

Difficulties of Distance University education from the Perspective of Adrar University Students

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Abstract: : This study aims to shed light on the difficulties encountered by university students while receiving distance education. The research sample consisted of students from the University of Adrar, numbering 60 male and female students selected randomly. The descriptive methodology was adopted in this study. The findings revealed several significant results, including:*Students faced major difficulties during distance learning, most notably the frequent interruptions of internet networks.* Among the material difficulties were students' lack of personal computers or mobile phones, in addition to the high cost of internet access.*Students' inability to effectively use distance learning platforms also constituted a major obstacle

Keywords: University education; distance university education; educational difficulties; distance learning mechanisms; university student.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is considered one of the most important sectors to which developed countries devote great attention, due to their awareness of its role in development, prosperity, and civilization-building. For this purpose, substantial material and human resources are allocated to manage this sector, which is relied upon in the development process. Advancing the education sector requires modern mechanisms and methods that keep pace with technological developments in order to achieve educational outcomes commensurate with this progress. Among the most important of these developments is distance education via the internet and advanced technological techniques, particularly in higher education.

Distance éducation has become one of the top priorities adopted by the state in the current period, as part of adapting to technology, innovations, and modern means that contribute to the development of the education sector, especially higher education. Among the measures taken is internet-based education to ensure quality education that aligns with contemporary developments. Consequently, Algerian universities have adopted policies to generalize distance education within their academic programs. The University of Adrar was among the institutions that quickly adapted to this situation by establishing special distance learning platforms, encouraging faculty members to engage in this process, and attempting to interact with students through distance learning platforms using various tools, most notably the Moodle platform and Google Meet technology.

1.The probleme of the study

Based on this context, the main research problem can be formulated as follows:

What are the most significant difficulties faced by university students in distance education while attending lectures?

The subsidiary questions are as follows:

1. Do difficulties related to internet network availability and weakness affect distance education among university students?
2. Do students' material conditions affect their reception of distance education?
3. Does students' inability to properly use distance learning platforms constitute a difficulty in attending lectures?

1.2. Hypotheses

- **First hypothesis:** Difficulties in distance education are mainly represented by frequent internet interruptions and weak connectivity.
- **Second hypothesis:** Students' material conditions (possession of a mobile phone or computer) significantly affect their participation in distance learning.

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- **Third hypothesis:** Students' lack of proficiency in using electronic communication tools makes it difficult for them to attend lectures remotely.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to identify the reality of distance education in the Algerian university, using the University of Adrar as a model, and to explore the main challenges and difficulties faced by this mode of education in Algeria. It also seeks to understand how students perceive the obstacles that hindered their effective participation in distance education and their ability to benefit from its advantages.

1.4. Additional objectives include:

- Building a theoretical framework on distance education, particularly university-level education.
- Identifying the reality of distance education and the main challenges facing Algerian universities.
- Highlighting the major difficulties encountered by university students while attending distance lectures, especially since this form of education has become inevitable.
- Reaching results that clarify the real obstacles preventing the success of distance education in universities.

2. Definition of Study Terms

2.1 Conceptual Definition of University Education

University education refers to a series of planned, organized, coordinated, and integrated efforts and activities aimed at achieving the desired learning outcomes among students. Learning implies changes in the learner's mental state or cognitive structure, which can be inferred through positive behavioral changes. Teaching planning therefore involves thinking about how to successfully bring about the desired learning. (Hamad Al-Titi, n.d., p. 74)

2.2 Operational Definition of University Education

It refers to the transformation processes targeting the inputs of the university system, carried out by faculty members using pedagogical and material resources provided by university administration, in order to achieve the intended goals of the university. In this study, it refers to education at the University of Adrar and the facilities provided to students to achieve their future objectives.

2.3 Conceptual Definition of Distance University Education

Distance education is the process of transferring knowledge to learners at their place of residence instead of requiring them to attend an educational institution. It is based on delivering knowledge, skills, and educational materials through various technical media and methods, where the learner is spatially or temporally separated from the teacher. Technology is used to bridge the gap between both parties in a way that simulates face-to-face interaction.

