

EFL Instructors' Experience with Online Teaching during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Recommendations

تجربة أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مع التدريس عبر الإنترنت أثناء جائحة كوفيد-19: التحديات والتوصيات

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Abstract :

This research paper aims to explore the challenges faced by Algerian EFL teachers in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the various obstacles that hinder effective teaching and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid transition to online education, which posed significant challenges for EFL instructors in Algeria, including issues related to technology, pedagogy, and student engagement. In order to answer the research question, data was collected through an online questionnaire, distributed via email to the participants, which included multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions designed to probe into various challenges related to E-learning. To this end, the findings highlight critical issues related to technological infrastructure, pedagogical adaptation, and emotional strain, revealing that the majority of teachers reported frequent internet connectivity issues and felt overwhelmed by increased workloads. Accordingly, it is recommended that Algerian educational authorities invest in improving digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, and provide comprehensive training programs for teachers to enhance their digital literacy and assessment techniques.

Keywords: Covid-19, online teaching, EFL teachers, challenges and problems.

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف التحديات التي يواجهها أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجزائر في التدريس عبر الإنترنت أثناء جائحة كوفيد-19، مع التركيز على العقبات المختلفة التي تعيق التدريس والتعلم الفعالين. لقد استلزم وباء كوفيد-19 الانتقال السريع إلى التعليم عبر الإنترنت، مما فرض تحديات كبيرة على مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجزائر، بما في ذلك القضايا المتعلقة بالتكنولوجيا، وعلم التربية، وإشراك الطلاب. وللإجابة على سؤال البحث، تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان عبر الإنترنت، تم توزيعه عبر البريد الإلكتروني على المشاركين، والذي تضمن أسئلة متعددة الخيارات، ومقياس ليكرت، وأسئلة مفتوحة مصممة لاستكشاف التحديات المتعلقة بالتعليم الإلكتروني. ولتحقيق هذه الغاية، تسلط النتائج الضوء على القضايا الحرجة المتعلقة بالبنية التحتية التكنولوجية، والتكيف التربوي، والضغط العاطفي، وكشفت أن غالبية الأساتذة أفادوا بمشكلات متكررة في الاتصال بالإنترنت والشعور بالإرهاق بسبب زيادة أعباء العمل. وعليه، يوصى بأن تستثمر السلطات التعليمية الجزائرية في تحسين البنية التحتية الرقمية، وخاصة في المناطق الريفية، وتوفير برامج تدريبية شاملة للأساتذة لتعزيز معرفتهم الرقمية وتقنيات التقييم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوفيد-19، التدريس عبر الإنترنت، أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التحديات والمشاكل.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered every aspect of life, and the education sector was no exception. Around the globe, educational institutions faced the need to abruptly shift to online platforms as governments imposed lockdowns and social distancing measures to curb the spread of the virus. Algeria, like many countries, resorted to remote teaching in an attempt to maintain continuity in education. This transition to online learning, while necessary, posed numerous challenges, particularly for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructors who rely heavily on interactive, communicative teaching methods. The sudden shift to distance education revealed gaps in digital infrastructure, technical skills, and pedagogical preparedness, leading to difficulties for both students and educators (Hodges et al., 2020).

In the case of Algeria, the challenges were compounded by the lack of preparedness in terms of digital tools and infrastructure. While the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) played a crucial role in sustaining education during this period, many teachers and students struggled to adapt to the online learning environment (Makhlouf, 2020). This study aims to explore the issues faced by EFL instructors during the pandemic and offers recommendations based on their experiences.

This paper aims to explore the challenges faced by Algerian EFL teachers in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, it seeks to answer the following research question: What are the main challenges associated with online teaching in the context of EFL instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic in Algeria?

