Challenges with Online Teaching and Learning of English Vocabulary

Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh*, Mohammad Alaghawat, and Afakh Younes

***Abstract*—This article aims to examine the challenges facing secondary school teachers and students in English vocabulary online classes in Amman, Jordan. It also aims to propose the most effective ways to overcome the encountered challenges. To this end, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty teachers and twenty students to understand their experiences related to the online learning-teaching process. Based on these interviews, several challenges that might obstruct this process were identified, with some of the challenges reported by teachers being similar to those reported by students. Teaching and learning challenges included poor class management, poor Internet connection, and large class sizes. Moreover, the findings of this study highlighted that one of the most important challenges that teachers encountered in teaching English vocabulary online was the impossibility of using realia. The study concludes with some solutions from both teachers and students to overcome these difficulties, such as using more advanced online platforms, e.g., Google Meet, World Word, and Microsoft Teams, as well as splitting students into small online rooms, and using games/plays.**

***Index Terms*—Online learning, English vocabulary, secondary school students, qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews**

I. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is important since language is mainly used in social exchanges in which learners express their beliefs, viewpoints, and ways of thinking [1]. Ellis [2] described second language acquisition as "the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom." Thus, achieving second language (L2) fluency is considered one of the most fundamental aspects a learner of a foreign language should acquire, as it is the major means of communication with others [3]. According to Koponen and Riggenbach's research [4], fluency is the "flow, continuity, automaticity, or smoothness of speech." To achieve this fluency, the foreign language learner should master the four main skills of any language, namely reading, speaking, writing, and listening, and the three systems of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Haynes [5] argued that various factors influence English development, such as prior English literacy, personality, school experiences, motivation, and attitude. These challenges are multiplied, however, in online classes where the risk of student disengagement and lack of attention is much higher [6].

Focusing on learning English as a foreign language, Hatch and Brown [7] proposed that students in classrooms are sometimes uncomfortable with using the L2 because they face several problems with learning English vocabulary. Richards and Renandya [8] stated that English vocabulary plays a crucial role in English language learning (see also [9]). It is a fundamental skill for learning and mastering the main four English skills. Without vocabulary, people are unable to express their ideas and feelings either in a written or spoken form [8]. Therefore, it is very important to teach vocabulary in classrooms and take into consideration the used techniques in teaching students vocabulary, with teachers as the facilitators in the classroom. Stahl and Nagy [10] stated that vocabulary is knowledge and a way to understand how words fit into the world. Thus, learners of L2 can, for instance, convey their message using content words without proper grammar at the beginning. This suggests that being able to communicate in L2 can only be accomplished through the use of vocabulary.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, political events and other life changes caused by this pandemic emerged. For instance, the teaching-learning process in Jordanian secondary schools went online during the pandemic. Thus, challenges in teaching L2 vocabulary online are worthy of investigation. Based on our experience in the local Jordanian context, students kept complaining about their lack of vocabulary, especially during online learning. Students suggested that this is one of the main disadvantages of online learning where engagement is minimal since the teacher does not always see the student on the screen; and thus, it would be easier for students to be distracted and not pay attention compared to instruction inside the classroom. Thus, this study is motivated by the observation that students have insufficient vocabulary to express their ideas in writing or speaking in English. In particular, this study aims to identify the challenges encountered by teachers and students concerning the teaching/learning of English vocabulary, and then to suggest solutions that could help to overcome such problems for both teachers and learners.

II. General Background

A. Online Learning/e-Learning

According to Hafeez *et al.*'s research [11], learning is necessary for, and a crucial element of, individual success and a nation's growth. Technology and globalization have facilitated online/distance learning, through which computers or tablets connected to a network are used for learning anywhere and at any time [12]. Yang and Li [13]

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proposed that an online teaching and learning environment can enhance the learning process through the use of various devices, advanced technology, and the Internet, to provide students with a more contemporary or asynchronous learning experience. Effective learning and teaching environments allow learners to participate in online classes, engage in direct interaction with teachers, and receive immediate feedback. In such environments, learning materials cannot be accessed face-to-face. Instead, they are accessed through several learning management systems. Littlefield *et al.* [14] stated that the use of asynchronous or hybrid learning/teaching environments may not allow for immediate or quick responses because students have more freedom if their cameras are turned off; thus, they may as well be sleeping.

According to Basilaia and Kvavadze's research [15], the widespread use of various online platforms has been essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic generated a sudden shift to distance learning in the educational sector, affecting students worldwide by imposing lockdowns, and closures of schools [16]. During this pandemic, several constraints and changes in the educational process emerged. Therefore, it required teachers to be more creative in the pedagogical methods that were used in the teaching process.

B. Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary can be described as "words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)" [17]. Schmitt [18] highlighted the importance of vocabulary and its major role in acquiring any foreign language, stating that "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language". Wilkins [19] further argued that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". That is, even without grammar people can still convey their ideas using some useful words. Therefore, vocabulary is an essential element for communication and conveying ideas and feelings. This view is supported by Schmitt [20], who argued that "learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books." Based on Schmitt's [20] view, it can be proposed that vocabulary forms the crucial first step of learning English in comparison to grammar; thus, learners are motivated to learn vocabulary first to express themselves. This proposes that examining vocabulary learning by EFL students is still an area worthy of further investigation, especially if this learning process has a newly added variable, namely, online learning.

Lewis and Nation have tried to identify the significance of vocabulary using different concepts and terms. For instance, according to Lewis' research [21], "lexis is the core or heart of language". This shows the significance not only of acquiring more useful vocabulary knowledge but also of developing personal vocabulary learning techniques. In the same vein, Nation [22] views the relationship between language use and vocabulary knowledge as complementary. Thus, vocabulary knowledge facilitates the use of the language, and language use contributes to an increase in vocabulary.

C. Previous Studies on Challenges Faced by Teachers and Students in Online Learning

Several studies have investigated the challenges that teachers and students encountered with online teaching, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic e.g., Altakhaineh *et al.*'s research [23, 24]. In one study, Mathew and Iloanya [25] investigated the benefits and challenges of using technology in open and distance learning (ODL) in Botswana's higher education system. An online survey was distributed to 34 participants, comprised of nine experienced lecturers and 25 learners. The findings showed that using technology in online teaching had essential benefits for student engagement, accessibility to the most recent information, and content sharing. However, both students and teachers encountered several challenges during the online process, such as technophobia, difficulties accessing technology, and affordability. In a recent study, Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison [26] explored the challenges and opportunities of online teaching experiences in Chile. Their sample consisted of 27 English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. The data were elicited quantitatively and qualitatively. Primarily, the results revealed that a lack of direct interaction and an unexpected change of setting were the main challenges that affected the learning process.

In another recent study on the challenges that encounter teachers and students in online teaching, Altakhaineh [23] argued that teachers and students in Jordanian secondary schools face certain challenges in teaching English oral skills via online learning. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain data from thirty teachers and twenty students. The results mainly showed that both parties reported similar challenges, namely: time management, methods of teaching, a lack of encouragement/motivation, and a lack of knowledge regarding online teaching tools.

Ilonga *et al.* [27] conducted a study in Namibia to examine the challenges experienced by students through online learning at a higher education institution. Data were collected from nine participants using semi-structured interviews. The researchers proposed that students might prefer online learning to balance their work and school or to improve their skills. On the contrary, the findings demonstrated several factors that could affect the learning process, such as disorganization in the online learning program, lecturers not being punctual, a lack of face time with the lecturers, and a limited amount of study material in the institutions.

Nobre [28] conducted a quantitative study to explore the challenges faced by teachers in virtual education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were collected by distributing a questionnaire to 129 teachers who worked at five professional centers. The results showed that various challenges arose during the online teaching process, such as a lack of training, weak Internet connectivity and interruptions to electricity supply, a lack of experience, being fearful of online classes, plagiarizing in online assessments, and a lack of non-verbal communication.

Similarly, Şevik and Yücedağ [29] examined the views of EFL teachers on the use of online learning in EFL contexts with a qualitative study. The teachers were working at secondary or high schools in various cities in Turkey. The data were collected by distributing an online questionnaire

to 40 Turkish EFL teachers. The results revealed that there were prevalent challenges faced by teachers, such as Internet connection problems, a lack of technological devices, an absence of Internet connection, having technical problems, and a lack of technological knowledge about online learning. The study concluded that EFL teachers lacked the required experience and did not receive proper training on online learning.

Altakhaineh and Alnajjar [24] conducted a study with Jordanian secondary school students to examine the challenges they face in acquiring and fostering research skills. Specifically, the study aimed to identify effective methods for enhancing Jordanian secondary school students' research skills. The study sample included 40 teachers and 30 students, and the data were elicited by conducting semi-structured interviews. The results demonstrated that economic and cultural factors, as well as teaching methods and having large classes, played a crucial role in preventing these students from acquiring adequate research skills. Moreover, the findings showed that similar challenges faced teachers and students, namely: time limitations, a lack of encouragement, and insufficient knowledge on conducting scientific research.

