

Challenges Associated with E-learning on MOODLE Platform During COVID 19 Pandemic From Chlef EFL Students' Perspective

تحديات التعلم الإلكتروني على منصة مودل خلال جائحة كوفيد19
من منظور طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الشلف

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Abstract

COVID 19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life. Since its appearance, social distancing has become the first safety measure. And to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, educational institutions all over the world have been shut down, which entails moving education to the virtual world. The digital world became the only option to carry on the teaching/learning process. Subsequently, the Algerian universities, adopting the E-learning, used the Moodle platform to continue the teaching/learning activities. Because Algerian university students are not familiar with distance learning, this descriptive qualitative study aims to explore what challenges EFL students at Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef have encountered while relying on the E-learning process. Hence, some solutions are sought to overcome these obstacles through an online questionnaire via Google Form. The obtained results revealed that students were not ready for this shift, and they favour a mixture of E-learning and traditional learning. This attitude is due to some challenges, like technical issues with the platform and Internet problems. Subsequently, to overcome those hurdles and better the process of E-learning, it is necessary to provide teachers and learners with training on ICTs and use some alternatives like Zoom and Google Meet in delivering the courses.

Keywords: Challenges, COVID 19, E-learning, MOODLE platform.

الملخص

أثرت جائحة كوفيد19 على جميع جوانب الحياة، فمنذ ظهور هذا الوباء أصبح التباعد الاجتماعي أول إجراء للسلامة، وعليه تم غلق المؤسسات التعليمية في جميع أنحاء العالم لمنع انتشار فيروس كورونا. مما استلزم انتقال التعليم إلى العالم الافتراضي حيث أصبح العالم الرقمي الحل الأوحده لمواصلة عملية التدريس و التعلم. لقد تبنت الجامعات الجزائرية بدورها منصة مودل لمواصلة أنشطة التدريس والتعلم. و بما أن طلاب الجامعات الجزائرية ليسوا متعودين

على التعلم عن بعد، فالهدف من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف التحديات التي واجهت طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة حسيبة بن بوعلي في الشلف أثناء الاعتماد على التعلم الإلكتروني. وكذا البحث عن بعض الحلول للتغلب على هذه العقبات من خلال إجابة الطلبة على استبيان عبر Google Form. حيث أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الطلاب لم يكونوا مستعدين لهذا التحول، وأنهم يفضلون مزيجًا من التعلم الإلكتروني والتعلم الحضوري وذلك بسبب بعض التحديات التي واجهتهم، مثل المشكلات الفنية المتعلقة بالمنصة ومشكلة الاتصال بالإنترنت. وبالتالي، لتخطي هذه العقبات وتحسين عملية التعلم الإلكتروني، فانه من الضروري تكوين الأساتذة والطلبة على استخدام تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصال واستعمال بعض البدائل مثل Zoom و Google Meet لتقديم الدروس.

الكلمات الدالة: التحديات، التعلم الإلكتروني، كوفيد 19، منصة مودل.

Introduction

The end of 2019 brought a new pandemic to the world named COVID 19. This virus spreads rapidly among people, and with no cure found to this pandemic, several countries felt obliged to declare the confinement as the first safety measure; amongst schools and universities lockdown (Mailizar et al., 2020:1). Algeria is one of the countries that followed the health protocol. Yet to maintain the course of learning, all Algerian universities shifted to distance learning through the online learning platform MOODLE. This paper is significant because it tackles an important issue of E-learning as it played a crucial role during COVID 19 pandemic. In fact, without E-learning, the students would not have been able to continue studying at home during the pandemic. Hence, the current study may help avoid the barriers that hinder students' E-learning, as it may provide some solutions to better E-learning in higher educational institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Since E-learning kept students engaged during the pandemic, Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef, in turn, used the MOODLE platform in the process of E-learning. Thus, it is crucial to discover the challenges that EFL students have encountered with the platform during COVID 19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Study:

- To find out students' attitudes towards E-learning in general and MOODLE platform in specific.
- To explore what challenges EFL students have encountered while studying online.