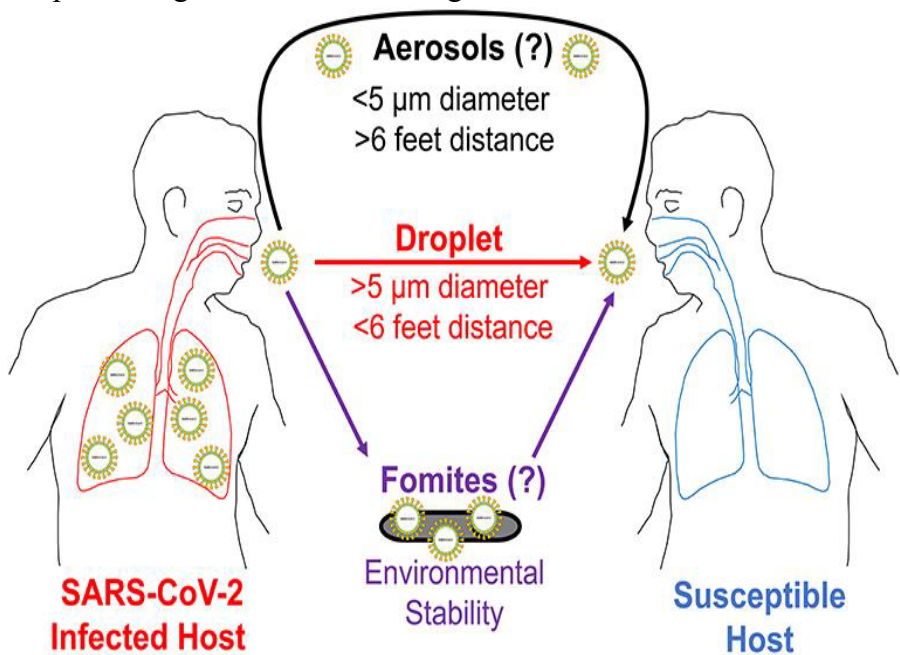
The study hypothesizes that online teaching process during the pandemic faced significant challenges due to infrastructural, pedagogical, and technological limitations, which negatively impacted both students' learning outcomes and teachers' ability to assess effectively.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is an abbreviation that stands for Corona-Virus Disease 2019 which is the most dangerous infectious disease that did strongly threaten the whole world and created a wave of fear and anxiety cause of which the entire world had been extremely changed. Unfortunately, December 2019 was the beginning of the corona virus outbreak that was originated in Wuhan (China)

and infected the whole world. This disease has common symptoms like fever, cough, extreme tiredness, headache, loss of taste and smell, and nasal congestion, in addition to other less common symptoms. The World Health Organization (WHO) had claimed that approximately 1 out of 5 persons may be infected and be seriously ill and they may have various difficulties of breathing. It also sheds red light on the danger that threatens older people, especially those with chronic illnesses like diabetes, heart, blood pressure and lungs problems (WHO, 2020). Moreover, this virus can be transmitted through physical contact, or through droplets produced by infected persons while coughing, sneezing or even talking. It can also be transmitted through touching contaminated things and objects. Accordingly, keeping distance (at least 1 meter), washing hands, and using sanitizers are the most important steps to protect oneself from being infected (Smith, 2020). In this regard, specific severe limitations had been imposed like: closing restaurants, theatres and entertainment venues, restricting travel, and preventing face-to-face learning.



(Figure 01: Transmission of Covid-19 (Galbadage, Peterson, &Gunasekera, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions worldwide to transition rapidly to online teaching, profoundly impacting instructors and students alike. This literature review examines various studies focusing on EFL

(English as a Foreign Language) instructors' experiences with online teaching during this unprecedented crisis, discussing the challenges faced, perceptions of e-learning, and recommendations for future practice. However, the perception of e-learning during the pandemic varied among instructors. Arabeche and Soudani (2021) conducted a study that highlighted the mixed feelings of Algerian university teachers towards e-learning. While some educators appreciated the flexibility and accessibility provided by online platforms, many expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness of virtual teaching in fostering meaningful learning experiences. This sentiment aligns with findings by Dhawan (2020), who referred to online learning as a "panacea" in crisis but also acknowledged its limitations, such as technical issues and lack of engagement.

In a blended learning context, Comas-Quinn (2011) explored teachers' experiences and noted that while instructors learned to adapt to online teaching, the shift required significant adjustments in their teaching methodologies. This transition exposed gaps in their technical skills and pedagogical approaches, emphasizing the need for professional development in digital competencies.

1.2. Challenges Faced by Instructors

Numerous challenges arose for EFL instructors during the transition to online teaching. McIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer (2020) identified common coping strategies employed by language teachers, including leveraging technology to maintain student engagement and seeking peer support. However, the study also revealed barriers such as inadequate training in online teaching methods and insufficient institutional support. Moorhouse (2020) described how a face-to-face teacher education course was abruptly moved online, forcing instructors to adapt their content and delivery methods quickly. This "forced" transition underscored the lack of preparation many educators had for online teaching, leading to feelings of overwhelm and anxiety. Furthermore, Mailizar et al. (2020) highlighted specific barriers faced by secondary school mathematics teachers, which are similarly applicable to EFL instructors, including issues related to students' access to technology and internet connectivity.

