

## ICT Training at the Algerian University: Insufficient Teacher Training and Complete Neglect of Learner Training

التدريب على تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات في الجامعة الجزائرية: تدريب غير كافٍ للأساتذة وإهمال كامل لتدريب الطلبة

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### Abstract

Among the notable changes following the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic is the urgent and necessary use of ICTs in several domains, including education. ICT skills have become a central feature for successful teaching/learning process, adding much value to key learning areas like EFL. Although previously neglected, most newly recruited EFL teachers have been placed in vocational training aimed at enhancing their ICT skills. Though insufficient, this step proved to be of remarkable benefit, as it ensured a more efficient learning process. However, a lack of well-covered training slowed down the process. While the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research issued regulations to ensure newly recruited teacher training, it neglected the importance of providing the same initiative for previously recruited teachers, as well as learners. The present paper emphasizes the importance of involving all teachers and integrating learners in ICT training programs. Given their indispensable role in the teaching-learning process, learners should be provided with the same opportunity. Undoubtedly, teacher's training has increased EFL courses efficiency. But it should be sustained by engaging all teachers and learners in an efficient ICT training.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, EFL, E-learning, ICTs, Learners, Teachers, Training.

### الملخص

من بين أهم التغيرات الناجمة عن الانتشار الواسع لوباء كوفيد-19 هو التبني الطارئ والمفاجئ لتكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات في العديد من المجالات من بينها التعليم. حيث أصبحت تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات من بين أهم الخصائص لضمان نجاح عملية التعليم والتعلم وذلك لإضافتها قيمة مهمة لعملية تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ومع أنها كانت مهمشة كلياً في السابق إلا أن أغلبية أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية الذين تم توظيفهم حديثاً قد تلقوا تدريباً مهني يرمي إلى تعزيز مهاراتهم في مجال تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات. وعلى الرغم من عدم كفاية هذه الخطوة، فقد أثبتت أنها ذات فائدة مهمة، حيث أنها ضمنت عملية تعلم أكثر كفاءة. ومع ذلك أدى الافتقار إلى تدريب شامل إلى عدم

جودة العملية ووجود العديد من النواقص. في حين أصدرت وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي في الجزائر لوائح لضمان التدريب في تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات للأساتذة الموظفين حديثا غير أنها تغاضت عن أهمية إدماج الأساتذة القدامى. يؤكد البحث على ضرورة إشراك جميع الأساتذة وكذا إدماج الطلبة في برامج التدريب الخاصة بتكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات. حيث انه ونظرا لدورهم الفعال في عملية التعلم ينبغي إتاحة نفس الفرص للطلبة. ومما لا شك فيه أن تدريب الأساتذة أدى إلى زيادة كفاءة الدورات الدراسية في مجال اللغة الأجنبية الإنجليزية. ولكن ينبغي استدامته بإشراك جميع الأساتذة والطلبة في التدريب على تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الأساتذة، التدريب، التعليم الالكتروني، الطلبة، كوفيد-19، اللغة الأجنبية الإنجليزية.

## **Introduction**

Similar to the whole world, Algeria adopted online learning that was the only available solution to overcome the hurdles met due to the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some countries have already built strong experience in using ICT as a significant tool to conduct online learning, others were lagging behind, including Algeria. The Algerian experience with online learning was quite modest and needed many efforts to meet required needs. Due to the sudden emergence of the pandemic and the urgent need for lockdown, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Algeria immediately adopted online learning as an alternative to face-to-face learning. The launch of online learning encountered several backdrops. Like any other process, E-learning requires a well-planned and studied start-up to ensure the effective use. To guarantee fruitful use of E-learning, there should be a deep study that covers: available equipment needed in ICT, and more importantly teachers/ students' capability in using ICT. The present study revolves around two main questions. First, how important are ICT skills to ensure effective online learning in EFL classes? Second, what do teachers and learners need to guarantee a steady flow of online learning? In light of that, the paper seeks to investigate the adequacy of EFL teachers' ICT training. Besides, it highlights the importance of integrating learners in ICT training. More importantly, in an attempt to maximize the return of online learning, the present paper introduces a set of suggestions aimed at improving the Algerian experience with distance learning.

## **1. Online Learning Dependent on ICT**

Living in a digital age, acquiring Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has become an indispensable feature to guarantee evolution. ICT has emerged as a measuring degree of the development of any society. Different sectors are heavily dependent on ICT as a tool to achieve

their development goals. ICTs have multiple functions that can be used in several sectors, including commerce, health, government and public administration, military, civil society activities, and education (Hilbert, 2012, p. 16). The emergence of ICT as a significant catalyst for a widespread successful education is coined with the enhanced use of technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Tomei, 2010).

The innovation of new technological devices and resources, such as computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies, and telephony (Amin, 2018, p. 2), has helped in enhancing the educational process. Time and space are no longer a hindrance to the learning process. ICTs have allowed for the rapid and wide sharing of information around the world. Information is no longer preserved by teachers, but have become available to learners in different ways. Besides, ICTs have created new teaching/learning methods and environments, bringing education to a more improved stage.

