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The Impact of Online Learning on the Academic Performance of EFL Students: A Case Study of Skikda University

Zebardi Dounia[1]*

University 20 august 1955 -skikda (Algeria), zdn2907@gmail.com [1]

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Abstract:

This study aims at investigating the effect of online learning on EFL students performance. In addition, it is an attempt to shed light on the attitude of both higher education learners and teachers towards mass online learning courses. A descriptive study has been conducted in the University of Skikda in which data were gathered through a questionnaire administered to a sample of seventy-three (73) second-year LMD EFL students. In addition to an interview with seven teachers of English at the same level. Therefore, the obtained results were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. They reveal that online learning has a negative effect on EFL students' performance.Most teachers and students were dissatisfied and feel that the lack of resources and online community had contributed to an imperfect learning process, which in turn results in teachers' low morale and students' low achievements. All in all, integrating online learning with traditional learning and fostering teachers' training can be the key to minimize the negative impact of online learning, as well, to ameliorate the conventional learning process.

Keywords: Online learning; Traditional learning ; Blended learning; Academic performance.
JEL classification: I21 ; I23 ; I33.

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أثر التعليم عبر الإنترنت على الأداء الأكاديمي لطلبة اللغة الإنجليزية: دراسة حالة بجامعة سكيكدة.

دنيا زبغدي[1]*

[1] جامعة 20 أوت 1955 – سكيكدة (الجزائر)، zdn2907@gmail.com

* دنيا زبغدي[1]

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ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء أثر التعليم عبر الإنترنت على أداء طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL). بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسعى الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على اتجاهات كل من المتعلمين والأساتذة في التعليم العالي نحو مساقات التعليم الجماعي عبر الإنترنت. أُجريت دراسة وصفية في جامعة سكيكدة جُمعت بياناتها من خلال استبيان وُزع على عينة مكونة من ثلاثة وسبعين (73) طالباً من طلبة السنة الثانية (نظام LMD) تخصص لغة إنجليزية. فضلاً عن إجراء مقابلة مع سبعة أساتذة للغة الإنجليزية في نفس المستوى. تم تحليل النتائج المتحصل عليها كمياً وكيفياً، وقد كشفت أن للتعليم عبر الإنترنت أثراً سلبياً على أداء طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية. حيث أبدى معظم الأساتذة والطلبة عدم رضاهم، معتبرين أن نقص الموارد وغياب المجتمع الرقمي قد ساهم في عملية تعلم غير مكتملة، مما أدى بدوره إلى انخفاض الروح المعنوية لدى الأساتذة وتدني التحصيل الدراسي لدى الطلبة. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن دمج التعليم عبر الإنترنت مع التعليم التقليدي وتعزيز تدريب الأساتذة يمكن أن يكون المفتاح لتقليل الآثار السلبية للتعليم الرقمي، فضلاً عن تحسين وتطوير العملية التعليمية التقليدية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم عبر الإنترنت؛ التعليم التقليدي؛ التعليم المدمج؛ الأداء الأكاديمي.

تصنيف (JEL): I21 ; I23 ; I33.

1. Introduction

Regarding the complexity of the issue during the COVID-19 pandemic, a need to implement e-learning as an emergency remote teaching becomes indispensable, offering learners the opportunity to keep in touch with their teachers. This new education trend allows teachers to change their pedagogical approaches by using innovative techniques that motivate students to improve their cognitive skills and performance (Rodriguez & Fahara, 2010). In that, learners become part of "an electronic community of learners" in which they have more flexible ways for learning with a minimum requirement to move to classes. As a new method in the digital age, a considercable number of studies are dedicated to examining the effect of remote learning on learners' performance and it is found that most research agreed on the positive impact of e-learning on students' performance (Florit, Montaño, & Anes, 2012; Alam, Waqar, Zaman, Shehzadi & Mehmood, 2012; Allo, 2020). In the Algerian context, similarly, a number of studies show the effectiveness of online learning (Zermane & Aitouche, 2020 ; Guessar, 2020). Ergo, This study seeks to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of online education and its effect on EFL students' performance. Besides, it also aims to shed light on the attitude of both higher education learners and teachers towards mass online learning courses. Hopefully, It would reveal that turning the online learning emergency into an occasion by integrating online learning with traditional face-to-face learning will ameliorate the education system

Statement of the Problem: Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational system has radically changed from face-to-face to online delivery of teaching. Though the challenges and disruptions, ensuring learning continuity becomes a necessity. Therefore, Algerian universities, including Skikda University, suggested after the spread of COVID-19 to follow online learning as the best and the only alternative which all the departments started to use through digital platforms to publish courses for all degrees of study.

Research Questions : Since our study aims to evaluate learners' achievements and satisfaction with the e-learning method of teaching and whether it was a successful alternative teaching model or not, this study will try to answer the following questions:

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, how has distance learning facilitated EFL learners' learning process and help them to achieve the desired level of achievements?
2. Did EFL students and instructors adapt easily to online learning?
3. What does the shift to virtual learning bring to future generations?

Research Hypothesis Thus, It is hypothesized that in the mid of the novel coronavirus scenario, online delivery of teaching helps universities to ensure a flexible mode of learning and instructs learners to maximize their academic performance. Consequently, it would be vital to integrate both online and traditional learning to refine the conventional learning process.