Several studies have documented the difficulties faced by EFL instructors during the pandemic. For instance, Moorehouse (2020) highlighted that many instructors struggled with the abrupt shift to online platforms, facing technical issues and a lack of training in digital tools. This study indicated that instructors often felt overwhelmed and underprepared, leading to decreased instructional quality and student engagement. Similarly, Hodges et al. (2020)

emphasized that the rapid transition was often misconceived as simple remote teaching rather than a well-structured online learning experience. This misalignment led to confusion among educators about effective pedagogical practices. In this sense, technological challenges were pervasive, with many teachers lacking the necessary digital literacy and infrastructure to conduct effective online lessons. Hodges et al. (2020) also argue that the distinction between emergency remote teaching (ERT) and traditional online education is crucial. Unlike carefully designed online courses, ERT during the pandemic was a reactive measure, implemented with little planning or support. As a result, EFL instructors struggled to utilize learning management systems (LMS) and communication platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom effectively (Dawane, 2020). In Algeria, the situation was exacerbated by poor internet connectivity and a lack of access to adequate devices, particularly in rural areas (Makhlouf, 2020).

Moreover, the pedagogical challenges were also significant. Language teaching relies heavily on interaction, real-time feedback, and non-verbal communication, elements that are difficult to replicate in an online environment (Rapanta et al., 2020). EFL instructors reported difficulties in maintaining student engagement and participation, as students were often passive recipients rather than active participants in their learning process. Teachers also found it challenging to assess students' progress accurately, given the limitations of online platforms for conducting assessments (Onyema et al., 2020). Cheating and plagiarism became common problems, as students found it easier to collaborate inappropriately or seek external help during online assessments (Mailizar et al., 2020).

In addition to technological and pedagogical hurdles, instructors faced emotional and psychological challenges. The sudden transition to online teaching, coupled with increased workloads and the isolation brought on by the pandemic, contributed to high levels of stress and burnout among teachers (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Teachers also noted a decline in student motivation, with many students disengaging from the learning process due to the lack of face-to-face interaction and the novelty of online education (Apriyanti, 2020). In Algerian context, Chelghoum & Chelghoum (2021) claimed that the mental health implications of remote teaching, noting increased stress and anxiety among instructors. Their findings indicated that many educators were

unprepared to handle the emotional burden of supporting students while managing their well-being. This highlights a critical gap in institutional support for instructors' mental health during such transitions.

The pandemic-induced shift to online learning brought to light significant challenges that had previously gone unnoticed or unaddressed. The literature on EFL teaching during the pandemic presents a variety of perspectives on the issues faced by instructors and students alike, ranging from technological difficulties to pedagogical challenges and emotional strain.

Despite these challenges, many EFL instructors adapted to the new teaching modality by adopting creative strategies. Moorhouse (2020) found that teachers who invested time in self-directed learning or sought professional development opportunities were more successful in navigating online platforms. The flipped classroom model, where students review materials before class and engage in discussions during synchronous sessions, was an effective method for maintaining student engagement (Chelghoum & Chelghoum, 2021). Teachers also made use of breakout rooms, collaborative tools like Google Docs, and polling features to create a more interactive and engaging online environment (McIntyre et al., 2020).

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research design

This study employs a quantitative research approach to explore the challenges faced by Algerian EFL teachers in conducting online teaching processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was conducted in 2020, during the peak of the pandemic when educational institutions in Algeria were fully reliant on online teaching. Data have been collected through an online questionnaire sent to teachers' Emails so that they access a Google form containing the questions.

2.2. Participants

The research community consists of permanent EFL teachers from different universities in Algeria. The research population consists of 50 EFL teachers from different Algerian universities, including Mohamed Lamine Dabaghine Setif 2, Oran 2, Mentouri Constantine, and Batna 2. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, and their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 15 years.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Data was collected through an online questionnaire, distributed via email to the participants. The questionnaire comprised 15 items, including multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions. The questions were designed to probe into various challenges related to E-learning, such as technological difficulties, student engagement, and teachers' preparedness. One specific question was dedicated to the issue of online assessment, asking participants to identify the main problems they encountered in evaluating student performance through digital platforms.

