarks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the findings of their study, some instructors rated some benchmarks positively. On the other hand, generally, both learners and instructors articulated their lack of happiness over the student and faculty support services. Likewise, Farrah and Al-Bakry (2020) observed the perceptions of around one hundred ninety students studying English as a foreign language in different six Palestinian universities toward using online learning. The results showed that students held optimistic views toward implementing online learning. However, they raised concerns over some challenges that they encountered owing to the lack of technical support. According to them, students need support and a better internet connection.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the researchers describe the study design, instruments and participants. Furthermore, they present the reliability and validity of the students' and instructors' questionnaires. Finally, they describe the administration of the questionnaire.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

As mentioned before, this study followed a quantitative approach to research. According to McLeod (2018), such approaches enable researchers to collect data promptly through a Likert scale.

#### *Participants*

The participants of the study were students and instructors in Palestinian universities. The total number of participants was 375 male and female students and instructors from different

Palestinian universities (301 students and 74 instructors). The researchers conducted their study during the academic year 2020.

### *Instruments*

Two sets of online questionnaires were developed by the researchers for both EFL university students and instructors based on the IHEP benchmarks (2000).

The two online questionnaires consisted of two major sections. The first section contains demographic data for the participants. The second section included items related to benchmarks which consist of six domains.

### *Validity and reliability of the Questionnaires*

The researchers validated the questionnaires by four experts from various Palestinian universities. Moreover, they examined the reliability coefficient of the questionnaires. The overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the student questionnaire was 0.75 and this point out that all of the benchmark items of the students' questionnaire had quite high internal consistency which indicates that the students' questionnaire tends to be reliable. Similarly, the researchers examined the reliability of the instructors' questionnaire. The results revealed that the overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the instructors' questionnaire was 0.89. Generally speaking, this indicates that most of the benchmark items tended to have reasonable degrees of consistency.

### *Results of the Questionnaire*

#### *Part one: Demographic Data of Instructor and Student Questionnaires*

Table 1 and Table 2 present the demographic data of instructors and students.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Instructors

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	males	67.6%
	females	32.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>
University	Al-Aqsa University	8.1%
	Al-Azhar University	10.8%
	Bethlehem University	9.5%
	Birzeit University	6.8%
	Gaza University	6.8%
	Hebron University	10.8
	Quds University	5.4%
	Q O University	10.8%
	PA University	10.8%
	IUG	9.5%
	An-Najah National University	5.4%
	Arab American University, Jinin	5.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.</b>
Have you received training regarding online learning?	Yes	82.4%
	No	17.6%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that the percentage of male instructors is 67.6%. Moreover, the table reveals that 82% of the participants had training regarding online learning.

Table 2. Demographic Data for students:

Variable	Group	Percentage
University	Male	19.6%
	Female	80.4%
	Total	100.0%
	Al-Aqsa University	9.3%
	Al-Azhar University	3.3%
	Bethlehem University	13.0%
	Birzeit University	10.3%
	Gaza University	2.7%
	Hebron University	12.3%
	Al-Najah National University	9.3%
	Palestine Ahliya University	4.3
	Quds Open University	13.3%
	Quds University	6.6%
	The Arab American University in Jinin	6.3%
	The Islamic University of Gaza (IUG)	9.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As Table 2 reveals, the percentage of female students represents 80.4% of the participants. This percentage is in line with other studies (Farrah, 2014). Moreover, the table reveals that the largest percentages of participants were from Quds Open University 13.3% followed by Hebron University.

#### *Part Two: Data Analysis and Results*

The researchers present in this section the data analysis for both instructors and students' questionnaires.

#### *Instructor and Student Questionnaires*

This section tries to answer the main research question regarding meeting the online learning IHEP benchmarks?" Means and standard deviations are calculated.