Parte and Mellado [30] investigated the effect of assessment modalities on academic performance and examined the levels of anxiety and the expectation of success during the course. The study adopted descriptive statistics, contingence tables, correlation analysis, and t-test and incorporates quantitative analysis with a qualitative approach. The study suggested that static perspective allows an early diagnosis of the student and creates opportunities for instructors and institutions to find solutions during the early phase of the course. The participants of the study were students enrolled in Managerial Accounting for Tourism course (2019–2020). The results revealed that both quizzes modalities result in positive academic performance and outcomes. The linguistic analysis also showed that there were differences between high-performing students and low-performing students in their language usage. The results showed that successful students, in terms of academic performance, utilize more articles, prepositions, and work words, indicating more categorical language. On the contrary, unsuccessful students use more pronouns, adverbs, conjunctions, negations, negative emotions, present verb tense, social dimensions related to family and friends, and ingested dimensions, which show more dynamic language.

Stewart *et al.* [31] examined whether students' perspectives and experiences over time would change through Sustained Remote Teaching (SRT) as a result of institutional preparedness and faculty support/experience. The data was collected by distributing an electronic survey among 140 (spring) and 93 (fall) students in the first and second semesters of the 2020 academic year rated their perceptions of *Teaching and Learning Processes, Student Support, and Course Structure* with their ERT/SRT learning experiences. The results showed that remote courses required sharing more features with traditional online courses since planning and development are practicable. The results also showed that performance may not improve across enough benchmarks and may not be considered "successful" to all student groups because the pandemic learning losses will present different challenges for educators and institutions in short-and long-term post-pandemic academic affairs.

Based on the literature above, several studies have investigated the challenges that students and teachers encountered in the online learning context, but as yet no study has investigated the importance and challenges of teaching English vocabulary in Jordanian schools. This study is a serious attempt to bridge this gap by seeking answers to the following questions:

1) What are the challenges that secondary school teachers in Jordan encounter regarding teaching English vocabulary online in Jordan?
2) What are the challenges that secondary school students in Jordan encounter regarding learning English vocabulary online?
3) How can these challenges be overcome from the viewpoints of teachers and students?

III. Methodology

A. Sample

The population of the study consisted of all students and teachers either studying or working at secondary schools in Amman. The researchers used a stratified random sampling technique. This sampling method is regarded as useful in relation to data collection that includes a heterogeneous population [32]. The heterogeneous population is divided into a number of strata or groups where each group is homogenous within itself. Following that, units are sampled at random from each group or stratum. There is variation in the sample size of each group relative to the importance of each group in the population. The technique employed to obtain this stratified sample is referred to as stratified sampling [32]. Groups or strata are selected based on certain criteria because there is evidence by the researchers that these strata are related to the outcome of their research. In the current study, the participants were stratified based on four selection criteria that pertain to the outcome of the study:

1) Both the students and teachers were selected from public secondary schools.
2) Both teachers and students were willing to take part in the study.
3) Teachers' experience: the selected teachers should have at least 2 years of experience.
4) Students' age: students' age should range between 14 and 16 years old.

Public schools were selected rather than private schools since the latter are inconsistent in terms of their online learning techniques; each school uses certain platforms and utilizes specific teaching methods and as such comparison may not be valid as opposed to public schools that follow similar teaching methods and platforms. One of the researchers visited public secondary schools in Amman/Jordan and asked the principals for a list of teachers and students who satisfy the above selection criteria. For each group (list) provided, the researchers interviewed teachers and students randomly selected as discussed above (see Section III.B for more details). As such, the sample

included: two main groups of participants, namely: teachers and students either teaching or studying in public secondary schools in Amman, Jordan. The first group consisted of 15 males and 15 females with 2 to 8 years of teaching experience. The years of experience in teaching English were the crucial criterion in selecting the participants of the study. Master *et al.* [33] proposed that years of experience is a significant factor that reflects a teacher's proficiency, skills, and knowledge. The second group of participants included 20 public secondary school students, whose parents consented to their participation. Their ages ranged between 14 and 16. Students of this age are more aware of the significance of learning English vocabulary, the importance of improving other skills, and the challenges of distance/online learning in comparison with younger students. It was important to select students who are able to verbalize their thoughts in comparison to younger learners and to reflect on their own learning experiences. The latter was important because the nature of the questions they were required to answer during the interview meant that they needed to understand the topic under investigation and needed to be able to evaluate their online learning experience and reflect on it.

B. Data Elicitation Tool

A qualitative elicitation tool, namely a semi-structured interview, was used to elicit information from the participants of the study. According to Duggleby's study [34], qualitative methodologies are essential in developing and understanding human behaviors and personalities. Semi-structured interviews are used specifically because they allow all participants to answer the same questions within a flexible time frame [35]. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree [36] stated that in semi-structured interviews, "open, direct, verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories." Thus, the participants express their opinions freely from various angles on the investigated issue.