Methodology : This research study utilizes a **triangulation design**, combining quantitative and qualitative methods through student questionnaires and teacher interviews to investigate remote learning effectiveness. It focuses on EFL students at **Skikda University** during the COVID-19 pandemic to analyze their attitudes and academic performance. Second-year students were specifically chosen as the **sample** due to their unique experience with both traditional and online learning modalities. The data, presented through statistics and various charts, aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and outcomes of digital education.

2. Literature Reviews :

2.1. Definition of online learning

Khan (2009) defines e-learning as a new approach responsible for delivering electronic sources, well-established, interactive, and learner-centered educational environments to anyone and at any time by using the internet and digital devices related to instructional design principles. In this regard, e-learning refers to using available information technology to gain educational resources that can be generated without geographical constraints. According to Sharifabadi (2006), other terms are generally used to refer to e- learning: distance learning**,** distance education**,** virtual learning, internet learning, online learning, computer-based learning, tele learning, and networked learning. He adds that e- learning is not only restricted to content delivery via the web, but it is more about the learner and the learning process. Correspondingly, he defines e-learning as using the web to acquire new knowledge that enables them to construct new learning experiences and promote interaction with tutors, peers, and content (sharifabadi, 2006). Naidu (2006) maintains that the letter 'e' in e-learning refers to the term 'electronic', which stands for technological devices that aid individuals or groups of learners to work through particular educational activities presented in different formats.

2.2. Implementation of learning theories to online learning

Generally speaking, we have three major learning theories: Behaviourism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism. Those learning theories vary in how they approach the severe issues related to learning, including how learning occurs, how transfer occurs, self- regulation, the role of memory and motivation, and implications for teaching (Schunk, 2012). Therefore, Principles from the three schools of thought should be integrated into the establishment of online learning materials (Ertmer and Newby, 1993 as cited in Anderson, 2008). For effective online instructional design models, Janicki and Liegle (2001) recognize components from each behaviourist, cognitivist, and constructivist schools of learning, as well as the connectivist-theory. The aforementioned theories explore the basis for helping designers to develop learning materials (as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 20).

- **Behaviourism**

According to behaviourism, learning takes place in response to external stimulus. Skinner's theory of stimulus and response is considered as the driving force of the behaviourist approach. This school of thought sees that learning is fostered by external stimuli in an environment where an observable change in human behaviour will occur. With respect to the behaviourist school, Anderson (2008) suggests implications for Online Learning as follows ;

- Learners should be informed of the learning' explicit outcomes to set their own goals and determine whether or not they have accomplished the lesson objectives.
- The instructor should integrate online testing or other assessment forms and evaluation to determine whether or not the learner has achieved the desired learning outcomes. Therefore, the instructor will be able to verify his learners' performance and provide relevant feedback.

- **Cognitivism**

As a reaction to behaviourists, the cognitivist approach proposes that the mind's "Black box" is opened and interpreted. In this theory, the learner is regarded as a data- processing machine (computer) (Alzaghoul, 2012). Individual differences are essential, and the cognitive school acknowledges the importance of using various learning methods in online education to address those differences. Furthermore, the cognitive school of thought regards learning as a mental process and sees it through information processing, wherein learners employ various forms of memory; short-term memory and long-term memory, including working memory (Anderson, 2008). In the context of online learning, Anderson (2008) introduces a set of implications ;

- Strategies used in online learning should allow all senses to work together and maintain learners' attention by stressing critical and relevant information. This can be realized through pre-instructional questions or pre-requisite test questions.
- To satisfy individual differences and cognitive styles, information should be delivered in multiple ways to make them easier to be processed and stored in long-term memory, such as transmitting information through visual and textual modes and integrating real-life examples.
- Learners should focus on what they are learning, interact with other students, and monitor their success in the online environment.

- **Constructivism**

According to Anderson (2008), "Constructivists see learners as active rather than passive. Knowledge is not received from the outside or someone else; rather, the individual learner interprets and processes what is received through the senses to create knowledge" (p.30). The constructivist view is based on the idea of knowledge construction. Learners activ0ely

construct knowledge based on their own learning experience; the learner is the heart of the learning process, with the teacher serving as a guide and facilitator. According to Anderson (2008), instructional designers must consider the following factors in designing instructions for online learning ;

- Instructors must have strong collaborative online guidance to motivate learners to construct their knowledge, build a sense of initiative learning and communicating with other students as well as the teacher (Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001, as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 31).
- Collaborative and cooperative learning should be promoted to facilitate learning (Hooper & Hannafin, 1991 as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 31). Working in groups stimulates students' metacognition and provides them with real-world knowledge. In online learning, learners must be grouped based on their expertise and learning styles to benefit from each other.
- Instructors should encourage students to take control over the learning process by giving feedback and guidance. Hence, online learners should be motivated to apply, assess, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and reflect on what they learn (Berge, 2002, as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 33).
- Online instructors should focus on the learning materials and offer meaningful and illustrative learning. Therefore.

➢ **Connectivism**

Siemens (2005) proposed an alternative theory of learning called connectivism that emphasises technology and networks in education. He believes that learning in the 21st century requires a practical approach based on the most relevant learning theories, social structure, and technology. The learning process is regarded as a continual process where new information is continually being acquired, and learners should be able to memorize, understand and distinguish between important and unimportant information as well as how new information changes the outdated views (Siemens, 2005). Ultimately, as learning occurs in a network environment, individuals do not have an innate control over the learning process because others in the network constantly change information (Siemens 2004, as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 34). According to Anderson (2008), Siemens (2004) proposes a set of guidelines for instructional designers to develop learning materials based on the connectivist theory ;

- Due to the huge amount of data published, learners should be encouraged to be self-directed and explore the new information from various sources as well as distinguishing between important and unimportant ones. Hence, they will be able to develop a credible and reliable knowledge base.