Table 3. Degrees of meeting IHEP Benchmarks

#	Domain	Instructors Mean	Std.	Students Mean	Std.
1	B1 Faculty Support	3.33	0.83	-	-
2	B2 Evaluation and Assessment	3.38	0.92	2.90	0.88
3	B3 Student Support	3.55	0.93	2.90	0.84
4	B4 Course Structure	3.59	0.91	3.00	0.85

5	B5 Teaching/Learning Process	3.60	0.91	3.00	0.96
6	B6 Course Development	3.75	0.88	3.10	0.86
7	B7 University Support	3.80	1.01	3.30	0.67
<b>Total</b>		<b>3.56</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>0.74</b>

As Table 3 shows, university instructors in Palestine agree that the online experience met the IHEP benchmarks. This is evidenced by the high rating for University Support benchmark (M=3.80). Another indicator of agreement is their high rating for the Course Development benchmark (M=3.75). Nevertheless, it appears that some instructors are inclined to have less agreement with the Faculty Support benchmark (M=3.33). On the other hand, Regarding, students' experience, table 3 shows that students have a modest agreement with a mean of 3.03. For the students, the benchmark of University Support got the highest rating (M=3.30). The Course Development benchmark ranked the second with a moderate mean of 3.10. In the opinion of the students, the Evaluation and Assessment benchmark got the lowest rating (M=2.90).

### *IHEP Benchmarks*

In this section, the researchers present the percentage of answering the research questions that are related to IHEP benchmarks. To answer the questions, means and standard deviations are calculated for items of EFL university instructors and students' perceptions toward implementing online learning and meeting the IHEP benchmarks.

*First: institutional support benchmarks.*

Table 4. Participants' Responses Regarding Institutional Support Benchmarks

#	Item	Instructors Mean	Std.	Students Mean	Std
2	Our university provided us with the necessary educational tools (Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meet, Moodle, Blackboard, etc...)	4.10	1.09	3.36	1.17
1	There was a quick response and an organized manner to the online learning transition at our university.	4.00	1.06	3.09	1.08
3	Electronic security measures are in place to ensure the reliability and validity of the information.	3.90	1.12	2.98	1.08
4	We were provided us with satisfactory technical support	3.88	1.14	3.34	1.09
5	The online delivery system at our university is highly reliable	3.80	1.15	3.36	1.06
6	There are policies regarding intellectual property rights for online delivery.	3.40	1.12	3.38	1.05
<b>University Support</b>		<b>3.85</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>0.68</b>

Table 4 shows that both students and instructors tended to agree that University Support benchmark is met. The item that scored the highest mean is item 2 (M= 4.1). This indicates that the universities provided students and instructors with the necessary educational tools. This is followed by item 1 (M=4.00). This shows that there was a quick response and in an organized manner to the online learning transition by the different universities. Similarly, this is followed by item 4 (M=3.90) "We were provided us with satisfactory technical support." Additionally, the students and instructors are inclined to agree with item 5 (M=3.80) "The online delivery

system at our university is highly reliable.” On the other hand, both students and instructors are inclined to have less agreement with item 6 (M=3.40). This indicates that not all of them agree that policies regarding intellectual property rights for online delivery are present. Furthermore, students are inclined to have less agreement with item 3 (M=2.98). This means that more electronic security measures should be in place to ensure the reliability and validity of the information.

2. Meeting course development benchmarks

Table 5. Meeting the Course Development Benchmarks

#	Item	Instructors Mean	Std.	Students Mean	Std.
1	The content of course content is provided with suitable media.	3.85	1.00	3.05	1.08
7	Students were guided on how to use online resources	3.80	1.05	3.20	1.15
2	The difficulty of course content is suitable to students.	3.78	0.96	3.12	1.10
4	The content of the course helped students to fulfil the objectives of the course.	3.78	1.06	3.10	1.15
3	The technology being used to deliver course content is based on learning outcomes.	3.872	0.95	3.10	1.10
6	The students are engaged in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.	3.60	1.04	3.4	1.16
5	The assessment tools used in the course added to confidence of the students.	3.55	1.08	3.10	1.19
<b>Course Development</b>		<b>3.73</b>	<b>0.87</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>0.87</b>

According to Table 5, instructors have a high agreement level with the items of the Course Development benchmark (M= 3.73). The item that got the highest rating is Item one. This indicates that the content of course content is provided with suitable media (M=3.85). This is followed by item 7 (M=3.80). This indicates that universities provided their students with the necessary guidance on how to use online resources. Furthermore, Table five shows that students tended to agree with that Course Development moderately with a mean of 3.17. Based on the students’ perceptions, item 6 and got the highest mean (M=3.4). This indicates that the students were provided with opportunities that engaged them in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This is followed by item 7 with a mean of 3.20 which indicates that students tended to agree that they were guided on how to use online resources. This means that both instructors and students agreed that there they were guided on how to use online resources during the online learning experience.