It was difficult to conduct face-to-face interviews because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, each participant was interviewed separately over the phone. Teachers were asked questions related to the challenges they face in teaching English vocabulary online, whereas the students were asked about the challenges they faced while learning English vocabulary online. Some of the questions asked to the teachers during the semi-structured interviews are as follows:

1) To what extent does the teaching method (online vs. traditional) have an effect on learning English vocabulary?
2) How do you teach English vocabulary online?
3) To what extent is the interaction between students, and between teachers and students, important for learning English vocabulary?
4) What suggestions do you have to help secondary school students acquire English vocabulary using online learning?

The following questions were presented to the students during the interviews:

1) What are the challenges that prevent you from learning English vocabulary in online classes?
2) Do you think that you interact with your classmates more in traditional classes or online classes? Why?
3) Do you believe that interaction with the teacher is important and effective in learning English vocabulary? Why?
4) What prevents you from using English vocabulary in sentences if you are learning English vocabulary online?
5) Do you have any suggestions for improving the online learning/teaching process of English vocabulary?

C. Data Analysis

After the semi-structured interviews, the answers to the questions were analyzed and categorized under specific and clear themes. According to Rabiee's study [37], when researchers adopt a qualitative data elicitation tool, they should start the analysis while collecting the data. At the time of interviewing the participants, researchers can infer certain conclusions about their answers and classify them into groups/themes. Consequently, the researchers of this study carefully investigated the transcription of the interviews. Then, they categorized the responses into major themes and supported them with direct quotations [38].

Various approaches can be adopted to analyze qualitative data, one of which is framework analysis. Goldsmith [39] proposed that framework analysis is "an inherently comparative form of thematic analysis which employs an organized structure of inductively and deductively derived themes (i.e., a framework) to conduct cross-sectional analysis using a combination of data description and abstraction". Framework analysis consists of five main stages, namely: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation [40]. In this study, these five stages were adopted to analyze the data obtained from the two focus groups. Thus, data analysis starts with the facilitation of the discussion, which is maintained by taking notes and transcribing the recorded interviews. Then, the stage of familiarization is employed by listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts repeatedly. After these two processes, the themes mainly start to emerge and become clear. Then, the thematic framework was identified based on the concepts, topics, or ideas of the texts and labeled into groups. In the third stage, the quotation index was filtered so that the opinions stated in the interviews could be compared. The fourth stage of charting involves extracting the direct quotations from their original context and classifying them under the recently selected themes. At the final stage of the analysis, mapping, and interpreting, the researchers try to analyze and build a correlation between the direct quotations, to reveal associations between them [37, 41, 42]. The following section presents the results of the study and discusses them.

IV. The Challenges Faced by Teachers and Students in Online Learning

This section presents the responses provided by the teachers and students during the semi-structured interviews. Thus, this provides answers to the first and second research questions.

The researchers divided the challenges provided by the teachers and students into ten categories, namely: time and class management, students' weakness (low English

proficiency level), misbehavior issues, quality of feedback, technical problems, an absence of real objects, a lack of visual interaction, difficulty with assessment, exhaustion, and an inability to translate each word using only the L1. Fig. 1 below shows the most frequent challenges encountered by teachers in teaching English vocabulary online based on the interviewed teachers' answers. In addition, Fig. 2 presents the most frequent challenges faced by students in learning English vocabulary online.

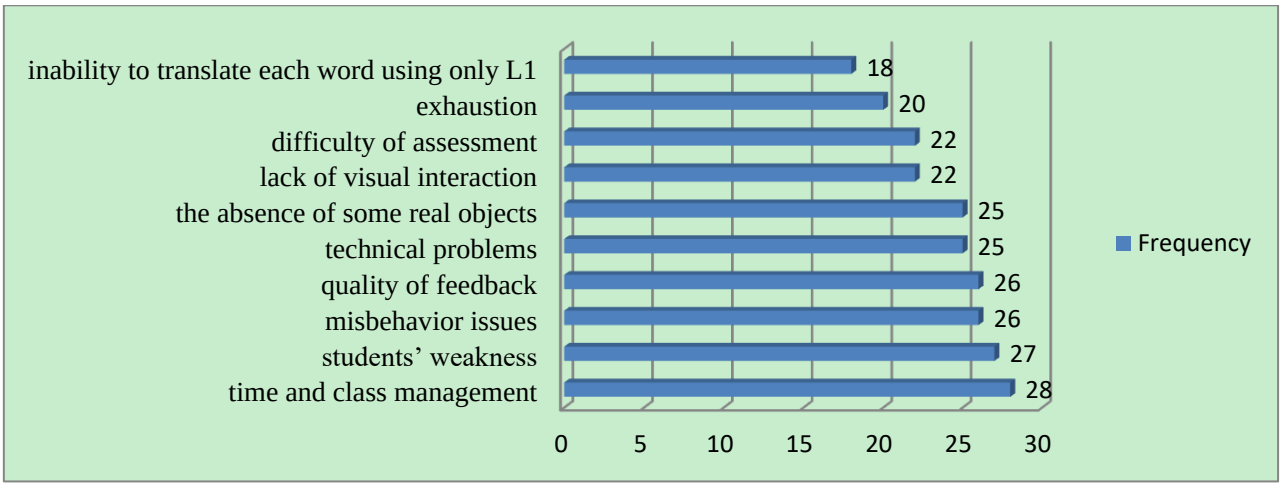

Fig. 1. Frequency of teachers' challenges in teaching English vocabulary online.