UNESCO defines distance education as “an educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by a person who is distant in space and time from the learner, with most communication between teachers and learners occurring through a specific medium, whether electronic or printed.” (Dehimi & Gouda, 2021, p. 464)

Distance education achieves the principle of democratization of education, which is based on providing educational opportunities to all who seek it, regardless of economic, social, or temporal circumstances. Education is a right for every individual, whether young or old, rich or poor. (Association for Development, 2002, p. 19)

2.4 Operational Definition of Distance University Education

It refers to delivering lectures to university students without their physical attendance at the university, via the internet using advanced technological tools such as Google Meet, through mobile phones or computers, particularly during the spread of COVID-19.

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2.5 Conceptual Definition of Distance Learning Mechanisms

Distance education differs from traditional education in that it keeps pace with modern technology through the use of television, internet, and satellites to transmit information. These mechanisms include: **(Dehimi & Gouda, previously cited, p. 457)**

- **Audio materials:** interactive audio communication tools such as telephone-based interaction and online audio conferencing, as well as non-interactive audio tools like recordings.
- **Audiovisual materials:** films, video recordings, and video conferencing.
- **Internet network technologies:** characterized by wide accessibility and low cost.

2.6 Operational Definition of Distance Learning Mechanisms

These include all modern technological tools provided by the university to ensure the success of distance education, such as distance learning platforms, videos, and computer-equipped facilities.

2.7 Definition of Distance Learning Difficulties

They refer to the challenges and problems faced by students and teachers in an educational environment that relies on the internet or remote communication technologies.

2.8 Conceptual Definition of the University Student

University students are individuals enrolled in higher education institutions; they represent a group of educated youth concentrated in educational institutions. **(Mohamed Wahbi, 1996, p. 238)**

2.9 Operational Definition

A university student enrolled at the University of Adrar in all disciplines who received distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic in the academic year 2019–2020.

3. Previous Studie

Previous studies constitute an important entry point for researchers, enabling them to gain an overview of the topic under investigation and to compare their findings with earlier research.

3.1 First Study

“E-learning during the Spread of Coronavirus from the Perspective of Teachers at the University of Palestine (2020)”

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher adopted a descriptive-analytical approach with a sample of 50 teachers. The results showed that teachers’ evaluation of distance education effectiveness was moderate. Faculty members recommended the need for training courses for both teachers and students, addressing obstacles hindering the use of e-learning, and adopting a blended learning approach combining face-to-face and online education in higher education institutions. (Abu Shkheidem, 2020)

3.2 Second StudyMaazouz Hisham et al. (2020): “The Reality of Distance University Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Field Study on a Sample of Algerian University Students.”

The study aimed to highlight the reality of distance education during the pandemic. Using a descriptive-analytical method and an online questionnaire, data were collected from 95 students. Results indicated psychological effects of lockdown on students, lack of pedagogical and psychological support, technical obstacles such as lack of devices and poor internet connectivity, absence of training, and ambiguity surrounding the new educational process.

3.3 Third StudyGouri Zahbia (2023): “The Reality of Distance Education from the Perspective of University Professors.”

This study examined the reality of distance education from the perspective of faculty members at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tizi Ouzou. Using a descriptive-analytical approach and a questionnaire administered to 70 professors, the results showed that distance education is still in its early stages, facing numerous obstacles such as lack of effective strategy, insufficient

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material resources, and inadequate training for both teachers and students. (Gouri, 2023, p. 147)

Commentary on Previous Studies

After reviewing previous studies on distance university education, it is evident that the topic has attracted significant scholarly attention, focusing on its advantages, disadvantages, and actual implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. While earlier studies addressed effectiveness and general challenges, the present study specifically focuses on the difficulties faced by students at the University of Adrar. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study to address this topic in this context, while also proposing solutions to improve distance education conditions at the University of Adrar.

4. Methodological Procedures

- **Temporal Scope:** The field study was conducted in October 2020, coinciding with students' attendance for examinations, which facilitated direct distribution of questionnaires.
- **Spatial Scope:** The study was conducted at the University of Adrar, located in Adrar Province, which includes four faculties: Social and Islamic Sciences, Arts, Law, and Engineering, as well as several departments.
- **Human Scope:** The sample consisted of 60 male and female students from various disciplines and academic levels, selected randomly.
- **Questionnaire:** The questionnaire included 16 items distributed across three dimensions corresponding to the research hypotheses: demographic data, material aspects affecting distance education, and psychological aspects influencing distance education.

