Challenges Facing EFL Teachers/ Learners Associated With Online Teaching

Défis auxquels font face les Enseignants/Apprenants d'EFL associés à l'Apprentissage en ligne

Nesma BARA
Abbes Laghrour University, Khenchela- Algeria
Email : nesmabara72@gmail.com

and

Sabrina BAGHZOU
Abbes Laghrour University, Khenchela- Algeria
Email : baghzousabrina@univ-kh.dz

Abstract

The rapid and unexpected spread of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the world without exception, and in Algeria in particular, has led to preventive measures at all levels social, economic and educational. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research encouraged the policy of social distancing for protective aims. Besides, the ministry urged all the universities to follow the distance education (online learning) to address the academic year curriculum. This research paper examines the challenges associated with online teaching in Algerian universities during the Coronavirus pandemic. A survey is administered to a sample of Algerian teachers and learners from various universities to evaluate their perceptions and attitudes towards online teaching/ learning experience, as to examine its effectiveness, flaws and suggests resolutions for distance learning even in post-pandemic.

Keywords: Corona pandemic, challenges, online learning, post pandemic resolutions

Résumé

La propagation rapide et inattendue de la pandémie de COVID-19 dans le monde entier, sans exception, et en Algérie en particulier, a donné lieu à des mesures préventives à tous les niveaux sociaux, économique et éducatif. Le ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique a encouragé la politique de distanciation sociale et physique pour les mesures de protection. En outre, le ministère a exhorté toutes les universités à mettre en œuvre l'enseignement à distance (apprentissage en ligne) afin d'aborder le programme de l'année

scolaire. En conséquence, ce document de recherche vise à examiner les défis et les problèmes d'apprentissage associés à l'enseignement en ligne dans les universités algériennes pendant la pandémie de coronavirus. Une enquête en ligne est réalisée auprès d'un échantillon d'enseignants et d'apprenants algériens de diverses universités afin de déterminer leurs perceptions et attitudes vis-à-vis de l'expérience de l'éducation en ligne, ainsi que d'évaluer son efficacité, des lacunes et suggère des solutions possibles pour l'apprentissage à distance, même après la pandémie. Après avoir recueilli des données en ligne, perceptions des participants ont été analysé pour avoir leurs avis sur l'apprentissage à distance au moyen d'un logiciel statistique. En outre, une évaluation qualitative descriptive de la deuxième partie de l'enquête, qui porte sur les suggestions des participants de futures réformes de l'apprentissage électronique pour une meilleure activation. Même si les résultats ont révélé des affirmations importantes au sujet des défis et des problèmes en ligne auxquels ils ont été confrontés au cours de leur processus d'enseignement/d'apprentissage, Cependant, la plupart des participants approuvent la mise en œuvre des TIC dans l'environnement d'apprentissage, car elles ont des résultats positifs sur l'amélioration de l'éducation.

Mots clés :Apprentissage en ligne, défis, pandémie de corona, résolutions après la pandémie.

1.   Introduction

As a matter of fact, The COVID-19 pandemic has become a global health issue and has had a major impact on education. The infection control and physical distancing measures are crucial to prevent the virus from further spreading as to help control the pandemic situation. The policy of compulsory physical distancing has been implemented in many countries including in Algeria. Therefore, all the nationwide schools and universities almost follow closures. In accordance with this policy, English departments are compelled to make appropriate and timely modification in order to continue to deliver education and to sustain the continuation of student academic progress. The teaching and learning activities were immediately shifted to a full E-learning.

 Due to the rapid technology advances in our present life, education requires updating. This advancement in computing and teaching has led to the creation of VLEs (Virtual Learning Environment), which market a turning point in education and in the way, people gained access to knowledge as part of life-long learning. The low costs, the possibility to access the content anywhere and anytime, and the use of modern technology make VLEs popular among learner. Even though online learning has been applied in some global institutes over two decades ago, yet most educational settings and teachers do not involve e-learning for many reasons. In recent years, 'E-learning' has become

a buzz word appealing to diverse communities. As an instrument used in higher education, it evolved from an optional, relatively new approach in order to ensure a superior teaching process. Subsequently, its use of technology on the one hand, and of social media and software, on the other hand, has generated a shift from the teachers- based teacher- based learning to technology- based one? MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) has facilitated and increased academics' awareness of online learning and its involvements (Lynch, 2004). Nowadays, trainers are focusing on finding new and exciting technological resources to attract their learners. Thus, teachers should guide learners to be motivated in virtual learning, the latter depends on practical orientation on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Hartnett and Louwrens, 2015).