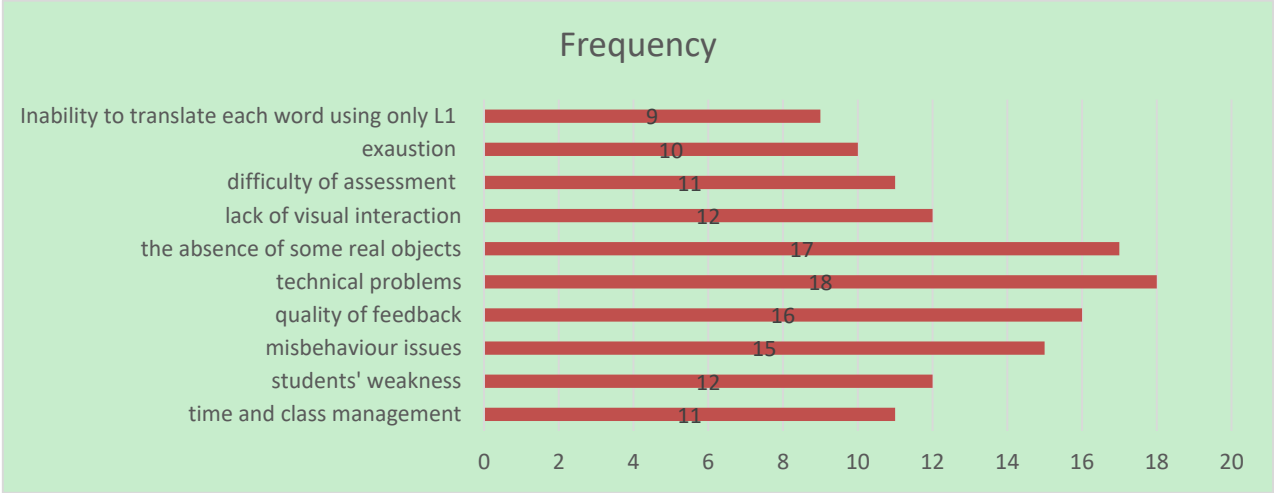

Fig. 2. Frequency of students' challenges in learning English vocabulary online.

The challenges mentioned in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 are discussed in the remainder of this section.

A. *Time and Class Management*

According to twenty-eight of the interviewed teachers, organizing and explaining online lessons takes too much time in online classes, teachers need a great deal of time to organize the online meetings, check the Internet connection, share the presentation, and check the attendance of all students. Some teachers argued that in online classes they directly taught the core of the material because of time restrictions. Sometimes they could not practice or do more exercises due to the lack of time where the time of the online session does not exceed 35 minutes. Several teachers complained about the difficulty of managing the class due to the large number of students where some classes included 50 students and above. It is challenging to give all students the opportunity to answer a certain question or comment on a student's answer due to time restrictions. One teacher stated, "during online learning, I felt for a moment that I lost control and could not manage the class." Another teacher stated that "it was difficult to explain all the mentioned English words and their meanings in various contexts. Moreover, finishing the course on time has caused a lot of pressure on us as teachers." Eleven students also reported that one of the challenges they faced in learning English vocabulary online is poor class management. For instance, one student stated: "even though I raised my hand to answer several times, the teacher did not pick me. I felt that the teacher has lost control of the class."

B. *Students' Weakness (Low English Proficiency)*

As reported by twenty-seven of the interviewed teachers, students in public secondary schools in Jordan are academically weak. On one hand, they cannot employ English vocabulary in sentences or use words in inappropriate contexts. This weakness is due both to their inability to distinguish the intended meaning from the context and the fact that some synonyms do not carry exactly the same meaning. One teacher stated, "after discussing the meaning of certain English words, I asked the students to give me some examples, but they failed to do so."