- As living in an era of globalization, learners must be able to interact with people all over the world to exchange opinions and perspectives in a networked environment where they can learn at any time and from any location (Ally, 2005, as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 34).
- With learners, teachers, and professionals from all over the world, the internet transfers education into a global classroom. Therefore, students and professionals must collaborate to ensure that they are constantly developing and updating their skills.

2.3. Online learning tools:

- **Digital library tools**

According to Lynch (1995), a digital library is "an electronic information access system that offers the user a coherent view of an organized, selected, and managed body of information" (as cited in Sharifabadi, 2006, p. 390). Jarboe (2001) emphasises the significance of the correlation between distance learning environments and digital library tools for creating innovative ways to improve learning and teaching, including integrating assessment principles and peer review of the designed materials (as cited in Sharifabadi, 2006,

p. 394). A set of goals have been identified for digital library tools in supporting the use of e- learning, including augmenting the possibility of understanding both quality and quantity of resources. In this way, digital libraries are practical in yielding opportunities to work independently and have extended life learning (Sharifabadi, 2006).

- **Knowledge representation tools**

The representation of knowledge is a phenomenon studied for a long time in cognitive psychology, education, and knowledge engineering, and more recently in areas of intelligent systems and artificial intelligence (Buitrago & Chiappe, 2019). Visualization has been applied in knowledge representation to assist learners in problem-solving by identifying patterns and structural relationships in graphical representations of data, mainly when students learn about abstract concepts and theories, especially objects that cannot be observed easily (Ursyn, 2013).

A study conducted by Buitrago and Chiappe (2019) reveals that there are a variety of knowledge representation instruments (KRTs) that are used for depicting and visualising knowledge in online educational environments, including schemes, such as conceptual maps, mind maps, knowledge maps, and tree diagrams which are mainly used in the visual representation of concepts, ideas, processes, and events. In this way, KRTs are used as concrete visualisation tools of the concepts and the relationship between them. These relationships are given linguistic use, as they act as abstract mental representations that a speaker makes and allow him/her to use language in formal and informal contexts (Buitrago & Chiappe, 2019).

- **Curriculum tools**

Curriculum tools are used in both academic settings and virtual learning environments to promote effective learning. They are implemented to support six main tasks: interaction, collaboration, assessment, delivery organization and creation (Piotrowski, 2010, as cited in Costa, Alvelos & Teixeira, 2012, p. 335). There are different models of curriculum instruments

such as Blackboard and WebCT for commercial purposes and Moodle platforms which are more used in educational settings (Costa et al., 2012).

Moodle platform implies content organization and interaction among teachers and students as well as students and their peers (Gomez & Almashdeh, 2016, as cited in *Cacheiro*-Gonzalez, Medina-Rivilla, Dominguez-Garrido & Medina-Dominguez, 2019, p. 75). It embodies the use of traditional classroom components to expand face-to-face learning and create communicative features through pictures and video tutorials that motivate students to use their reflective skills. Hence, the learning platform essentially aims to use relevant visible resources thet enable emotional and social involvement in the virtual environment (*Cacheiro*-Gonzalez et al., 2019). Moodle has been described as a system that allows sharing information through synchronous and asynchronous approaches with the requirement of a wide range of glossary, quiz, surveys, assignments and feedback (Costa et al., 2012).

2.4. Online sessions and students'performance

- **Learners' responsibilities**

According to Li and Wong (2018), learners within the online education environment usually have greater flexibility over their learning and time spent on the assignment. Time flexibility refers to the start and end dates of a course, whereas curriculum flexibility refers to the level of difficulty of course material, the order in which topics are discussed, and the subject to be learned. In this sense, learners with job advancement can have such rewards to balance family and job obligations. Consequently, they can access learning resources in the order that suits them and study at their pace in the e-learning environment. (as cited in Kokoç, 2019, pp. 11-12).

Research findings suggest that when learners study at their own choice, they are more likely to be motivated to engage with online learning experiences. According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), Behavioral participation, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement are three critical agents for successful academic achievement. Self-evaluation required for learning success refers to as behavioural involvement. Cognitive engagement encompasses learners' ability to expend effort and time to comprehend a subject or a challenging task. Emotional engagement relates to students' feelings and emotions against various aspects of the learning process, all of which influence their study habits (as cited in Kokoç, 2019, p. 4).

- **Effectiveness**

According to Thomson (2010), the format of online learning does not only provide the course material over the web, but it also offers new ways for teaching/learning. With its emphasis on asynchronous learning, i.e. learning at any time and any place, the interaction between students and teachers occurs through one on one conversation. He believes that teachers who value this flexible character of online learning are more likely to know their

students, use a certain level of tone to support learners' efforts, and cover their strengths and weaknesses. In this way, learners integrate into wiggle rooms comfortably and have the opportunity to ask questions or make comments about misunderstanding issues. Thus, e-learning offers a good deal of interaction between teachers and learners whereby instructors support reflective pace learning through opening conversations and sharing experiences with the subject matter. Accordingly, the use of web-based learning adequately is an effective way to maintain a strong community and a sense of confidence which result in a more enjoyable and attractive learning process (Thomson, 2010).

