

The Online Learning-Teaching during the Coronavirus Pandemic: Second-Year Students as a Case Study

التعلم و التعليم عبر المنصة الإلكترونية أثناء جائحة كورونا فيروس: طلاب السنة الثانية
كحالة دراسية

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Abstract:

Online learning-teaching platforms have become increasingly vital in the educational realm over the previous decade and an imminent subject particularly last two years in Algerian universities. As e-learning is a new teaching method in the academic setting, it poses some impediments for both teachers and students. The ultimate objectives that lied behind undertaking such a research paper are to provide a profound and thorough understanding of the use of distance learning in teaching English as a foreign language in the Algerian Universities and how effective teaching-learning online are. The piece of work sheds lights on the use of e-platform by second-year students of Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida. An interview and classroom observational sessions are used to conduct this piece of work. The findings reveal that second-year students showed negative attitudes towards e-education.

Keywords: English language, e-platform, university, learning, teaching.

ملخص:

أصبحت منصات التعليم على الإنترنت ذات أهمية حيوية متزايدة في المجال التعليمي خلال العقد الماضي وموضوع وشيك لا سيما في السنتين الماضيتين في الجامعات الجزائرية. وبما أن التعليم الإلكتروني طريقة تعليمية جديدة في الإطار الأكاديمي، فإنه يشكل بعض العقبات والصعوبات للأساتذة والطلبة. الأهداف الأساسية التي تكمن وراء هذا البحث هو تقديم فهم عميق وشامل لاستخدام التعلم عن بعد لتعلم اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات الجزائرية ومدى فعالية التعليم/التعلم عبر الإنترنت. تسلط هذه الورقة البحثية الضوء على استخدام المنصة الإلكترونية من قبل طلاب السنة الثانية للدكتور مولاي طاهر جامعة سعيدة. للقيام بهذا العمل، مقابلات وجلسات مراقبة في الفصول الدراسية قد استخدمت. تبين النتائج البحثية أن طلاب السنة الثانية قد أظهروا مواقف سلبية تجاه التعليم الإلكتروني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنكليزية، المنصة الإلكترونية، الجامعة، التعلم، التعليم.

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1. Introduction

The Coronavirus has not influenced only the human body but also the educational settings (schools and universities). Due to the spread of Covid-19 throughout the world, the Algerian universities shut their doors to cease the spread of this deadly disease among the students. As a consequence, it becomes mandatory to resort to the internet and therefore, online teaching-learning is conducted. This year, the government acknowledged learning by levels, i.e. first-year first, then second-year and finally third-year with third-year students. Nevertheless, e-education seems a real hindrance for The use of online platforms are immensely urged for language learning; for instance, planning lessons and submitting lectures online, organizing various tasks and videos as well as presenting remedial activities. The main purpose of the study is to show whether e-learning is effective or not in the academic settings.

2. Review of Literature

2.1.Traditional Learning Vs. E-learning

E-learning has received much attention recently because technology is making people's lives easier due to the effortless access to the internet. This implies that internet technology has been viewed as an imminent variable in educational settings (Elfaki, Abdulraheem & Abdulrahim, 2019, p. 225, quoted by Allen & Seaman, 2015). Adding to that, e-education presents an innovative step that contributes to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education (Pnalvo & Seoane, 2014, p. 98) According to Naarmala (2009) in traditional classroom learning students receive immediate feedback and students become motivated because they have to work inside the classroom.

On the other hand, Klesius, Homan, & Thompson (1997) asserted that distance education is better assimilated and enjoyed when students do not travel to the instructional setting and are intrinsically motivated (cited in Rovai, Ponton, Wighting & Baker, 2007, p. 416). Furthermore, E-learning cannot be considered as useful for all the syllabi, because there are some curricula that need to be implemented by traditional learning (Chang, Shu, Liang, Tseng, and Hsu, 2014, p. 214) such as oral expression that needs face-to-face learning where students have to receive actual and immediate teachers' comments.