Another teacher stated that "students are not aware that some English words are not interchangeable, and they have different meanings in various contexts." Moreover, students in public secondary schools in Jordan do not make use of English dictionaries when they misunderstand some English words. They suffer from a lack of knowledge of how to search for a word along with its synonyms and antonyms in the dictionary. In this regard, one teacher stated that, "when I asked students to search for a word as an assignment, half of them did not submit it because they did not know how to use the dictionary." Twelve students also indicated that they encountered problems with English vocabulary because they felt that they are weak and do not have the ability to memorize the meaning of English words. Out of the twelve students, eight of them complained about the teachers' way of teaching English words in isolation and their failure to take into account students' weaknesses in using the dictionary. One student stated that "My English teacher teaches us new English words in isolation." Another student indicated that "my teacher asked us to memorize a list of English vocabulary, but I found it difficult to do so because the words were not contextualized so I could not see how they are actually used in sentences." This strategy increases the pressure on students to memorize as many words as possible. Thus, they may forget them quickly or face some obstacles when they try to assign them to their long-term memories. Other students reported that they find searching for words in the dictionary difficult to do, especially because they cannot distinguish parts of speech.

C. Misbehavior Issues

Teaching from home proved to be difficult and challenging for both parties, as reported by twenty-six teachers and fifteen students. Both female and male teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with students' misbehavior. Such misbehavior has disturbed the general atmosphere of the class and confused students, e.g., eating, making random comments, interrupting teacher talk, turning cameras off, and using mobile phones in online classes. All these acts caused frustration for the teachers and students and affected the process of teaching English vocabulary. A female teacher stated that, "some students suddenly open the microphones and the voices around them were heard and disrupted teachers' line of ideas or thoughts." Thus, it could be proposed that some students open the microphones by accident; however, some of them do it in purpose to disturb the follow of the online class. Students also expressed their dissatisfaction with their classmates' misbehavior during online classes. A student stated that: "I was kicked out of the class (removed) more than once; it was very annoying since I kept missing parts of the class."

D. Quality of Feedback

Giving good feedback to the students and correcting their frequent pronunciation mistakes is a fundamental part of helping them improve when learning English vocabulary. In face-to-face classes, teachers are used to giving their feedback directly to each student and sometimes ask him/her to repeat the pronunciation of certain difficult words until they are mastered. On the contrary, in online classes, the teacher discusses common mistakes that students make when pronouncing some words. As reported by twenty-six teachers, their online feedback was general and did not discuss each student and their weaknesses individually. One teacher stated that "it is difficult to give feedback individually in online classes, as it takes a lot of time." This statement could be related to the Jordanian Arabic culture where students prefer to get feedback individually and they do not prefer to discuss their private issues and weaknesses in public. In fact, sixteen students reported that receiving feedback on submitted assignments and answers is crucial to them, especially when it is one-on-one feedback. Students felt that when teachers discuss their inaccurate answers in general, they do not benefit as much as when they receive them individually. In online classes, they indicated that in online classes, it is difficult to receive the kind of feedback they need.

E. Technical Problems

Twenty-five teachers as well as 18 students noted that one of the main challenges encountered in English vocabulary online classes was technical in nature. During the online classes, teachers and students faced several technical issues, e.g., weak Internet connection, problems with audio and video presentations/plays, and problems with sound quality. Some teachers argued that secondary public schools had a limited number of computers, and also that some computer equipment was broken, e.g., the mouse and keyboard; moreover, some of the computers used old software versions and operating systems. Thus, the computers responded slowly due to the excessive load on the server. The following is a quotation from a secondary school teacher, who noted that: "We do not have appropriate services in the secondary schools that support the online teaching process." To overcome this challenge, it was proposed that the government should inspect public schools, follow up on the needs of schools on a regular basis, and provide them with the necessary tools to carry out the online learning process in the correct manner. Students also reported technical problems as one of the main reasons for the difficulties they found in learning English vocabulary online. In addition, to the poor Internet connection, some students complained about the difficulty of having more than one computer at home due to financial limitations. Students also mentioned that some of their computers\laptops at home are too old and require maintenance on a regular basis. Therefore, some students may have had to miss their classes because another family member needed the computer, either for work or study.

F. The Absence of Some Real Objects

According to twenty-five of the teachers, the main tools used to explain the vocabulary of English words were realia or visual aids, such as pictures. This enables students to link a word to a specific object and employ the words in several sentences. One teacher stated, "to learn some types of seeds and vegetables in English, I asked the students to bring them to class and make a plate of food using them." During online learning, it is difficult for teachers to follow this strategy because of the absence of certain objects/items in the homes of some students. Another teacher stated, "I asked the students to open the camera and show some of the tools needed for the lesson, but unfortunately some students did not have them." Seventeen students also reported that

many of the objects that the teachers asked them to prepare for class could not be obtained\shown for many reasons, e.g., issues at home and problems with cameras.