According to instructors, the table shows that the least agreed item is item six (M=3.60). This indicates that some students believe that the assessment tools used in the course did not add to their confidence On the other hand, the least agreed items by the students are items two, three, and four. These items address the difficulty of course content, fulfilling the objectives of the course and whether the technology used to present course content is based on learning outcomes.

3. Meeting course structure benchmarks

Table 6. Meeting the Course Structure Benchmarks

#	Item	Instructors Mean	Std.	Students Mean	Std.
2	There is a clear, written, straightforward statement for the learning outcomes of each course	3.90	1.15	3.10	1.11
1	Supplemental course information that outlines course objectives, concepts and ideas are made available to students.	3.80	1.10	3.11	1.15
4	All assignments are graded and returned within a certain time period.	3.70	1.07	3.12	1.14
3	Expectations are agreed upon regarding times for student assignment submission and instructor feedback.	3.60	1.13	3.09	1.12
6	Students are oriented about the course to decide if they are motivated to learn online.	3.40	0.99	2.96	1.14
5	Library resources are adequately made available to students.	3.40	1.13	2.70	1.17
<b>Course Structure</b>		<b>3.63</b>	<b>0.90</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>0.88</b>

As seen in Table 6, instructors tended to have a very good level of agreement with the Course Structure benchmarks with a mean of 3.63. Item 2 got the highest agreement. This indicates that there is a tendency to agree that there is a clear, written, straightforward statement for the learning outcomes of each course (M=3.9). This is followed by item one which indicates that universities provided students with additional course information that outlines course objectives, concepts and ideas (M=3.80).

On the other hand, Table 6 shows that students are inclined to have moderate agreement with the Course Structure benchmarks with a mean of 3.15. Item four got the highest mean “All assignments are graded and returned within a certain time period” (M= 3.12). This is followed by item three which reveals that students’ expectations are agreed upon regarding times for student assignment submission as well as instructor feedback (m= 3.09). On the other hand, item 5 got a low level of agreement from both instructors and students (M=2.70). This means that students tended to have a low agreement that library resources are adequately made available to them.

Table 7. Teaching and Learning Benchmarks

#	Item	Instructors Mean	Std.	Students Mean	Std.
7	Students are provided with abundant examples to allow them to comprehend the subject matter.	4.10	.130	3.20	1.30
1	There are varied ways to facilitate student interaction with faculty.	3.80	.132	3.00	1.21
3	The instructor's feedback on assignments/questions is provided promptly.	3.70	.131	3.05	1.19
4	The instructor's feedback is offered in a constructive non-threatening manner.	3.77	.133	3.10	1.14
6	Proper methods of effective research and instructions are used in the teaching learning process	3.60	.123	3.05	1.19
5	Collaborative and problem-solving activities are promoted throughout the courses.	3.60	.120	3.05	1.15
2	There are varied ways to facilitate student interaction with other students.	3.55	.129	3.22	1.15
<b>Teaching/Learning Process</b>		<b>3.73</b>	<b>.104</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.97</b>

According to Table 7, Palestinian university instructors have very positive attitudes towards the Teaching/Learning Process benchmark. The mean is 3.73 and this indicates that this benchmark is met based on the instructors' perception. It should be noted that the highest mean was found in item 7. This indicates that instructors have a high tendency to agree that students are provided with plentiful examples that encourage them to understand the subject matter (M=4.10). This item is followed by item number one which reveals that interaction is facilitated during the online learning process in varied ways (M= 3.80). It should be noted that maximizing interaction is one of the requirements of effective online teaching.

If we look from the students' perspective, the Teaching/Learning Process benchmark got to some extent a moderate rating with a mean of 3.01. This is acceptable taking into consideration the novel experience they had undergone. Among the items that got the highest ratings is item number two, this shows that there are mixed ways that facilitate student interaction with other students (M=3.22). Item two is followed by item seven which shows that ample examples were presented to students that allowed them to understand the subject matter (M=3.2). Items one and three got the lowest mean in the perception of the students, these items talk about the presence of varied ways to facilitate student interaction with faculty (M=3.00) and getting instructor's feedback to assignments/questions on time (M=3.05). It seems that students and instructors have diverse perceptions towards the nature of their interaction and feedback. Instructors considered the nature of their interaction and feedback to be satisfactory. This is natural as instructors tend to have the feeling that they are making all the necessary measures to maximize interaction and provide immediate feedback despite the new online learning environment. On the other hand, students had higher expectations in terms of the type of interaction and feedback with their instructors. Some of them felt that instructors do not involve all students. Moreover, they had the assumption that once they send their assignment they

would receive timely feedback forgetting the number of assignments that instructors will review and provide feedback on.