An empirical study conducted by Ladyshewsky (2004) where distance education was compared to traditional learning and revealed that learners' performance became better compared to face to face mode (cited in Naarmala's 2007, p. 148). In virtual learning, students are responsible for their own learning (learners' centredness), whereas, in traditional learning, the teacher takes a huge part in the classroom; where s/he has to provide resources (authentic materials) and has to guide the class to achieve learning outcomes (teachers' centredness). On the other hand, E-learning allows a wide range of information to circulate amid the students in a timely period (Ilie & Frăsineanu, 2018, p. 1196). Knowledge can be shared by video-conferencing, uploading videos from YouTube, word-pdf documents, social media and other E-Systems. Furthermore, online learning allows the learner to access to e-platforms at any time s/he wants (Radha, Mahalakshmi, Kumar & Saravanakumar, 2020, p.1097) and whether at home or in the classroom. Using e-system could be practical as the students can be engaged in

some learning tasks with their tutors on a laptop or a mobile from their home (Almaiah, Khasawneh & Althunibat, 2020, p. 5262).

Traditional learning is based on the physical interaction between the learner and the tutor and focuses primarily on the content itself and helps the student gain proficiency from the lecture transmitted by the teacher (Kelmendi, 2019, p.8). In classroom learning, the tutor has to be in the same place and at the same time with the students. In this case, the teacher is the sender and the student is the receiver; therefore, the teacher fails to provide attention to all his/her learners which leads to passive learning (p. 9). The latter could be due to time constraints and large classrooms. Additionally, in a face-to-face education, students develop communication skills when cooperating with their instructors and classmates who have different knowledge background (p.12).

2.2 E-Learning at the Algerian Universities

Owing to Coronavirus pandemic, all the educational schools and universities found an alternative method to the traditional learning and inclined to E-learning platforms to maintain schooling and research. Studies found that online learning provides several benefits to learners as it emphasizes learning centeredness and is more flexible (Coman, Tîru, Schmitz, Stanciu & Bularca, 2020, p. 1). More importantly, it encourages students' interaction as they share lectures, activities...etc. via using online instruments as e-mailing the tutors to seek more information, chats on Moodle platform amid themselves and with their teachers and ask for help if something seems ambiguous.

Nevertheless, using E-learning platforms such as MOODLE have some impediments that hinder the students' learning process such as, absence of motivation, delayed teachers' feedback or assistance because of the tutor's time availability on the platforms. Further, students would always need help because online learning lacks both the classmates' and the teachers' physical presence (p. 2). It is worth mentioning that the Algerian universities make platforms' access easier for the students taking into consideration the internet low speed. The administration of Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida facilitates E-learning platforms accessibility through HTML service; where the student clicks on this link and the lecture appears straightaway.

Most importantly, the Algerian university offers a wide range of possibilities for sharing information; from uploading word/pdf documents shifting to videos that illustrate the different lessons. This is done for the ultimate purpose of guaranteeing the learning ongoing process. Additionally, the Algerian students could download any lecture and watch videos simply from their mobile phones. Harriman (2010) opined that "M-Learning - The term M-Learning or Mobile Learning refers to the use of handheld devices such as PDAs, mobile phones, laptops and any other handheld information technology device that can be used in teaching and learning" (cited in Kelmendi's, 2019, p. 13).

It is of great utmost to mention that not all the Algerian students have the e-materials to access e-platforms and some of them live in rural places where network is unavailable. Video-conferencing could not be done at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida because of the poor internet connection as well as students' availability. So, teachers depended heavily on posting word-PDF courses, HTML lecture and uploading some videos from YouTube.

3. Methodology

3.1. Aim of the Study and Research Instruments

As the pandemic enforced the closure of all the schools and universities throughout Algeria, the higher ministry of education adopted the online instructional mode to support the students learning and to ensure the continuity of the educational process. EFL teachers at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida are obliged to display all their lectures including the activities on Moodle platform. The implementation of the latter began last year where it seemed peculiar to the majority of the students as well as tutors, however, this year is viewed as a simple concept. The piece of work seeks to know the students' perspectives towards online learning and their new challenges. Further, the main objective of this research paper is to scrutinize the effectiveness of online learning and teaching.