4.1 Presentation of Sample Characteristics

Table 1. Characteristics of the Study Sample

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Male	19	31.66%	15.21
Female	41	68.33%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

Regarding the **gender variable**, the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 68.33%, while males represented 31.33%. This indicates that female students were more committed to following distance learning courses compared to male students.

4.2. Presentation and Analysis of the First Hypothesis Results

Table 2. Age Variable

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
19–23 years	36	60%
24–28 years	19	31.66%
29 years and above	05	8.33%
Total	60	100%

As for the **age variable**, most respondents were aged between 19 and 23 years (60%), indicating that they were mainly undergraduate students (from first to third year). The second-largest age group ranged between 24 and 28 years (31.66%), which reflects the presence of master's level students within the sample.

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Table 3. Receiving Distance Lectures

Receiving Distance Lectures	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Yes	37	61.66%	15.21
No	23	38.33%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

The table shows that the majority of students (61.66%) received lectures remotely, indicating that the prevailing circumstances made distance education an unavoidable necessity. Meanwhile, 38.33% did not receive distance lectures, which can be attributed to several reasons, including the inability of both teachers and students to properly use electronic tools and the difficulty of communication and interaction, leading to non-participation in this type of education.

Table 4. Technologies Used by Students to Receive Distance Lectures

Technology Used	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Video recordings	22	36.66%	15.21
Google Meet	38	63.33%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

The results indicate that most students used Google Meet (63.33%), as this platform was officially launched by the supervising ministry across national universities to facilitate communication between teachers and students. Meanwhile, 36.66% of students preferred video-recorded lectures.

Table5. Mode of Communication with the Instructor

Mode of Communication	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Audio and video	45	75%	15.21
Audio only	15	25%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

The findings reveal that most students communicated with their instructors using both audio and video (75%), as this method is considered the most effective and closest to face-to-face interaction. However, 25% of students received lectures via audio only, mainly because some instructors—particularly female instructors—preferred not to appear on camera, which reduced positive interaction.

Table 6. Experiencing Difficulties in Distance Education

Experiencing Difficulties	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Yes	51	85%	15.21
No	09	15%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

The results show that most students (85%) acknowledged experiencing significant difficulties in distance education. These difficulties are attributed to the novelty of this educational mode, students' lack of adaptation, the exceptional circumstances under which distance learning was implemented, and insufficient resources

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Table 07. Types of Difficulties in Distance Education

Type of Difficulty	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Internet interruptions	32	53.33%	15.21
Weak internet connection	24	40%	18.58
Lack of understanding of lectures	04	6.66%	11.14
Total	60	100%	

The table indicates that the most common difficulty faced by students was frequent internet interruptions (53.33%), which hindered continuous lecture attendance. Another group of students (40%) reported weak internet connectivity, resulting in poor audio and video quality. A smaller proportion (6.66%) stated that internet instability caused misunderstandings of lecture content.

Conclusion of the First Hypothesis

Based on the statistical data, it is evident that students did receive distance education, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed this mode of instruction as an alternative—especially for exploratory modules. Despite the adoption of modern educational technologies, students encountered substantial difficulties, especially during the early stages of implementation in the academic year 2020–2021. Weak internet flow and frequent interruptions were the most significant obstacles, particularly in rural areas. These issues prevented effective interaction with instructors and comprehension of lectures, often leading students to withdraw from sessions. These findings align with the study by Maazouz et al., who reported technical obstacles

related to insufficient access to devices and inadequate internet connectivity.

4.3. Presentation and Analysis of the Second Hypothesis

Students' material conditions significantly affect their participation in distance education.

Table 08. Ownership of Technological Communication Tools

Ownership	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Yes	38	63.33%	15.21
No	22	36.66%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

The field data show that 63.33% of students owned modern communication tools, reflecting the technological demands of contemporary life. Conversely, 36.66% did not own such devices due to their families' limited financial resources, which hindered their ability to engage in distance learning.

Table 09. Type of Communication Tools Owned

Type of Tool	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Computer	18	30%	15.21
Mobile phone	20	33.33%	18.58
None	22	36.66%	11.14
Total	60	100%	

Most students reported owning mobile phones (33.33%), while 30% owned computers. Mobile phones were more common due to their lower cost and portability compared to computers.