- **Online Discussion Forums**

Onyema, Deborah, Alsayed, Naveed, & Sanober (2019) define online discussion forums as "electronic platforms for online learning, discussion, knowledge sharing, and information dissemination"(p. 4854). These boards boost the willingness of learners to upload tutorial videos related to their learning for further discussion with their peers. ODF helps them read other peers' threads and draw interpretations from what has been discussed. Additionally, learners can have extensive access to course content, whereby they can present textual evidence that analyzes ambiguous questions to improve both the quality and consistency of learning (Onyema et al., 2019).

- **Practice Quizzes**

Johnson and Aragon (2002) claim that learning can not be separated from cognition, and therefore learners use some forms of enjoyable quizzes to create effective online learning. In that, they can use "*Think pair share"*, which is an effective technique that allows learners to test their background information and incorporate new ones. Johnson and Aragon (2002) add, "In instructional design course where students are expected to create complete training module, they need many specific tasks such as conducting a needs assessment, developing training plans, and creating instructional media" (p. 6).

2.5. Implementing Theories on online learners' academic performance in online learning

All aspects of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), constructivism, and communication theories are considered to significantly influence learners' academic performance in online learning (Al Alwan et al., 2019).

- **Constructivism**

The constructivist view is based on the idea of knowledge construction, in the sense that learners actively construct knowledge based on their own learning experience (Anderson, 2008). This view involves three significant aspects as follows:

Interaction for learning

Gunawardena (1995) says that "no interaction equals no learning" (as cited in Tu & Carry, 2003, p. 52). Nichols (2008) states that "Interaction has been used in online learning to denote anything from clicking on a link to interpersonal dialogue among many participants" (as cited in Hartnett, 2016, p. 10). In online learning, interaction makes students more involved and

active learners, motivated to construct their knowledge, and encouraged to achieve a better transaction of ideas and information between all students (Alalwan et al., 2019). Consequently, to optimise learning, online teachers and instructional designers should build an interactive learning environment. And then, by using technology, instructors could pass responsibility for learning to learners and encourage them to decide where, when, how,

and what they know (Tu & Carry, 2003). Generally speaking, there are four types of interactions; Moore (1989) suggests three kinds of interaction in the earlier generation of distance learning. These are learner-content interactions, learner-instructor interaction, and learner-learner interaction. Hillman et al. (1994) identify the fourth type of interaction: learner-interference interaction (as cited in Hartnett, 2016).

Collaboration for learning

According to Hooper and Hannafin (1991), Collaborative and cooperative learning should be promoted to facilitate learning (as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 31). Working in groups allows students to foster their metacognition and provides them with real-world knowledge (Anderson, 2008).

Collaborative learning is defined as the description of situations "… in which two or more subjects build synchronously and interactively a joint solution to some problem" (Dillenbourg and Schneider, 1995, as cited in Curtis & Lawson, 2001, p. 22). That is, collaborative learning occurs when learning tasks are more complex and require more problem-solving skills. Every step in the online learning process is covered by collaboration- from planning to evaluation and ongoing support for online programmes (Vandenhouten, Gallagher-Lepak, Reilly & Ralston-Berg, 2014). It may take discussion amongst the whole class or in small groups by assigning team activities (Faja, 2013). Hence, collaborative learning may also be classified in terms of process-oriented wherein discussions may or may not result in a product, or product-oriented-online collaboration, which on the other hand may result in a final product, such as essay, project etc. (Macdonald, 2003, as cited in Faja, 2013, p. 43).

2.6. Engagement

According to Kuh (2009), engagement results from a students' involvement in learning either by engaging in a conversation or collaborating on solving problems, which encourages students to participate in course activities in the future (as cited in Meyer, 2014, p. 6). Research in this respect show that engagement in online learning is critical for learners' progress and success. By offering opportunities for students to connect their teachers, other students, and learning materials, instructors can create a coherent and immersive learning atmosphere far from the students' feelings of isolation that are more likely to occur in the online learning environment (Dixson, 2010).

In online learning, students may not have the chance to meet their teachers face-to- face. Thus, instructors feel that it is better to reinforce the virtual or online sessions with the phone,

e-mail, blackboard or audio/video conferencing to be more available to students in the online learning process (Deschaine & Whale, 2017).

- **Technology Acceptance Model**

Technology acceptance model (TAM) is an intention-based model used to explain and predict user acceptance of computer technology (Hu, Chau, Sheng & Tam, 1999). It is also defined as an "individual's psychological state with regard to his/her voluntary or intended use of particular technology" (Hendrick et al., 1948, as cited in Masrom, 2007, p. 02). Generally speaking, online learning based on its mission of providing students with the learning material on using the internet and web technologies through the computer interface (Masrom, 2007).