Moreover, it provides a profound and thorough understanding on the use of online platforms such as MOODLE and E-Learning platforms in teaching English as a foreign language in the Algerian Universities and how effective teaching/learning online are. It also sheds light on how online methods contribute to the English learning process and depict its advantages and drawbacks in the educational system. Therefore, two research instruments are employed which are interviewing second-year students and using online teaching.

3.2. Participants

The work is conducted on ninety (90) participants. These students are second-year students from Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida who are enrolled to carry on their studies during the academic year 2020-2021. It is worth noting that the students had to attend ten (10) sessions; which implies five (5) weeks for each semester. They had to show up in the classroom and learn other details online because implementing a course in one hour and for five weeks would not be sufficient to achieve academic success.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Due to this immediate transition that Covid-19 imposed on the entire world, the Algerian universities applied learning-teaching online methods. Therefore, two research questions are formulated:

- 1- Do students prefer online learning?
- 2- To what extent is E-learning effective in Algerian universities?

According to what has been stated earlier, two research hypotheses are developed:

- 1- Students may assimilate their lectures and learn via online platforms effectively.
- 2- E-learning would be more efficient than traditional learning.

5. Classroom Experience

5.1. Analysis of the Students' Interview

The higher ministry of Education in Algeria imposed three weeks of studies during the spread of the pandemic, in which students are asked to attend their lectures and the fourth week is meant for examination. At the level of Saida, the administration assigned five weeks and the sixth one is for examination. Nonetheless, students' presence was not mandatory as the ministry revealed, however, at the University of Dr. Moulay Tahar and particularly the Department of English Language and Literature learners' presence is compulsory.

Further, the administration at Saida asked all the university teachers to display different lectures using different forms on MOODLE Platform a month before second-year students' entrance. Each tutor presented several lectures online that encompass the entire semester. The administration planned to expose the courses online to reinforce teaching online and to facilitate learning for the students as five weeks are insufficient for language learners.

It is worth mentioning that second-year students are familiar with this platform since last year. Therefore, all university teachers require revision from their students before they come to the classroom. As a written expression teacher, she put different lessons online that enclose first and foremost objectives for each course, a word document that illustrates the lesson, a video that demonstrates the same course, a literary text that shows how for instance descriptive or narrative essays should be tackled, comprehension questions and revision of the lesson in a form of a PowerPoint. In the first session, the teacher remarkably noticed that the students has not visited the platform, so she started asking questions:

Q1. Have you accessed the e-platform?

Table 1. Checking the Students' Online Learning

Options	Students
Yes	05
No	85

The table above reveals that the vast majority which represents eighty-five (85) participants clearly showed that they did not revise the lessons on the platform before coming to the classroom. Whereas, five (05) students admitted that they checked MOODLE and answered the questions that were put by the tutor.

Q2. Why?

No revealed answers on the students' part; they kept silence.

Q3. Is it because of the network?

Few informants reported that they have internet access neither at home nor on their mobile phones, whereas three (3) students stated that they do not have an account on the platform. The rest which embodies the sweeping majority stated that they do have internet access, but did not verify MOODLE for no reason.

5.2. Observation

From the first session, the teacher noticed that the students have not accessed the e-platform. So, it was quite complex to tackle reading comprehension as the students did not read the assigned text. The tutor asked the students to read the given texts outside the classroom on MOODLE platform and put some comprehension questions online three days before the session. Nearly all the students did not read nor answered the questions, whereas a minority responded to the given tasks. It is worth noting that the teacher informed her participants that she is frequently available on the platform at 6pm, at which they can pose any question or ask for clarification.