5. Meeting student support benchmarks

Table 8. Instructors' and Students' Responses Regarding the Student Support Benchmarks

#	Item	Instructors	Std.	Students Mean	Std.
7	Students are provided with Emails, Facebook accounts and WhatsApp and are encouraged to communicate with their instructors and other students.	3.90	1.09	3.40	1.24
2	Students are encouraged to use electronically retrieved information successfully.	3.80	1.15	2.90	1.06
5	The students are provided with technical assistance throughout the semester.	3.60	1.14	2.83	1.12
1	There is an office to address students' complaints to the online instructors.	3.55	1.14	2.85	1.03
4	Students are provided with written information about the online courses.	3.55	1.14	3.10	1.10
6	A help office is in place to address students' complaints.	3.54	1.10	2.85	1.14
3	The university provides students with training to enable them to use the online platforms.	3.40	1.08	2.70	1.15
<b>Student Support</b>		<b>3.62</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>0.85</b>

As shown in Table 8, University instructors tend to have high levels of agreement with Student Support benchmark. The mean for this benchmark is 3.63. Item number seven indicates that students were provided with Emails, Facebook accounts and WhatsApp and are encouraged to communicate with their instructors and other students. Instructors rated this item in a very positive way with a mean of 3.9. The second most rated item was item two (M=3.80). The positive result of this item indicates that students were encouraged to use electronically retrieved information successfully. Furthermore, item five got a high level of agreement (M=3.60). This means that, based on the perceptions of the instructors, students were provided with the necessary technical assistance throughout the semester. On the other hand, instructors tended to have less agreement with item three (M=3.40). This indicates that university instructors tend to say that training which was provided by universities to students to enable them to use online platforms was not adequate.

Based on the students' perceptions, the Students Support benchmark got a moderate rating with a mean of 2.96. The students to some extent had comparable perceptions to the instructors' point of view as they rated item seven positively (M=3.40). This means that students generally tended to agree that they were provided with the necessary Emails to facilitate their communication, Facebook accounts as well as WhatsApp. This is followed by item four with a mean of (M=3.10). This indicates most universities provided their students with the necessary written information about the online courses along with guidance on how to join them. Two items tended to get less rating based on the students' perceptions. They are items three (M=2.70) and six (M=2.85). This means that students were less satisfied with the training they got

from their universities. Moreover, it means that not all students tended to agree that their universities provided them with a help office to address their complaints.

6. Meeting faculty support benchmarks?

Table 9. Faculty Support Benchmarks

#	Item	Mean	Std.
2	Our university helped us in the transition from traditional teaching to online learning.	3.72	1.13
1	The faculty is provided with sufficient technical assistance.	3.70	1.17
4	Our university continued providing online training throughout the progression of the online courses.	3.55	1.14
5	Our university provided us with written resources to deal with issues arising from online learning.	3.55	1.00
3	Peer mentoring resources are made available to faculty members.	3.36	1.09
6	Some web applications involved in online learning are confusing.	3.30	1.11
7	Our university provided us with financial incentives for online transition.	2.50	1.19
<b>Faculty Support</b>		<b>3.35</b>	<b>0.82</b>

Table 9 reveals that university instructors tended to have moderate points of view regarding the Faculty Support benchmarks (M=3.35). This is evidenced in their rating for item number two (M=3.72). This reveals that they agree that their universities helped them in the transition from traditional teaching to online learning. Additionally, item one got a high rating (M=3.70). This clearly indicates that most instructors tend to be satisfied with the technical assistance they received from their universities. On the other hand, item number seven got the lowest level of agreement. This means that most instructors believe that their universities did not provide them with financial incentives for online transition (M= 2.50). This means that instructors believe that the incentives provided by the universities are inadequate.