The TAM emphasises two central values, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, to reinforce the user's behavioural intention of using computer technology. It was developed by Davis (1989) based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, as cited in Masrom, 2007, p. 02). The TRA suggests that "individual behaviour is driven by behavioural intention where the behavioural intention is a function of an individual's attitude towards the behaviour and subjective norms surrounding the performance of the behaviour" (Masrom, 2007, p. 02). In other words, behaviour is the function of both intentions and attitudes. As determinants of users' behaviour, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of technology are used to predict and detect users attitude towards using technology, behavioural intention and actual usage. (Marsom, 2007)

In TAM, perceived usefulness is defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" (Davis, 1989, p. 320). That is, it refers to the degree to which individuals believe that using technology will boost their performance. In contrast, perceived ease of use is referred to as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (Davis, 1989, p. 320). This idea indicates that using technology in learning is simple and requires fewer efforts from online learners. Research in the field demonstrate that both perceived ease of use and usefulness of new technology are determinants for the learners' attitude towards the latest technology, determining the user intention to use the system.

In a study conducted by Farhat (2012), he posits a positive connection between the desire of students to use online learning, their attitude towards online education, and their perception of the usefulness and ease of use of e-learning (Farhat, 2012). In that, we can say that learners' intentions and attitudes towards online learning are a condition for a successful online learning process and to enrich their education performance.

- **Online communication**

Online communication is defined by Harstinski (2009) as "the process of learning by taking part and maintaining relations with others. It is a complex process comprising doing, communicating, thinking, feeling and belonging, which occurs both online and offline" (as cited in Widjaja & Chen, 2017, p. 76). The learning process in the online environment is generally individualized. Although the instructor has fewer opportunities to connect with the

entire class, he can motivate learners to create forums to raise questions, confront one another and share new information. Therefore, a course designer is enthusiastic to determine collaborative instruments that enable learners to take an active role in the online platforms by extending interaction with other mentors (Kolodziejczak, Roszak, Ren-Kurc, Kowalewski, & Półjanowicz, 2015).

Kolodziejczak et al. (2015) also maintain that online communication is one of the fundamental strategies that support a pro-active attitude and considers the importance of developing learners' skills in organizing knowledge, reasoning through deductive and inductive approach along with judging and assessing others' opinions. The management of the e-learning context not only requires managing and monitoring the natural development of the conversation but also the management of the communication tool installed on the site. Therefore, the teacher should determine technological problems at the place and resolve them to promote effective online communication (Kolodziejczak et al., 2015).

2.7. Learners' motives to communicate

According to Jacobi (2018), fostering flexibility is an effective way to promote online communication. Thus, students do not only value the teaching expertise as an integral aspect of effective web-based learning, but they also value the convenience of time and place, allowing them to pause and review what has been discussed.

Furthermore, offering clear and meaningful instruction is another pedagogical technique that boosts the willingness of students to communicate successfully. In that, teachers may support their lectures by contributing to the body of knowledge through posting links to videos or websites that they believe are connected to the course content. Additionally, in enhancing the perceived capacity of students, a balance between demands and freedom to communicate is vital, whereby learners respect their teacher's guidelines and freely express their thoughts in the e-learning forum (Jacobi, 2018).

2.8. Perceived ease of communication

Learners are encouraged to communicate effectively through groups. Accordingly, teachers should join small groups seize, which increases learners' anonymity to share more information and create a discussion area for all participants. Moreover, the use of videos, audio, and text provides a visible structure for the course. They help learners integrate into pair projects, debates, and artefacts and therefore ensure a flexible learning framework. Coaching for groups as well provides effective interaction to the individual or the group process. In that, learners can induce other peers to discuss their topics by intervening in the communication area and sharing their perspectives (Mayende, Prinz, & Isabwe, 2017).

2.9. Online learning challenges

Online learning is subjected to a set of possible problems that may lead to an imperfect learning process. Despite the merits of e-learning, some studies have revealed many challenges

by which online learning may be affected. However, Thomas Russell's "no significant different aspect" indicates that the learning outcomes are not highly affected by the delivery medium used in transmitting information, either online or face-to-face, but it is influenced by the instruction method used within the Medium (Gilbert, 2015).

One of the generally examined aspects concerning online learning is the " lack of community and peer interactions". In contrast to face-to-face learning, distance learning may not successfully achieve a sense of community where learners actively participate and interact in the learning process. As a result, students will struggle to accomplish the objectives of their online learning (Sadera, Robertson, Song & Midon, 2009). In that, learners who use distance learning as means of education may report feelings of contemplation, isolation, and lack of interaction. E-learning is realized as being counterproductive when it comes to improving learners' communication skills (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014). A study by Rovai, Wighting & Liu (2005) indicates that :

Online students score lower on both classroom social community and school social community than their on-campus peers. These results suggest that online students feel a weaker sense of connectedness and belonging than on-campus students who attend face-to-face classes, telling online students are more likely to drop out of their online programs than are on-campus students (Rovai et al., 2005, p. 369).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the absence of a positive sense of community and social interaction in an online learning environment contributes to lower online learning achievements, poor performance and a marked tendency to skip online sessions. In response to these deficiencies, there are a variety of ways by which the instructor may realize a sense of community and connectedness among peers, mainly through implementing programs aimed at improving learners' involvement and interaction with peers, instructors, as well as the learning content (Rovai et al., 2005).