It is mandatory on the students' part to do reading and respond to the different tasks as time does not suffice. Foreign language teachers are urged to display their lectures online hoping that their students would learn

Due to time shortage, the researcher imposed on the students to do reading and answer the assigned questions by grading them taking their classroom interaction into account. The grades are considered as TD (classroom work) marks. Implementing this method led the students to execute their learning activities. Approximately all the students were participating and answered different questions inside the classroom. For the three (03) students who did not have an account on MOODLE platform, they asked the teacher how to obtain the lessons and the activities. So, the teacher sent them all the writing-reading courses with activities via e-mails and they sent back their assignments for evaluation. It is worth mentioning that these students did not have an account because they come from different universities. To sum up, second-year students were forced to use distant learning.

Fifteen students (15) have never accessed the platform and never answered the reading assignments. As the module entails writing-reading courses, these learners attended regularly and wrote in their copybooks what the teacher has explained on the whiteboard. Further, they provided their written tasks because the extended essays were done in the classroom and at home, but never interacted as they had not accomplished the reading tasks. In fact, reading is a tiresome activity that is not done by EFL learners. Most importantly, foreign language teachers always complain about the students' poor level because of the tremendous absence of reading skill. To put special emphasis on reading, the teacher imposed on the students to read intensively mainly when the text is quite short; the learners did not bring printed copies instead they read from their cell phones which proves that the bulk majority have a mobile network and can access easily to the platform.

It is of great utmost to mention that tutors at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida received special training on how to monitor distance learning, how to put lessons online using different forms (Word /PDF documents, HTML and videos), how to interact with the students distantly. Therefore, teachers did not find any hurdle within the platform; they posted different lectures whether via MOODLE, social media or helping students through emailing them. Similarly, second-year students did not find any obstacle with using E-learning as they started using the platform last year. Additionally, the teacher-researcher showed all her students in the classroom how to interact distantly if something seems ambiguous. So, to implement this, the students used their cell phones inside the classroom and the tutor unveiled all the steps to her learners.

6. Discussion

English language teachers as well as learners at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida, were forced to shift from traditional learning to E-learning because of the sudden spread of Coronavirus. It was mandatory to shift from teachers' centredness to students' centredness as distant education requires this type of teaching and learning. However, the role of the teacher remains important in the EFL context as s/he guides, facilitates and monitors learning distantly. It is worth noting that it is not easy to shift from one method of teaching to a completely different one as some students do not have the necessary materials for e-education and students are not well-trained in self-learning (Guesser, 2020, p. 77)

The results obtained from the students' interview equal with those of the classroom observational sessions. The teacher remarkably noticed that the students have not accessed the platform and nor have read the text or listened to the video that explains the entire lesson. Hence, she started asking them questions and they admitted that they have not yet used the platform, albeit, various lectures were displayed a month earlier before starting the academic year. Second-year students show a profound reluctance towards distant education because they got used to the traditional learning in which the teacher is the spoon-feeder.

Because of the pandemic, students have to depend on themselves to achieve academic success. Although the tutor was often available on the platform at 6 pm waiting for the learners' clarification, no one asked a question except for asking if they have written assignments or not. One student amid all the learners did all the provided assignments and sent them via email asking for feedback. In brief, students did not respond to e-learning as all the teachers were complaining that their learners do not use MOODLE. Similarly, the minister of Higher Education reported that e-platforms are such a failure in the Algerian universities as the students do not interact and respond to E-education.

Thus, distance learning is ineffective particularly at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida because students showed great de-motivation and laziness towards the use of MOODLE. The participants greatly employ their cell phones when writing an extended essay. It is of great importance to note that second-year learners use widely the internet for chatting with friends and stated that they have the network in their mobiles mainly when their tutor asked them to access the platform in the classroom. So, nearly all the participants accessed the e-platform without any internet obstacle. This proves that EFL students do not have any impediment as far as the internet connection is concerned except for a minority who did not have the net connection.