Thus, several educational institutions have become heavily dependent on ICTs to ensure more effective learning. The adoption of ICT in education has brought a new operation to the field, known as online learning. As the strongest way used to transfer and share information, ICTs are considered the leading tool to conduct online learning. Other than information sharing, the latter facilitates communication between teachers and students.

In addition to its positive contribution in enhancing the educational process, ICT has emerged as a necessary tool to ensure the continuity and safety of education, mainly following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to their infancy in ICTs, several developing countries have struggled with the urgent need to adopt online learning as an alternative to the face-to-face one.

Ensuring an effective online learning environment needs a set of pre-requisites. As a premier, we need to guarantee two things: the availability of necessary ICT equipment and the ability of teachers and students to use ICT.

## **2. The Experience of the Algerian Higher Education with ICT**

The necessary and sudden switch to online learning has caused several inconveniencies; particularly, due to its novice practice in certain countries. Similarly, Algeria's new experience with E-learning encountered numerous hurdles.

The integration of ICT in teacher training started around 2004-2005. It revolved around the basic use of computers, and was directed only towards newly recruited teachers. Previously recruited teachers were not included in the process, which led to a wide gap between both categories in terms of their ICTs skills. Besides, the delivered courses were conducted online, making it extremely hard for trained teachers to acquire the needed skills.

According to educators Paul Kirschner and Niki Davis, the main competencies that teachers should acquire to maintain good practice in using ICT are to be "(a) competent personal users of ICT, (b) competent in making use of ICT as a mind tool, (c) and competent in making use of ICT as a tool for teaching" (2003, p. 145). Moreover, they need to master a variety of educational paradigms that can be used in ICT, as well as mastering some assessment paradigms that make use of ICT (Ibid). However, among the major shortcomings encountering teachers' training in ICT in Algerian universities was the lack of training in educational and assessment paradigms in ICT. Hence, teachers had to go through a fierce struggle to conduct their online courses and assessment accurately, especially that they were suddenly required to adapt to online learning.

As a pivotal part of the teaching/learning process, students should also be involved in different training programs to enhance their ICT skills and competencies. Unfortunately, these others were completely overlooked. Except for a course based merely on basic computer training, students were not efficiently trained on how to use ICTs.

Due to their unprecedented experience with ICT, some teachers found no solution but to use randomly technological tools and applications that they had no previous knowledge with. Likely, students struggled to access the official pedagogical platform launched by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Algeria, MOODLE. That has opted students, and teachers alike, to switch to the use of unofficial means of communication and information sharing, precisely Facebook.

Other than that, some learning components, including teachers and students, lacked basic tools that are necessary to ensure successful online learning. While some teachers became negative in switching to online learning, a number of students considered the operation a failed one.

The lack of well-covered training for teachers and students caused several backdrops in the adoption of online learning in the aftermath of the COVID-19. Both parts are considered pivotal to ensure fruitful learning process. Hence, they should be provided with similar opportunities to enhance their ICT skills.

Providing teachers with the necessary training and facilitating their access to the required equipment would guarantee a successful online learning process. In a similar vein, students' motivation, interest and engagement in online learning is more likely to increase, if they become well-trained and possess all the needed technological means.

### **3. Recommendations**

In an attempt to better the online learning process in Algeria, below are a set of recommendations that may help enhance the operation:

1. Constant teacher/learner trainings in ICT, especially with the rapid development in ICT, would help participants align with new technologies.
2. Emphasizing the use of teachers holding a Ph.D. degree in ICT training to ensure an effective process.
3. Create, at least, one permanent position for ICT teachers in each faculty to guarantee constant and well-observed courses.
4. Ensure a retrospective ICT teacher training to all teachers to ensure well-covered training involving both newly and previously recruited teachers.
5. The adoption of blended learning in ICT training, especially in the early years.
6. Emphasize the pedagogical competence, other than basic computer use.
7. The Accreditation of ICT competence as an initial standard to certify new teachers.
8. Training in fixing technical problems to ensure time management and a steady flow of the e-course.

#### 4. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the use of ICT has provided the educational sector with a new method of teaching/learning, that is online courses. The latter has played a pivotal role in overcoming the challenges met due to the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring an urgent and rapid close-down. Despite its positive contribution, the lack of adequate equipment and insufficient teacher and learner training in using ICTs have slowed the integration of technology in Algerian universities. Hence, both teachers and students were not adequately prepared for online education. Regardless of its negative outcomes worldwide, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has woken the attention of the Algerian educational institutions on the necessity to prepare the entire education staff in using ICTs, as it has become an indispensable feature to guarantee the development of the process. Several scientific events have been organized for the sake of improving online education in Algeria. Despite the remaining backgrounds, online learning is witnessing remarkable, albeit slow, progress in Algerian higher education.

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