Another factor that instructors should note in online learning is "Ensuring motivation". In the same way, as motivation is vital in face-to-face educational settings, it is also significant significant in online learning classrooms (Hartnett, 2012). Motivation is an integral part of the online learning process because its absence may contribute to poor academic performance. This idea is confirmed by Savenye (2005), who claims that "Students who lacked independence and self-motivation overall had lower success rates than their counterparts" (as cited in Gilbert, 2015, p. 13). Usually, online learning assignments and lectures tend to take the reading and/or writing forms. Therefore, this may be quite challenging to some students with limited reading and writing abilities (Donlevy, 2003, as cited in Gilbert, 2015, p. 13). Then, they will be less motivated in the learning process, and they will quickly get distracted. Similarly, unlike face-to-face learning, teachers in online education are not always available. This would leave the learner with a sense of being uninvolved and isolated in the learning process.

"Poor accessibility in Remote Area" is another challenge that online learners may face in online learning. Learners who are not updated with the new technological development may

face difficulties in attending online sessions. In that, students may not be able to use the different internet applications, such as receiving and sending emails, using the other platform web browsers such as Google Chrome and Firefox etc. to browse information, and using the internet for chatting, especially video conferencing, as well as using Moodle platform to have access to lectures. Besides, many students may lack high-quality internet that enables them to attend online sessions or upload courses from Moodle platform (Dhull & Sakshi, 2017).

3. An investigation of the integration of online learnning in teaching 2nd year EFL students in 2021:

To gather data from both teachers and students, two research tools are chosen: a questionnaire for students and an interview with teachers. The primary purpose of the reliance on questionnaire and interview is to gain a large amount of information related to our research study in a significant period and to ensure the findings as well as reach the objective from the study.

3.1. Analysis of the students' questionnaire

The following data represent the most important results of the questionnaire:

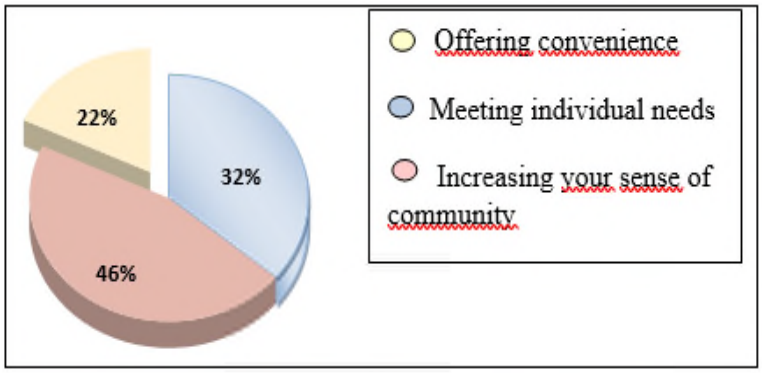
- **Sudents' perception about the effectiveness of e-learning**

Table01: Sudents' perception about the effectiveness of e-learning.

Responses	Number	Percentage
Offering convenience	11	22%
Metting individual needs	16	32%
Increasing your sense of communitywith your instructor and fellow students	23	46%
Total	50	100%

Source: Prepared by the author based on the survey results

Figure01: Sudents' perception about the effectiveness of e-learning.

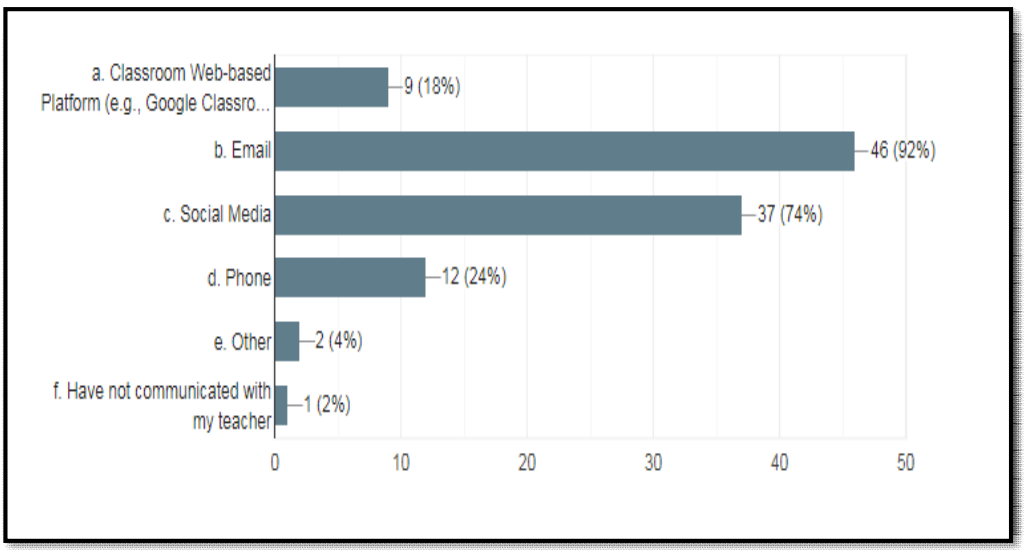


Source: prepared by the author based on the findings of Table 1.

As the results show, 46% believed that online learning increases a sense of community with the instructor and fellow students. Thus, within the virtual environment, students can create cooperative learning and consequently effective learning outcomes. 32% are with the option of meeting individual needs. This indicates that students are satisfied with the services promoted by e-learning which enable them to gain technical and research skills that are useful for their educational career and future endeavours. 22% declared that online courses are effective in offering convenience. In that, students can proactively work whenever they want without being restricted by time or place constraints.

- **Students-teachers' communication in online learning.**

Figure 02: Students-teachers' communication in online learning.