- To seek solutions to overcome the obstacles that EFL students have faced with Moodle platform.

Research Questions:

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the main difficulties EFL students have encountered while using MOODLE platform?
- What are EFL students' attitudes towards Moodle platform?
- What are the possible solutions that may help EFL students overcome these difficulties with E-learning?

Literature Review

1. Definition of E-learning

E-learning or electronic learning is based on technology or ICTs (equipment as computers, phones, or tablets) with or without the internet. This new type of learning allows students to study online regardless of time and space. Thus, it is worth mentioning that E-learning combines two significant areas, learning and technology. Kaushal defines E-learning as “a learning system based on formalized teaching but with the help of electronic resources” (2020:1). Also, “it is the learning facilitated and supported by Information Communication Technologies (ICT) to enable people to learn anytime and everywhere” (ibid 2). Similarly, Levy and Murphy define E-learning as the entire technological system that enables students learning via the internet (2002). On this account, E-learning is considered as a delivery technique and mediator in the process of learning.

E-learning has changed the old school teaching methods where the classroom was the first source of knowledge acquisition. Teachers were to deliver the content by means of books, handouts, or simply the white boards. However, with the upcoming of E-learning, teachers resort to virtual classrooms; and tend to vary the teaching methods and tools for the course delivery by integrating computers, e-books, Powerpoint presentations, Word and PDF documents, webinars and more.

Even though E-learning is simpler, easier, and more effective, it requires certain mastery for the ICT's. Henceforth, Both teachers and students need to develop their competence in utilizing different digital equipment and applications that are used in the teaching-learning process. In fact, teachers'

digital illiteracy may affect negatively the students' achievements and their understanding of the courses (Trucano, 2005: 6). In the other hand, students who are not familiar with ICT's lack creativity, and tend to face some difficulties when it comes to E-learning.

2. Types of E- learning

2.1. Synchronous E- learning

Synchronous E-learning or direct learning is the process of learning by which teachers and students are present at the same time to deliver the course. Both parts meet online via a particular platform or application using the internet to communicate, and exchange lessons and information behind the screen. Hence, the students feel as if in class. And they can get instant feedback from the teacher, and discuss specific topics with each other. Schullo. et al. claim that the interaction that synchronous E-learning provides between teachers and students "improves attitudes, encourages earlier completion of coursework, improves performance in tests, allows deep and meaningful learning opportunities, increases retention rates, and builds learning communities" (2007: 2). Synchronous E-learning improves students' motivation since they are present at the course time. The way that the course is delivered helps students get engaged in the process of learning and assessment as well. In addition, it builds group contribution and cooperation. Accordingly, teachers can get instant feedback from students, evaluate their understanding, and provide in-time clarification and correction (Hrastinski, 2008: 52).

2.2. Asynchronous E- learning

Asynchronous E-learning or indirect E-learning is a different process of learning in which teachers and learners are not limited in time and space to deliver the course. In this type of E-learning, the teacher provides students with the material via e-mail or educational platforms. Consequently, students can access the lessons according to the circumstances that suit them; and re-study whenever needed. However, they are, here, just recipients of knowledge. They cannot get direct feedback from the teacher nor have online chats with their colleagues. And this is why it is considered more student-centred. In this concern, Moore's theory of Transactional Distance postulates that as long as teachers and students are separated, it will "lead to communication gaps, a psychological space of potential misunderstandings between the instructors and the learners" (Moore & Kearsley, 1996: 200). In fact, the teacher-student communication plays a vital role in the learning activity. Students tend to face some difficulties in comprehending the content, and without the presence of

the tutor, who is a facilitator in this matter, they might misunderstand their courses. In this vein, this may be overcome by “involving learners to conversation boards where tutor and learners could discuss, clarify misunderstandings and appose ideas” (Pange & Pange, 2011: 935).