G. Lack of Visual Interaction

A prerequisite for the success of English vocabulary classes is students' ability to interact constructively with each other and the teacher. To ensure that students understand the meaning of a certain English word, they need to work in groups or pairs and cooperate in employing this vocabulary in sentences and practicing its correct pronunciation. According to twenty-two teachers, it was difficult to organize online pair/group work, monitor students' work in rooms, and move between them. One teacher said that "Some students turn off the cameras and when they are called to make sure that they understand and interact, they do not answer." Thus, the lack of face-to-face interaction between the students and teachers seems to be a great challenge in teaching English vocabulary online. Twelve students indicated that the lack of face-to-face interaction with their teacher and their peers made them feel disconnected from their vocabulary online classes which in turn had a negative impact on their engagement. Some students suggested that the lack of confidence and motivation discouraged them to participate in online vocabulary activities.

H. Difficulty of Assessing Students' Progress

Several factors make it difficult to assess all students' understanding of the English words mentioned in the class and their correct pronunciation. First, twenty-two of the interviewed teachers indicated that the number of students in each class was very high, so the teacher needs a great deal of time to evaluate the students and their pronunciation of words. On the other hand, due to the large number of students, it was challenging to evaluate them individually, and this may have led to increased pressure on teachers and negatively affected their performance. In addition, if the student was asked to use several words in different sentences to ensure that he/she understood them, it was difficult to determine who had done the assignment, whether it was the students or a member of their family. One teacher stated:

> When I asked the students to use the words in sentences as an assignment, some of the sentences were beyond the level of the students and it was clear that he/she was not the one who had done the homework. Therefore, I was reluctant to correct and evaluate these assignments.

Eleven students also indicated that due to the large number of students in class, it was difficult to ask for repetition of the pronunciation of English words and for teachers' specific feedback on the pronounced words. As discussed earlier, students reported that they prefer one-on-one feedback from their teachers which is difficult to obtain in online classes.

I. Exhaustion

It is exhausting and discouraging for teachers and students to spend their day taking or delivering online classes continuously without a break, sitting at desks, or lying in beds in front of their laptops/computers for long hours. According to twenty of the interviewed teachers, this caused physical fatigue and distraction for both parties. One teacher stated that "After I finished the online class, I felt dizzy and had joint pain from sitting for a long time." A student stated that "having to sit there for hours on end to attend online classes is very tiring, at least when we go to school, we can have fun with each other and eat from the canteen."

J. Inability to Translate Each Word Using Only L1

In face-to-face classes, teachers rely heavily on body movements, gestures, mimes, and pointing to explain English words, and sometimes use Arabic. These techniques capture young learners' attention and make the lesson more dynamic. According to eighteen of the interviewed teachers, in online classes, following such strategies seems to be impossible due to the absence of physical and sensory interaction. They pointed out that it was difficult to explain the meaning of each English word using L1 (the mother tongue). Teachers argued that not all English words can be interpreted in Arabic. Some words may be used differently in the two languages or need more elaboration for them to be used appropriately. One teacher stated, "Some students are surprised when I speak English continuously in the classroom, but actually I cannot find an Arabic word to explain certain vocabulary." Another teacher stated that "Sometimes I used English synonyms to demonstrate some words because I did not have an Arabic word that had an equivalent meaning to the English word." In this regard, nine students argued that they could not understand the meaning of the vocabulary from the context, and they were waiting for the teacher's translation of words into their mother tongue. This challenge is in agreement with Gee's Situated Cognition theory which proposed that knowledge cannot be separated from the situation or the context in which it was acquired (see Gee's research [43]). In other words, the learning process is strongly associated with an activity, culture, place, or social situation.

With regard to the third research question which is concerned with the solutions for these challenges from the viewpoints of interviewed teachers and students. Some teachers pointed out the importance of using more advanced online platforms to teach English words, such as Google Meet, World Word, and Microsoft Teams. These online platforms can also be used in an effective way by dividing students into small classrooms that enable them to practice words together and use them in short sentences. Some teachers also suggested using electronic games in teaching English words because they add a sense of fun and entertainment. The interviewed students were also asked to suggest solutions to these problems, and their solutions seem to be similar to those mentioned by the interviewed teachers. Some of the interviewed students argued that teachers could assign them to small online rooms for more practice. Furthermore, other students suggested that teachers should upload the material with audio presentations on the advanced platforms for easy reference in case they encountered technical problems.