Further, the same students employed the net when were assigned a written text in which they took ideas from the internet without even paraphrasing or summarizing the copied thoughts. Thereby, the teacher notified her students to use their own ideas when penning an extended essay and illustrated that plagiarism is not permitted in the academic setting. The students used various websites for writing a descriptive text about 'Dream House' and used copy-paste without adjusting a word. Learners had to draft outside the classroom because of time constraints, and literary theft was revealed through a plagiarism detector.

The findings reveal that online learning has less value compared to traditional learning as students were forced to check the e-platform and were asked to download the lectures because

the teacher did not provide her learners with hand-outs. More importantly, students favour face-to-face learning-teaching because e-education requires self-autonomy and EFL students are not used to this kind of learning. The study shows that second-year students poorly assimilate online learning.

To sum up, second-year learners are used to traditional learning as they never dealt with distance education until university and particularly due to the pandemic that swept the entire world, i.e. e-learning was imposed and forced EFL learners and teachers to use different ways for transmitting knowledge. Thus, students do not prefer online learning but the traditional one which depicts that distant education is ineffective in some FL universities and therefore the second hypothesis is disconfirmed. The results also disconfirm the first hypothesis which states that students assimilate their lectures and learn distantly because the findings revealed that the sweeping majority did not access to MOODLE platform.

7. Pedagogical Implications

E-learning failed in some educational institutions because of some factors that are summarized in the following claims:

- Technical hurdles such as poor internet debit in which students cannot download video-conferencing or other types of videos.
- Zhang (2005) reported that “some institutions failed in running e-learning because they are newly established and lacked expertise and experience in distant education” (cited in Jarvis, 2009, p. 244)
- He added that distant learning is completely different from face-to-face learning in which e-education requires some administration and pedagogical management such as, course design, learning support, technical support and quality assurance.
- Lack of students’ support and motivation.
- Students are not accustomed to the new type of online learning.

7.1. Effective E-learning

- Teachers and students need to be well-equipped with different materials to achieve effective E-learning.
- Efficient E-education requires professional experts in distance education as not all tutors are trained on using e-platforms and demand a great deal of investment (In Jarvis, 2009, p. 244).
- E-learning must be integrated at an early age so that learners will get used to it. The government needs to integrate and develop e-education in all academic settings and not only at the tertiary level.
- Adapt new teaching methodologies that suit the sudden shift from face-to-face learning to e-education (Coman et al, 2020, p. 15).
- The Higher Ministry of Education needs to optimize the quality of teacher’s training and familiarize the students with the online learning environment not only during the crisis and severe conditions but also during normal days.
- Special programs and training sessions must be dedicated for teachers to show them how and what to tackle in an online course since a traditional course hand-out is different from an online course.

- It is important on the teacher's part to be available on e-platforms from time to time to respond to the students' clarifications, needs and provide feedback when necessary.
- Provide alternative solutions for students who live in rural areas, because they do not have internet connection or poor students who cannot afford or adopt the new technologies.
- It is important to diversify the online course to stimulate the students' attention and interest (YouTube videos, audio, video conferencing, word document, PDF, HTML...).
- The university administration needs e-materials such as: internet connection, hardware and software to be capable of implementing online learning effectively (Almaiah et al, 2020, p. 5276).
- Decision and policy-makers ought to adopt new educational policies and regulations to foster and promote e-education among students and tutors by altering some traditional teaching approaches to e-learning methods.
- Raising the students' awareness and knowledge on the relevance of online learning and how to use it via training lectures mainly for third-year licence learners and first-year Master students.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, the study reveals that second-year students show negative attitudes towards e-learning except for a minority who worked hard to achieve academic success. Therefore, the teaching was a teacher-centered approach rather than student-centered and when attempting to focalize on the students' centeredness, they felt pressure due to the huge number of teachers' assignments that they have to implement each day and for more than a month (five weeks). To put it differently, students were not accustomed to this kind of intense learning that felt like a burden for both tutors as well as learners. Hence, the administration ought to well-equip tutors and students with the necessary e-materials to be able to monitor the e-platforms.

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