3. Technology and Education

As Clowes claims, “the next big killer application for the Internet is going to be education. And education over the Internet is going to be so big it is going to make e-mail look like a rounding error” (qtd in. Carruth and Carruth, 2013: 513). E-learning plays a critical role in the field of education. Indeed, the use of ICTs facilitates the teaching-learning process by conducting webinars, using and sharing materials in all formats (videos, slideshows, word documents, or PDFs), and communicating with professors via chat forums. Like any other field, education was also affected by the digital revolution. Technology altered how the content is accessed, discussed, and shared. As Chambers argues, “education and the internet must go hand in hand . . . [Internet] will change the way we work, live, play and learn” (qtd in. D’Amico, 1999).

4. E-learning during COVID 19 pandemic

Before COVID 19 outbreak, E-learning was optional. However, during the crisis of the Coronavirus, social distancing has become the first safety measure. As a consequence, educational institutions all over the world have been shut down, which necessitated the shift to E-learning (Krishnapatria, 2020: 1). The learning platforms that were mostly used during 2015–2020 include Edmodo, Google Classroom, MOOC, and Moodle (Setiadi et al., 2021: 4). Further research confirms that after the onset of COVID 19 pandemic, educational institutions shifted from traditional face-to-face learning to distance learning, where teachers and students are virtually connected (Radha et al., 2020: 1088). Because of the new situation, Hassiba Benbouali University felt the obligation to keep students engaged. The department of English adopted E-learning where the teaching-learning process was online using the MOODLE platform. Teachers uploaded the courses on the platform alongside the assignments.

4.1. MOODLE platform

4.1.1. Definition of MOODLE

MOODLE is free software that stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. The platform provides teachers and learners with a secure environment where different materials and contents are delivered easily and freely. It gives students the freedom to learn according to their circumstances and convenience. The platform was first founded by Martin Dougiamas in 2002 at the Curtin University of Technology in Australia (Kurti, 2008:3). It supports distance learning, blended learning and other E-learning projects in universities and workplaces (Edebatu et al., 2019: 37). According to Oguguo et al's study (2021) Moodle should be learnt and used by lecturers for it affects students' performance in educational evaluation. Likewise, Oproiu defines MOODLE as an open source learning software that enables educators to create collaborative, and engaging online courses (2015: 427).

4.4.2. Characteristics of MOODLE

According to (Kasim & Khalid, 2016: 57)

- It helps in students' assessment (quizzes, online tests and surveys).
- It saves time and money for transporting to classroom every day.
- It offers a wide variety of complementary tools to support the teaching and learning process.
- It allows sharing a collection of data.
- It facilitates the teacher-learners communication.
- Accessible for all: anyone can access either as a guest or log in with an account anytime.
- Flexible: teachers can organize courses easily and deliver the content in different forms like Word, Pdf, or video.

5. Methodology

It should be stressed that the main objective of the study is to find out what challenges students at Hassiba Benbouali University have encountered with E-learning. The researcher used a questionnaire as a tool of gathering data. Due

to the safety measures (quarantine), the questionnaire was sent through Google form. It targeted students from all levels in the department of English, but only 50 responded. This survey involved 28 females and 22 males, ranging from different levels as follows:

Level	Students' number
License 1	4
License 2	15
License 3	20
Master 1	2
Master 2	9

6. Results and Discussion

The first question: "Have you ever been engaged to E-learning before COVID 19 pandemic?" is grouped with the second question: "How would you describe your Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) capacities?" The results show that 52% of the respondents have answered negatively. That means that most of them are not familiar with E-learning, and their capacities in ICTs are medium (80%). The results indicate that EFL students at Hassiba Benbouali are familiar with face-to-face learning, and they lack experience and knowledge in using ICTs, especially, MOODLE since it has become the only way of learning during COVID 19.