This research focuses on challenges and obstacles that faced university EFL teachers /learners during the current global pandemic and the possible facilities and solutions that can be delivered to overcome these problems in the future. The significance of the present study is to explore the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the EFL learning process. The shape of the hazardous change in the post-Covid-19 crisis will occur in all societal institutions and mainly in the educational sector. These changes need wise leaders to make guidelines for reshaping the future of all the sectors.

Challenges to access online learning are less if both learners and teachers have satisfied experiences of knowing and interacting with educational technology tools. The role of information communication technology (ICT) and COVID-19 pandemic in hastening current and future e-learning activation are considered a panacea at the crisis'time and hardships. Although online learning has many advantages as mentioned before, yet there are many obstacles and difficulties face learners and teachers that hinder to success of activating e-learning mode.

This research is aimed at assessing the effectiveness of online learning, and choosing the best methods and modes to engage and motivate the EFL learners in e-learning. Also, trying to identify the challenges and obstacles of e-learning during the COVID-19 crisis encountered by EFL teachers and learners. Finally, explore the reflection outcomes of distance learning process in order

to provide possible solutions and reforms for virtual learning future integration in Algerian universities.

This research paper aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges of online EFL learning?
- What are the facilities that could be provided to learners during online learning?
- How can teachers make online English classes more engaging, motivating, and innovative?
- What are the urgent reforms in activating distance learning in post pandemic and to what extend will this approach would be useful?

In this research, we hypothesize teachers and students' positive outcomes on accepting the distance learning as a new learning strategy that was implemented during COVID-19 and pandemic condition.

5.1 Null Hypothesis:
- The use of Online learning as a new strategy has negative outcomes on the learning process during Covid-19 crisis.

5.2 Alternative Hypothesis:
- The implementation of Online learning approach has a positive outcome on facilitating the learning process during Covid-19 crisis.

2. Research Methodology

Since the main purpose of this research is to point out the challenges confronted teachers and learners in most Algerian universities during the movement to virtual learning in the pandemic crisis in order to find possible suggestions to enhance it even in post pandemic. This study was conducted after nine months of activating the distance learning, descriptive quantitative and qualitative tools were employed to accomplish the research paper's objectives. A constructed online survey was distributed via emails and other online applications to many different teachers and students of English departments in various local universities. A total of volunteers participated in this study are (30). The survey was accessed online from 15th to 30[th]of august 2021, regarding the hard circumstances in the country. All respondents were fully informed about the objectives of the study and agreed to voluntarily

participate. After that, data collection and interpretation of results to confirm or refute the hypothesis.

2.1 Description of survey

The survey (see Appendix 1), was developed by the authors of the current study and it was assessed by other teachers, academics. The google form survey consists two parts of questions, the first one, is based on rating the participant's agreements according to their beliefs from 1: strongly agree / 2: agree/ 3: Neutral/ 4: agree/ 5: Disagree/6: Strongly disagree. The defined 20 statements are various opinions related to e-learning and face to face education in order to answer the research questions. The second part of the questionnaire, is open answers to consider different future solutions as much as possible. Because there is a noticeable variation of participants who are mixed levels, backgrounds, gender of different Algerian universities: this is why, we avoided including any background information in the survey sections and keep it standard to university teachers, students in general.

3. Statistical analysis

After gathering online data, EFL teachers/students' perceptions of this teaching approach were analyzed according to a statistical software. Descriptive statistics were carried out such as frequencies, percentages, mean and SD deviation. Considering participants' viewpoints of advantages, disadvantages, and the level of e-learning mode acceptance and comparing it genuinely with face-to-face learning. A qualitative descriptive evaluation in the second part, which is about participants suggestions of future e-learning reforms better activation.