3. Results and Discussion

2. English Teaching Experience	4 less than 5 years 20 from 5 to 10 years 16 from 10-15 years 10 more than 15 years.
3. Institution	15 teachers teach at Mohamed Lamine Dabaghine, Setif 2 University. 11 teachers teach at Mohamed ben Ahmed Oran 2 University. 11 teachers teach at les frères Mentouri, Constantine University. 13 teachers are from Batna university.

Table 01: Participants Background Information.

The majority of teachers are female. This shows that women make up a larger share of education and there are more female teachers than male teachers in Algeria. The majority of teachers (20) had 5-10 years of experience in teaching English. 16 teachers have 10-15 years of experience. While, 10 teachers have taught for more than 15 years and only 4 had less than 5 years of teaching experience. This shows that most respondents were experienced teachers who could give an informed view. Teachers are from different universities namely Setif, Constanine, Batna and Oran and most of them are from the east of Algeria.

3.1. Technological Challenges

Table 1 illustrates that 80% of teachers reported frequent issues with internet connectivity, which severely impacted their ability to conduct real-time assessments. Moreover, 70% of respondents indicated that their students did not have access to reliable digital devices, further complicating the assessment process.

Table 2: Technological Challenges

Issue	Percentage (%)
Internet connectivity problems	80
Lack of access to devices	70
Unfamiliarity with teaching tools	60

2. Pedagogical Challenges

When asked about the pedagogical difficulties they faced, 60% of teachers expressed concerns about the validity and reliability of online assessments. Teachers reported difficulties in creating tests that accurately measured students' abilities, particularly for language-based skills such as speaking and writing. Moreover, 65% of teachers reported that they had detected instances of cheating during online exams, which they attributed to the lack of supervision.

3. Emotional and Psychological Challenges

The emotional toll on teachers was also significant. As shown in Table 2, 75% of respondents reported feeling overwhelmed by the additional workload required to adapt to online assessment tools, while 70% stated that they experienced high levels of stress due to concerns about academic integrity.

Table 3: Emotional Challenges

Emotional Challenge	Percentage (%)
Increased workload	75
Stress due to academic dishonesty	70

Last section: open-ended questions:

Question 12: what do you dislike concerning the currently distance education?

Four major answers were obtained from teachers' responses. They are arranged in order of recurrence:

- The method of learning and teaching online.
- Learners' lack of concentration and interest.
- Lack of interaction with the students.
- Problems related to impossibility.

Question 13: Do you think the method of online teaching and learning in Algeria during the Covid-19 Pandemic is efficient?

Most of the answers were "yes". Some teachers have justified their answer, stating that this is the only prominent solution in the era of Covid-19 and a better substitute for presential education.

Question 14: Who do you think is responsible for improving the distance education in Algeria?

Emerging themes are:

- The ministry.
- Experts and professors.
- They don't know.

From themes above, teachers in Algeria are unsure who is in charge of the improvement of distance teaching and learning. This is reflected in their broad and imprecise responses

Question 15: Overall, what do you suggest to improve distance education in Algeria?

Identified responses are as follows:

- The ministry's decision: teachers think that the MHESR should set a plan to listen to teachers' views and opinions and discuss with them their concerns.
- Teachers and students training: Both teachers and students need to be trained concerning the use of the different platforms.
- Quality of Internet: the MHESR should take into account the problem of internet and try to fix it as soon as possible.

The findings of this questionnaire revealed that all the questioned teachers without exception agreed on the fact that they faced many problems in distance education during Covid- 19 Pandemic. Teachers stated that there is a huge problem of networking in Algeria. The poor connection of internet is seen as an obstacle for teachers to submit their courses online and to assess their students effectively. Another problem that is reported by the questioned teachers is the affordability of devices. There are some poor students who cannot afford to buy a laptop or a computer to work with and there are no computer laboratories in Algerian universities that help these students to study and get their courses. Mailizar et al (2020) found in their research that the lack of knowledge, skills and devices, internet connections, irrelevance and issues with system access were the problems faced by both teachers and learners during the covid-19 pandemic. According to the teachers, the most frequently reported problems concern students' perseverance and engagement. In fact, with the surge of the Corona virus and with the closure of schools and universities, most students seem no longer to be interested in education and learning. Thus, students have a great lack of motivation towards learning and so do the teachers towards teaching. Moreover, teachers reported that the lack of ICTs facilities (especially from students' part) and technical support as major restrictions to the normal flow of online teaching. Many teachers do not have the skills to use online platforms because they never used them before. So, the training for teachers and students is really unquestionable. This was emphasized by Moorhouse (2020) who indicated that it is imperative to train teachers in online education so that they can explore the factors affecting this type of teaching. All the teachers agreed on the fact that online teaching is problematic especially when it comes to assure some feedback and finally teachers claimed that their students were not psychology prepared for this kind of education since online learning is a type of learning in which both learners and teachers are spatially and temporally separated from one another.