Source: Prepared by the author based on the survey results

The answers that are gained to this question came varied. 92% of the respondents said that communication among students and their teachers during the closing of university buildings was achieved through Email. At the same time, 74% of participants selected social media as the

second practical application to ensure communication and contact in the online environment. This indicates that Social media and Email are the most flexible ways to ensure communication and effective online contact. The majority of people spend a lot of time on their websites and apps; therefore, It contributes to facilitating their online learning. Then, classroom web-based platform and phone come in the third choice with the rate of 18% and 24% respectively. After that, only one respondent mentioned that he had never communicated with his teachers during the closing of university buildings.

If you selected "other" technology-based applications for the previous question, please specify.

In the end, participants are provided extra space where they had the chance to insert any other application that they use to communicate with their teachers. 4% of the informants specified group Messenger as more effective in interacting with their peers and teachers at the same time.

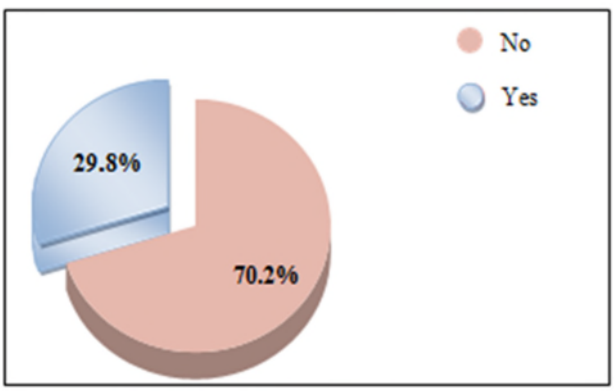
- **Students' online performance:**

Table 02: Students' description of their online performance.

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	14	29.8%
No	33	70.2%
Total	47	100%

Source: Prepared by the author based on the survey results

Figure03: Students' description of their online performance.



Source: prepared by the author based on the findings of Table 2.

The first part of this question requires Yes or No answers. A rate of 70.2% did not describe themselves as successful online students. Only 29.8% regarded themselves as successful online students.

If Yes, what makes you a successful online student? If No, what are the reasons for your lack of success with online classes?

The participants who choose either Yes or No options are asked to specify the reason. Unfortunately, five students did not justify. Four participants who describe themselves as successful online students stated that e-learning gives them time to access the Moodle platform and balance their study and daily-life activities. Five students believed that when they are exposed to online education, they are more likely to open discussions with their peers and share information related to the course content. Three of them stated that e-learning enables them to use online materials that suit their level. Those who do not describe themselves as successful online students; however, have different perspectives. The majority argued about the bad internet connection and the complex nature of the Moodle platform, whereby they struggle to get access and upload their courses. Seven (7) students claimed that instructors share their courses' knowledge in blocks. Thus, they depend on the production of heavy-text content, while four (4) students assumed that they used to take notes and ask direct questions to their teachers. Therefore, the lack of feedback and explanation in the virtual community does not fulfil their educational needs.

3.2. Analysis of the Teachers' Interview

- **What can you say on the coverage of the policy and existing strategies for developing distance education in Algerian universities?**

All teachers ensured that the current measures to develop distance education in Algeria are not enough and ineffective in implementing e-learning as a new method. They argued that not all teachers at university have benefited from online teaching training. Teachers' online training should cover all university teachers and not only the newly recruited ones; this again ensures what we have mentioned in the second item. Besides, putting just files on Moodle platforms without any online discussion or meeting with the students do not represent online education. Universities must promote the appropriate tools to make interactive, attractive, and beneficial learning, at least for students who have significant difficulties in understanding the learning materials in traditional classes.

- **What are the challenges that you have faced in teaching online?**

All teachers believed that the problem of the network system is the greatest challenge that they may encounter in online teaching. Some students do not have internet access; subsequently, they will not be able to access to Moodle platform and then there will be no way for interaction between teachers and students. Additionally, the lack of motivation and the increased sense of carelessness on the part of students towards online learning may stand as a barrier for instructors to achieve a successful online learning process. Likewise, poor

accessibility in a remote area is another challenge that teachers can face regarding the capacity of both teachers and students in mastering the new technologies adopted in online learning environments.

- **What resources can be taken to improve EFL learners' performance in distance learning in Algerian universities?**

The majority of teachers suggested improving video conferencing as a tool to promote effective e-learning. One of the interviewees proposed to open Edx. According to him, Edx is another platform of online learning resource that enables students to improve their academic performance. Thus, It is a massive open online course where students can enrol on the courses they want, and even teachers can create their courses and invite their students to engage with them.

4. Findings:

Based on the interpretation of both teachers' interview and students' questionnaire, it is clear that all participants are dissatisfied with the new online education system. Though the merits of online learning, traditional higher education is unlikely to be replaced by online learning but only as an alternative or an extension to ameliorate the conventional learning process.

First, in online learning, the problem is not measuring the online components of courses, but it is a matter of how technology may be employed in various courses' types. Hence, some instructors fail to adapt and change their course designs and instructions to the online environment due to the lack of teacher training as well as necessary tools and resources. Therefore, both teachers and students see that there must be an implementation of the technology-based learning tools, including discussion forums, quizzes, charts, etc., which demonstrate the practical side of Moodle platform, to help instructors in representing the learning content with sufficient explanation and in various forms that correspond with learners' styles as well as the types of courses. These technology based-tools allow students to control their learning process by identifying objectives, taking decisions and assessing their performance. Finally, one of the challenges in online education is to create a sense of community. Indeed, effective online learning is dependent on motivated students and well-trained instructors. Therefore, both learners and instructors must cooperate to build a thriving online community through achieving interaction and collaboration.