4. Results

According to the present results, challenges and related online issues showed the highest scores of all the statistical measures. The study addressed these issues where most EFL teachers and learners encountered during COVID-19 online learning. The (20) Items were measured allstatistically (see Appendix2), yet in the following table shows (10) related statements coherently with illustration to be more focused and precise since most issues are sequentially connected, and also, to ensure answering the research paper questions based on the above objectives. Accordingly, the following table displays the participants' total responses as below:

Table 1. *Descriptive Analysis of University teachers / Students' Attitudes towards online learning*

Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	mean	SD
1.Students learn better because technology allows them to adjust the speed of their learning.	5,56	1,76	1,76	0,7	0,36	2,028	*1,852807599*
2.Students will have better learning experiences when the teachers and students have better knowledge of online learning	3,93	2,86	1,43	0,36	0,36	1,788	*1,410239696*
3.Teachers who extensively use data and up to date of technological tools use, will be able to help their students more than who do not	3,57	5	0,36	0,36	0,36	1,78744	*2,092836217*
4. The combination of online and face-to-face learning methods would facilitate meaningful and authentic learning	5,93	2,96	0,36	0,37	0,74	0,31178	*0,2578599651*
5. Distance Learning promotes self-regulated learning.	3,7	3,33	2,59	0	0,37	1,998	*1,527342791*
6.Learners confronted some difficulties accessing online lessons, materials downloading, online exams conducting	2,76	5,17	0,34	0,34	0,34	1,79	*1,93250097*
7. An advantage of e-learning learning includes greater flexibility in arranging student class activities	1,79	7,14	0,36	0,36	0,36	2,002	*2,628021309*
8. I find online class delivery is more effective than traditional in - class delivery.	5,71	3,57	0,36	0	0,36	2	*2,263104063*
9. Combination of an online class delivery and traditional in - class delivery is most effective than using one -way delivery of information.	4,6	1,71	1,07	0,71	1,43	1,904	*1,389382597*
10 I encourage online learning even it suffers from lack of digital equipments, I find it enjoyable	6,07	1,79	1,07	0,36	0,71	2	*2,089382684*

Regarding responses to each question were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree*(SA)* = 1, agree*(A)* = 2, neutral*(N)* = 3, disagree *(DA)* = 4,

strongly agree *(SDA)* = 5). Responses to this domain were calculated using the weighted mean for each question and Study Deviation.

According to the displayed table, the highest scores marked in all statements is *(7,14- 6,07***degree)** to *Agree-Strongly Agree* in the ***Items (7-10),*** whereas the lowest degree *(0,36)* marked to -*Disagree and Strongly disagree*- frequently in most items;(***1-2-5-6***)

In statement N°1, the highest score marked to *Strongly agree* **(5,56 degree**); however, it dropped down from *Agree- Neutral (1,76)*to the lowest one in Strongly disagree *(0,36)/M=2,028*. The second statement shows low degrees in all ratings, yet the top score falls on *SA with (3,93)* and then *A (2,86%),*yet falling down stably in *Neutral (1,43)/ DA/SD* with *(0,36 degree)/M=1,788.* Not so far, the third item's scores have risen a bit to *(5)* degree for *A* and (*3, 57)* degree to *SA*, and lowest degree fell on *N/DA/SDA* with *(0,36 score)/M=1, 788744.*Then, *N•4,*the highest band goes to *SA (5,93)*and decreased to *A (2,96 degree/ for N=0,36/DA=0,37and SDA=0,74/M=0,2578599651).*The scores in the 5TH item were low and fluctuated significantly from the bottom score (3,7) from *SA* till the weakest score*(0,37)* for *SDA/M=1,998*. Next, the statement N° six, the score increased sharply in **Agree***(5 bands), yet dropped* dramatically from *SA (2,76 degree)* to *(0,36 degree)* in *N/SDA/DA/ M=1,76*. For the item 7 which describe the responses of the e-learning advantages, the highest score goes to *Agree (7,14)*and dropped sharply to SA with *(1,79), for N/DA/SDA(0,36 degree) ND M=2,002. Item 8*, for those who support Online learning *SA (5,71 degree)*and *agree* with *(3,57 degree), the lowest degrees are for N/SDA(0,36)/ M=2.* Highest scores voted *SA* with *(4,6*) to combine both traditional and online learning; also, the votes fell down stably in *(1,07 degree)* for *A/N, (1,43degree-DA)* till reached*(0,71)*In *SDA/M=1,904*. Finally, statement *N°10 **marked6 degrees*** as the top bottom in *SA **with lower fluctuation scores in the rest of (A=1,79 degree/ N=1,07 degree/SDA=0,71 degree 5 / M=2.***