In the literature, there have been many studies on issues and challenges related to subject such as: education and online teaching and learning even before the spread of Covid -19. McIntyre et al. (2020) declared that students encountered many challenges such as: internet connection, lack of concentration, not being acquainted with the different methods and receiving no messages for notifications in a web-based instruction. According to Chelghoum and Chelghoum (2021), students faced many problems related to online learning

such as: administrative problems, student motivation, social interaction, some technical and academic skills. During this pandemic, teachers from different Algerian universities realized all the difficulties and problems that they and their students faced and they tried their best to create a humanizing pedagogy approach that meet the learners' needs.

Limitations

This is a mini-research and a deeper investigation would require: the use of more tools and mixed methods design and triangulation. A larger population could have been better because the number of only 50 teachers is not enough. Time is very limited to address the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges of online teaching faced by Algerian EFL instructors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings highlight critical issues related to technological infrastructure, pedagogical adaptation, and emotional strain. These challenges suggest that significant improvements are needed in terms of digital infrastructure, teacher training, and assessment tools to ensure the effectiveness of online teaching in the future.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that Algerian educational authorities invest in improving digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas where access to reliable internet remains limited. Moreover, universities should provide comprehensive training programs for teachers to enhance their digital literacy and familiarize them with online assessment tools. Finally, future research should explore strategies for minimizing academic dishonesty in online environments, perhaps by incorporating more sophisticated assessment techniques such as project-based evaluations or oral exams. By addressing these challenges, Algerian universities can improve the quality of online education and better prepare for future disruptions to traditional learning environments.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Algerian Teachers

EFL Instructor's Experience with Online Teaching during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Recommendations

Dear Teachers,

The current study aims at **exploring EFL Instructors' experience with online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and the different challenges and recommendations**. Hence, we would be so grateful if you could sincerely answer the following questions. The results will help the researcher in gathering reliable data about the students' critical reading challenges.

Thank you in advance for your collaboration

Dr. Kelthoum RIM

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Dr.Nachoua KELKOULA

Mohamed Lamine Dabaghine Setif 2 University

Section One: Background Information

Would you specify the following please:

1- Gender: ☐ male, ☐ female.

2- Teaching Experience:

Less than 5 years ☐

From 5 to 10 years ☐

From 10 to 15 years ☐

More than 15 years ☐

3- Your Institution:

.....

Section Two: Teachers' Problems and Challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Do you agree with the following statements?

4- Teachers faced many problems in distance education during Covid- 19
Pandemic.

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, state some problems

.....
.....
.....

5- Networking in Algeria can be considered as a huge problem during E-learning.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please say how?

.....
.....
.....

6- Lack of affordability of devices is another main problem.

Yes ☐ No ☐

7- Students' lack of interest and motivation prevent them from engaging in distance learning.

Yes ☐ No ☐

8- Students were not psychologically prepared for this distance education because they were used to be in a face-to-face situation with their teachers

Yes ☐ No ☐

9- The high rate of cheating and plagiarism is one of E-learning disadvantages.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how did you detect that?

.....
.....
.....

10- Teachers' lack of training of how to use different ICTs is a questionable problem.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, suggest some solutions

.....

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.....
.....

- 11- Online assessment is problematic especially when it comes to assure some feedback.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Section Three:

- 12- What do you dislike concerning the currently distance education?
- 13- Do you think the method of online teaching and learning in Algeria during the Covid-19 Pandemic is efficient?
- 14- Who do you think is responsible for improving the distance education in Algeria?
- 15- Overall, what do you suggest to improve distance education in Algeria?

Thank you for your cooperation