V. Discussion

The interviews with both teachers and students showed

that online learning may not be effective in teaching English vocabulary to EFL learners. Both groups reported that various difficulties hinder the acquisition of English vocabulary. This result is consistent with data obtained by Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison [26], Altakhaineh and Alnajjar [24], Altakhaineh, Alhendi, and Ishtaiwa [23], Nobre [28], and Şevik and Yücedağ [29], who all reported problems such as time management, a lack of technological devices, and an absence of Internet connectivity with online teaching/learning. It can be observed that one of the main challenges that affect English vocabulary online classes in Jordan is the lack of training for teachers on using online platforms and online teaching methods. For instance, it can be suggested that the majority of discussed themes that pertain to time management, technical problems, lack of motivation, exhaustion, difficulty in assessment, and others can be resolved if teachers have more training on how to deal with online classes and how to make them more engaging for the students. The challenges reported by the participants of the current study are further complicated by the nature of the class, which requires the use of realia, pictures, gestures, body movements, and mimes in explanations.

The findings of this study have highlighted that one of the most important challenges that teachers encountered in teaching English vocabulary online was the impossibility of using realia. In particular, the study showed that the teachers relied heavily on realia and pictures to explain the meaning of English vocabulary. Thus, it seems difficult or challenging to employ this strategy in online classes. Oyarzo *et al.* [44] proposed that a significant aspect of realia is their close connection to the natural approach and therefore they are necessary for effective language learning because they create a more natural environment. Considering this, realia facilitate the acquisition of language naturally, which is a major advantage. This result supports the theory proposed by Scott and Ytreberg [45] that lessons can be much easier and more exciting for the students if the teacher utilizes real objects optimally to help students understand the material. In other words, through realia, the teacher can deliver information to the students clearly and simply, and consequently, the students also perceive the information easily because the teacher can show objects while explaining the lesson. In this regard, Purnamasari *et al.* [46] argued that using realia in teaching/learning masterfully improves the students' vocabulary, especially in spelling and pronouncing English words. They also allow children to apply various senses and thus motivate them and make learning effective. Furthermore, this result is in agreement with Smith [47], who stated that realia can "enhance linguistic and cultural comprehensibility, which are both prerequisites for real language learning". Thus, it makes the language of the classroom more dynamic and productive. Moreover, the results revealed that there was no significance of the years of experience in the online teaching process.

With regard to the challenges faced by students, data analysis of the interviews shows that students encountered various problems that included poor class management, poor Internet connection, having too many study subjects and their associated requirements, and the large number of students. In general, students were unsatisfied with the use of online learning in general, especially with regard to English vocabulary learning as they felt that they were unable to fulfill the expected progress, that is, they felt that they are much behind. In particular, students indicated that they felt as if they are still in the same grade they were before the pandemic as far as their English vocabulary is concerned. They indicated that if the pandemic has not happened and they continued to take their classes at school, not only their English vocabulary but their English skills including reading, writing, listening and speaking would have been much better than they are now. This result is in line with Mahyoob [48] who suggested that EFL students had a general feeling of disappointment with their progress level because of online teaching. Technical problems were the most common ones reported by the students. In addition, some students reported individual problems that have to do with their surrounding environment. For instance, a student reported that she and her siblings have to share a laptop for their classes and that caused several problems. Other challenges pertained to computer literacy and internet connectivity. These results are supported by previous research studies which highlighted that the technical problems students encountered as well as the individual problems hindered their learning and motivation [49, 50].

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has investigated the challenges of teaching English vocabulary using online learning from the perspective of both teachers and students in public secondary schools in Jordan. Data were collected using a qualitative data collection tool, namely semi-structured interviews, with thirty teachers and twenty students. Based on the responses of the participants, several challenges were found which may have prevented the students from learning English vocabulary when taught online. The findings revealed that many challenges were encountered by the teachers, such as time and class management, students' weaknesses, misbehavior, the quality of feedback, technical problems, the absence of realia, and the lack of visual interaction, among others. The findings also showed that some students' challenges were similar to those mentioned by the teachers, such as poor class management, poor Internet connectivity, and large class sizes. Furthermore, the study identified some suggestions from the teachers and students to resolve these problems and enhance students' ability in understanding English vocabulary and using them appropriately, such as using more advanced online platforms, e.g., Google Meet, World Word, and Microsoft Teams, as well as assigning students into small rooms and using games/plays.

Future investigations need to take these challenges into consideration to help students acquire English vocabulary. For instance, future studies might identify the most suitable ways of teaching English vocabulary online. It is also suggested that these results are compared with private secondary schools in Jordan to examine whether the same challenges are encountered. Moreover, future studies can investigate students' performance improvement in learning remotely when crisis conditions demand Emergency

Remote Teaching (ERT).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Abdel Rahman Altakhaineh and Mohammad Alaghawat contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Abdel Rahman Altakhaineh, Mohammad Alaghawat, and Afakh Younes. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Abdel Rahman Altakhaineh, Afakh Younes and Mohammad Alaghawat. Proofreading and copy-editing was performed by Abdel Rahman Altakhaineh and Afakh Younes. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript, and all authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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