From the marked scores above and the participants' significant claims, we can deduce that most teachers and learners confronted many obstacles such as accessing online lessons, materials downloading, online exams conducting, etc. For others, mostly teachers who lack sufficient experience, knowledge of advance technologies. Some other participants contended that they could not open online tests/ exams on their mobile phones because of some format or

extension not supported by their devices. In addition to other technical issues like the lack of digital skills in using online platforms (moodles/ forums… etc); that is why, the need for all online learning equipment, tools, systems are raised. Another serious constraint addressed of Distance learning is the lack of real English language practice with the teachers and their students. Therefore, the findings of the current paper advocate the findings of previous research on addressing similar issues about online learning during COVID-19, and the results showed that most teachers and students are not satisfy with distance education due many obstacles have been encountered (Bataineh, Atoum, Alsmadi & Shikhali 2020; Rajab et al., 2020).

The second part of the survey was an open-ended question to address participants' online experiences and that could give their future possible suggestion for better e-learning use. Since most of participants claimed that they lacked the experience and confidence to learn online using a new medium and could not overcome most of the technical issues related to online learning platforms. As a matter of fact, in online classes the opportunities to integrate technology are almost endless, so, the role of the Ministry of Scientific Research and Higher education is organizing updated trainings for university educators, teachers to enhance their skills and become innovative in order to leverage technology like use of digital tools; virtual whiteboards, discussion forums, online surveys and videos to teach their curriculum and communicate with students.

However, technology should always be appropriate to the grade level, as it is so important to give students time to learn new tools. Second suggestion is effective online lesson planning, most teachers and educators proposed to set realistic expectations for how long online lessons should be. In virtual classrooms, planning shorter lessons helps students stay focused and allows them to take breaks when they need them. Furthermore, to keep students' attentions, especially during live lesson sessions, teachers can encourage participation using polls chat features, and even turning lessons into games by awarding participation points. By gamifying participation, a lecture turns into a fun and engaging learning activity. All these advantages of e-learning could be activated smoothly if all facilities, useful equipments and trainings are provided at the level of the universities. Finally, the challenges of English language learning are still problematic in online learning during the pandemic. These findings add to the growing body of literature on the significant challenges and problems that encountered EFL teachers/learners during the

sudden change to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessary steps are needed to facilitate the online education process and to overcome these reported issues.

Eventually, the rejection of the null-hypothesis, which predicted the use of Online learning as a new strategy has negative outcomes on the learning process during Covid-19 crisis, and the Alternative hypothesis confirmation, which claimed the implementation of Online learning approach has a positive outcome on facilitating the learning process during Covid-19 crisis. As a result, the data analysis outcomes of this study have confirmed the claims that Distance learning approach facilitates learning process during and it is encouraged even post pandemic.

Conclusion

The main objectives of this study areto explore and investigate online learning challenges, and issues during COVID-19 encountered EFL teachers and learners in order to overcome them for future e-learning mode activation in the Algerian university. The synchronized e-learning was the panacea at the time of the pandemic. However, it negatively influenced the learners' performance and learning outcomes. In attempt to find possible answers to research questions and to test the research hypotheses stated supra, quantitative, and qualitative tools have been involved. The statistical results of this study reveals that most users (teachers/learners) encountered difficulties in accessing online platforms due to lack of experience, equipments…etc. Then, most learners missed the classes and other tasks using moodle forms.