7. Meeting evaluation and assessment benchmarks

Table 10. The Evaluation and Assessment Benchmarks

#	Item	Instructors Mean	Std.	Students Mean	Std.
1	The teaching/learning process is improved by continual evaluation.	3.50	1.050	3.3	1.14
5	The theoretical knowledge of the students is examined by varied means of evaluation for online learning.	3.48	1.04	3.2	1.12
6	There are professional and subjective ways to evaluate the online learning process.	3.45	.99	3.1	1.14
3	Quality measures are in place to review Intended learning outcomes regularly and to ensure their clarity and appropriateness.	3.43	1.08	3.05	1.10
7	Our university used varied and fair evaluation tools in online learning.	3.40	1.17	3.00	1.10

2	Our university has specific standards to compare and improve learning outcomes.	3.36	1.04	3.00	1.07
4	The objectives of the course are measured accurately through the evaluation tools used in online learning.	3.35	1.04	2.80	1.09
<b>Evaluation and Assessment</b>		<b>3.41</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>3.01</b>	<b>0.89</b>

According to Table 10, both students and instructors tend to agree to a moderate level with the Evaluation and Assessment benchmarks. The items that got the highest means are one, five, and six. This means that both students and instructors have positive views regarding the teaching/learning process and how it is improved by frequent evaluation. Moreover, it means that both students and instructors agree that different means of evaluation are in place to examine the theoretical knowledge. It also indicates that they agree that there are professional and subjective ways to evaluate the online learning process. Moreover, both students and instructors have less agreement with items seven, two, and four. This means that students both students and their instructors raised some concerns over the evaluation tools in their universities. Moreover, based on the findings of item two, they raised some doubts about whether their universities had specific standards to compare and improve learning outcomes.

## DISCUSSION

It is evident from the results of the study that instructors agree that online learning met most of the IHEP benchmarks. The perceptions of the instructors are to some extent comparable to the findings of other research papers in the same context such as Itmeizeh and Farrah (2021). Generally, the instructors tended to have a high level of agreement with the items of university support. This means that they were satisfied.

On the other hand, students did not have high agreement with the items of the online learning meet IHEP benchmarks. In fact, they had a moderate agreement with the extent to which online learning meets IHEP benchmarks. This is to some extent in agreement with Itmeizeh and Farrah (2021). Specifically, students did not agree that their universities offered appropriate technical support. Thus, they did not have an agreement with the statement that their universities provided them with satisfactory support, security measures, and tools.

In the current paper, both students and instructors indicated they have a very low rating for student support and faculty support. This means that the students and instructors were not given adequate support. Instructors agreed that peer mentoring resources were not accessible, some web applications were perplexing, and they didn't receive financial incentives.

Additionally, this study revealed that both instructors and students have a moderate rating for the items of the evaluation and assessment benchmark. This is in line with other studies (Farrah, 2006; Al-Bakry & Farrah, 2020; Johnson, 2000; Itmeizeh & Farrah, 2021).

The instructors gave very high ratings for the University Support IHEP benchmarks. This means that they agree their universities provided them with sufficient educational tools, responded quickly and systematically to the transition to online learning, and offered the necessary training sessions and workshops. Moreover, the instructors indicated that their universities had electronic security measures, and they were provided with appropriate technical support. However, the instructors gave a low rating to the items that talked about "policies to protect rights and digital work". On the other hand, the student indicated their dissatisfaction with the support they received from their universities.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to examine the extent to which EFL Palestinian universities extent met IHEP benchmarks. According to the findings of this study, the instructors were inclined to have a good agreement with most of IHEP. The only two benchmarks they didn't have good ratings were Faculty Support and Evaluation and Assessment. On the other hand, the students indicated that online learning didn't meet six IHEP benchmarks which include Course Structure, Student Support, and Evaluation and Assessment University Support, Course Development, Teaching/Learning Process. The results of this paper reveal that there is a need for an evaluation to be carried out to reassess the strong and weak points of online learning and teaching in every institution. There is a need to carry out studies to overcome the drawback of online learning. Additionally, this study indicated that there was a lack of support provided by the universities to their students and instructors. Universities need to identify the kind of support to be given specifically to language instructors and students to help language schools to prepare themselves for providing such services when the online option is adopted.

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