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Table 10. Ability to Pay Internet Recharge Costs

Ability to Pay	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Yes	38	63.33%	15.21
No	22	36.66%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

Most students (63.33%) were able to afford internet recharge costs, as these expenses were considered relatively affordable. However, 36.66% were unable to do so regularly due to their financial circumstances, limiting continuous participation in distance learning.

Conclusion of the Second Hypothesis

The study revealed that students' material conditions—particularly ownership of communication tools and the ability to afford internet costs—significantly influenced their engagement in distance education. The absence of smartphones (33.33%) or computers (30%) constituted a major barrier. These findings are consistent with the study by Maazouz et al., which highlighted technical obstacles related to lack of devices and inadequate internet access.

4.4. Presentation and Analysis of the Third Hypothesis

Students' inability to effectively use electronic tools negatively affects their comprehension of distance lectures.

Table 11. Difference Between Distance and Face-to-Face Lectures

Difference Exists	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Yes	35	58.33%	15.21
No	25	41.66%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

Most students (58.33%) believed that face-to-face lectures were superior to distance lectures, while 41.66% perceived no difference. This may be attributed to technical skill deficiencies, lack of experience with digital platforms, reduced concentration, and decreased motivation due to the absence of a traditional classroom environment.

Table 12. Nature of the Difference from Students' Perspective

Type of Difference	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Teaching method	13	21.66%	15.21
Interaction with instructor	47	78.33%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

Most students attributed the difference to interaction with instructors (78.33%), as face-to-face settings allow for better engagement. Teaching delivery was cited by 21.66%, as instructors tend to be more enthusiastic and interactive in physical classrooms

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Table 13. Preferred Mode of University Education

Preferred Mode	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Face-to-face education	56	93.33%	15.21
Distance education	04	6.66%	18.58
Total	60	100%	11.14

The overwhelming majority of students (93.33%) preferred face-to-face education, while only 6.66% favored distance education.

In-person university education differs from indirect (distance) education in several aspects, most notably that in-person education is older and considered the original form of education. It has numerous advantages, including direct interaction with the professor, getting to know them better, and ease of communication. Furthermore, information is easier to absorb and more effective, as confirmed by several university studies and by the majority of students who expressed a preference for in-person learning over distance education.

Table 14. Reasons for Preferring Face-to-Face Education

Reason	Frequency	Percentage	Total Results
Better comprehension	25	41.66%	15.21
Direct interaction	24	40%	18.58
Ease of accessing information	07	11.66%	11.14
Total	56	93.66%	

Students preferred face-to-face education due to better comprehension (41.66%), stronger interaction with instructors (40%), and easier access to information (11.66%).

One of the reasons that made students prefer in-person education is that the interaction with the professor is direct, and in it the two parties use the language of dialogue and discussion, the use of body language, and the professor's method of explanation, who is more active and comfortable when he is in direct contact with his students.

Conclusion of the Third Hypothesis

The psychological and social aspects—particularly interaction with instructors and peers—were found to be significant barriers in distance education. A total of 93.33% of students preferred face-to-face learning, primarily due to interaction quality (78.33%). These findings align with previous studies by Abu Shkheidem and Gouri Zahbia, which reported limited student engagement, reduced motivation, and lower academic achievement in distance education, emphasizing that online learning serves as a supportive rather than a replacement model.

5.CONCLUSION

Based on the field study conducted at the University of Adrar, this research examined the implementation of distance university education as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aimed to answer the main question: **What difficulties did students face in receiving distance lectures?**

The findings revealed that students experienced significant challenges, particularly frequent internet interruptions (85%), weak internet speed (53.33%), and poor connectivity (40%). These issues disrupted lecture continuity and comprehension. The results are consistent with previous studies that highlighted major obstacles to effective distance education.

Additionally, financial constraints limited students' ability to afford continuous internet access (63.33%), further hindering regular

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communication with instructors. Distance education also contributed to social isolation, reduced motivation, and psychological stress, negatively affecting academic performance

Recommendations:

- Providing financial and technological support to students and instructors, including reducing internet costs.
- Organizing training programs for faculty on distance education methodologies.
- Training students on the effective use of digital platforms.
- Developing objective electronic assessment methods.
- Establishing a future-oriented strategy to improve the quality of university education.

Enhancing internet services and bandwidth to ensure effective teaching and learning.

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