Also, the major challenges encountered by EFL teachers / learners in online learning were technical issues and internet connectivity problems, accessing classes, and downloading courses' materials problems. Lack of effective interaction between teachers and learners in distance learning classes of English language skills due to language communication issues, as revealed in learners' responses to open-ended question. Yet, most of EFL teachers and learners support the implementation of online learning in present and future teaching/ learning process as shown in the results with higher scores(**6,07 degree**)**.** It is worth while concluding that this investigation proves the positive activation of Distance learning in the Algerian higher education and the necessity to overcome the challenged are faced currently. Lastly, it is recommended that further research should be undertaken to understand the

teachers' views and experiences towards online English language teaching during and post pandemic.

References:

Altwaijry,N.,Ibrahim,A.,Binsuwaidan,R.,Alnajjar,L.I.,Alsfouk,B.A.,&Almut airi,R.(2021). Distance Education During COVID-19 Pandemic: A College of Pharmacy Experience. *Risk Management and Health care Policy*, Volume 14,2099-2110.doi:10.2147/rmhp.s308998

Bączek, M., Zagańczyk-Bączek, M., Szpringer, M., Jaroszyński, A., &Wożakowska-Kapłon, B. (2021). Students' perception of online learning during the COVID-19pandemic.*Medicine*, 100(7). doi:10.1097/md.0000000000024821

Bataineh, K. B., Atoum, M. S., Alsmadi, L. A., &Shikhali, M. (2020). A Silver Lining of Coronavirus: Jordanian Universities Turnto Distance Education. *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (IJICTE)*,*17*(2),1-11.

David, I. and Grosu, L., 2013. E-Learning in Foreign Language Teaching: what is Gainedand What is Lost§. In:*eLearning and Software or Education (eLSE)*. [online]Bucharest, Romania: Crentra and Eastern European Online Liberary, p.2. Available at:<http://www.ceeol.com>[Accessed 25 April 2013].

Louwrens, N., & Hartnett, M. (2015). Student and teacher perceptions of online student engagement in an online middle school. Journal of Open, Flexible and DistanceLearning,19(1), 27–44.

Lynch, M. M. (2004). Learning Online: A Guide to Success in the Virtual Classroom. Mahyoob, M.(2020). Challenges ofe-Learning during the COVID-19.Pandemic Experienced by EFL Learners. *Arab World EnglishJournal*,11(4),351-362.doi:10.24093/awej/vol11no4.23.

Thompson, T. L., MacDonald, C. J. (2005). 'Community Building, Emergent Design and Expecting the Unexpected: Creating a Quality e-Learning Experience' *In internet and Higher Education*8. p.235.

Appendix(a)*AttitudesofUniversityteachers/Studentstowardsonlineearning*

Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
1.Students learn better because technology allows them to adjust the speed of their learning.					
2.Students will have better learning experiences when the teachers and students when they have had better knowledge of e-learning mode					
3.Teachers who extensively use data and up to date of technological tools, will be able to help their students more than who do not					
4. The combination of online and face-to-face learning methods would facilitate meaningful and authentic learning					
5.Distance Learning promotes self-regulated learning.					
6. Learners confronted some difficulties accessing online lessons, materials downloading, online exams conducting					
7.I find obstacles to interact effectively when learning online, especially, developing the English language skills					
8.Students should gain experience with online learning					
9.Online technology is important to ensure that student has learned them aterial before moving on then extlesson					
10.Online activities can result in learning that would be difficult for students to achieve without technology					
11.Teachersshouldexplorenewteachingstrategiesthatcombinein-classandonline learning					
12.With online learning you can control how fast or slow you move through lessons.					
13.With online learning the information is obtained by more than one way					
14.A path of information from classroom lectures through documents in the web,e.g.,video and simulation will result in a good understanding of the instructional material.					
15.I encourage online learning even the educational settings suffer from lack of digital equipments, I find					

it enjoyable					
16.E-learning learning is a tool that could be implemented at Algerian universities					
17.Anadvantageofe-learning learning includes greater flexibility in arranging student class activities					
18.I prefer only face-to-face learning					
19.I find online class delivery is more effective than traditional in -class delivery.					
20.Combination of an online class delivery and traditional in-class delivery is most effective than using one -way delivery information.					

Parttow/Question: Since you have experienced online learning during the pandemic period, what are your suggestions for future integration inside EFL classrooms?

…………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………

.