To sum up, in the coming few years, online learning may become the leading mode of education. Therefore, efforts will be made to improve the quality of online education by promoting effective communication and interaction among students and instructors in the virtual environment, besides online learning should not be limited to web-based instructions,

but it should integrate online students into face-to-face educational environment to achieve a balanced education system known as blended learning.

5. Conclusion:

The main results reveal that both EFL teachers and students are dissatisfied with the online education system in the current circumstances. It contributes to a poor learning process which results in teachers' low morale and students' low achievements. Therefore, It is concluded that Online learning is not applied in our university as it should be till today. However, by addressing the challenges which hinder the online learning process, this form of studying will gain advocates every day.

In the coming years, online learning will continue to spread, and the internet will become the leading mode of education. However, it still does not have a large number of advocates. Therefore, efforts should be made to improve the quality of online education, and the Ministry of education needs to make provisions for online learning in the law of education to facilitate the implementation of blended learning. In that, a significant number of students will prefer to be engaged in both traditional and distance learning environment. Therefore, with instructors' supervision and the availability of resources in the virtual world, students will be able to actively participate with other students online and hold discussions with their teachers outside the classroom at any time. Indeed, as teachers, we must reconsider the real essence of distance learning and gain more access to the online learning tools required for creating an effective learning community which is the basis of teaching in general and language teaching in particular. This will contribute to successful online learning as an extension to traditional learning.

Recommendations

Along with the faster rate of technological progress, the internet in education creates what is known as online learning. The latter has grown fast and marked its presence in higher education due to its flexibility and affordability, especially for people who cannot learn because of their professional life, physical distance, health problems, and many other reasons. However, traditional higher education is unlikely to be replaced by online learning but only an alternative or an extension to ameliorate the conventional learning process.

- ✓ **Launching E-learning in Algeria**

Integrating the internet into education will generate profound changes in the education system. However, it is inefficient to invest resources in universities' informational technology hardware and software without fostering teachers' professional development (Guemide et al., 2012).It is agreed that teachers play a crucial role in online education; technology may be the basis of online learning, but it never replaces the teacher's place. Therefore, teachers' training is required to improve teachers' professional development, which boosts students' academic performance.

- ✓ **Teachers' Professional Training**

Integrating e-learning is necessary to meet the challenges of improving teachers' professional development in Algeria (Guemide et al., 2012). If teachers receive training

courses, they will be introduced not only to the technological means but also how to make use of ICTs adequately in order to achieve effective learning outcomes. Thus, the effective use of electronic models provides teachers with the required skills to observe, manage and assess students' work in the online environment (Ertmer, 2001, as cited in Marczak, 2013). Therefore, training on Moodle platforms is vital to serving effective pedagogical and communicative functions to online education.

Indeed, in Skikda University, Moodle platform is excessively based on uploading text-based materials, while it may allow various ways of presenting the learning materials that enable teachers to create more interactive online space, mainly through chat, forums, workshops, quizzes, and voiced threads. Overall, teachers play a crucial role in online education; technology may be the basis of online learning, but it never replaces the teacher's place. Therefore, the Ministry of education needs to make provisions for online learning in the law of education regarding teachers' online teaching training.

- ✓ **Online Learning Community**

One of the challenges that instructors may face in online education is to create a sense of community in the online space. Therefore, teachers' emphasis should not be only on the technological complexities that learners may face but also on the learners' engagement and community development in the online setting. According to Casimiro (2016), there are five conditions that support online student engagement: instructor facilitation, learning community, and moderating the crucial factors that suit the level of students' responses. In that, he states, "of this five, the nature of discussion questions, quality of students response, and learning community appeared to be the best to promote cognitive engagement" (p.441). Additionally, it is clear that the more instructors understand the online process and the online students, the better they design online courses that meet the students' needs regarding interaction and communication among them. In that, instructors must foster critical learning

spaces to increase students' sense of imagination and critical thinking along with relating the group discussions to their real-life experiences. Therefore, students will be highly motivated to get in online discussions and promote cognitive engagement.

- ✓ **Blended Learning**

Well-designed and effectively delivered courses are the way to achieve the possibility of blending traditional classrooms and online space. The type of online learning, which extensively based on online sessions without integrating face-to-face contact, may be quite challenging to be achieved, while blended learning may provide enormous promise. Therefore, blended learning can be the key to minimize the negative impact of online learning. According

to Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2013), "blended learning is the inspiration of much of the innovation, both pedagogically and technologically in higher education" (p. 20). Besides, this concept is further explained as mixing the traditional learning environment and the online learning environment, which comes to be used as new technologies expand the opportunity for distributing communication and interaction (Bonk & Graham, 2006). Therefore, instructors should not be limited to web-based instructions, but they should instead integrate the online students into the face-to-face educational environment.

In this form of studying, both teachers and students must be active in the learning process (T-S interaction method) where they depend on one another. According to Shivam and Singh (2015), with technology implementation in the traditional education system, students' engagement has increased. In that, they work as a partner of the teacher, who in turn facilitates and guides the learning process. Thus, instructors should make efforts to develop students' critical thinking and keep them digitally safe by setting a deep understanding and creating a sense of community.

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