6.1. Challenges associated with MOODLE during COVID 19 Pandemic

When asked about their experience of E-learning at the department of English, 38% of the students claimed that it was a good experience due to some reasons, like: E-learning helped them develop their reading skills, summarizing lessons, and it was helpful during COVID 19 pandemic to stay at home and study. On the other hand, 62% of the respondents were not satisfied because of some challenges encountered with the MOODLE platform, such as:

Challenges encountered	Some students' responses
The lack of internet access and slow connection	<p>_ I don't have access to the internet because of the weakness of the connection.</p> <p>_ Internet connection issues.</p> <p>_ Lack of connection.</p>
The lack of interaction with teachers	<p>_ "The lack of both motivation and commitment, and due to the no face-to-face learning, I had to teach myself and try to explain the courses one by one, which is, by the way, exhausting to first read and explain, then make a whole summary based on what I just read and finally memorize it."</p> <p>_ "Unfortunately, not all the lessons can be given as online courses (by just publishing the written lesson). Some courses need deep explanation from the teachers themselves."</p> <p>_ "The lessons were not clear enough, they were hard to understand."</p>
The ill-organization of lessons in the platform	<p>_ "There were some missing lessons."</p> <p>_ "It's not well organized; you can't find all the lessons together."</p> <p>_ "Some courses are not organized."</p>
Lot of lessons and assignments	<p>_ "The students are not really motivated when it comes to online learning because of the number of assignments that we receive each day which creates pressure on learners."</p> <p>_ "A lot of lessons, a lot of assignments, no summary."</p>

Technical issues with the platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ “Sometimes there were some technical problems.” _ “The MOODLE platform sometimes didn’t work.” _ “The platform was blocked sometimes.”

Some students lacked connecting to the internet either for having a slow flow of the internet or living in shadow areas. In effect, some students live in places where they cannot connect to the virtual world. And that hinders their access to the MOODLE platform.

The process of E-learning at Hassiba Benbouali was asynchronous. Teachers tend to upload the courses on the platform. Consequently, students were just recipients of the information. They could not get direct feedback from teachers, nor ask for explanations when needed. This confirms Moore’s theory of Transactional Distance (1996) that stresses the importance of teacher-learner communication. Undeniably, students encounter some new modules that need attention and thorough explanation, and the absence of the teachers hurdled their understanding of the courses.

Given the fact that Hassiba Benbouali University adopted E-learning for the first time, teachers were not familiar with the MOODLE platform. Because they were not formed before about using ICTs, They were not ready for this shift. So, the task of uploading and organizing the courses was challenging. Therefore, students faced some difficulties finding all the lessons organized, if not finding them at all. As pre-mentioned, Michael Trucano (2005) asserts the significance of teachers’ digital literacy in the achievement of students. Hence it is of great importance for teachers to be formed on how to use the ICT’s.

Before COVID 19, students were likely to study at ease. Courses were delivered regularly, and the number of assignments they used to get seemed reasonable as they had enough time to study and do their assignments. However, with E-learning, lessons and assignments were delivered in parallel during the same period. And that created pressure on them. Furthermore, face-to-face learning helps students take notes and summarize courses. Whereas; the asynchronous E-learning which they have received during COVID 19 made them suffer from the wide range of courses they have got.

The main problem EFL students have encountered with the platform was the technical issues. Indeed, as with any other platform or software, the MOODLE platform broke down, and the technical malfunctions sometimes lasted for a while. So, students could not access the platform, and that hindered their learning.

6.2. EFL Students' attitudes towards MOODLE platform

The next question: "Can E-learning replace class-learning effectively? Why?" is grouped with the question: "Do you prefer class-learning, E-learning, or a mixture of both?" Both questions sought students' attitudes towards E-learning in general and MOODLE platform in specific, where most of the students claim that class-learning cannot be replaced by E-learning due to some factors. Such as, in the classroom, they can ask teachers for more explanations and details; other students claim that no matter how technology has developed, the presence of teachers is valuable and necessary. The last question: "Would you like to continue studying using MOODLE platform after the disappearance of the COVID 19 pandemic?" revealed that 52% of the students disagreed. And this indicates distinctly that EFL students are not satisfied with this intricate sudden shift from face-to-face learning to distance learning.

6.3. Some solutions suggested by the students to overcome the challenges associated with E-learning:

- ✓ The mixture of Class-learning and E- learning with respect to COVID 19 precautions.
- ✓ Fix the technical issues of MOODLE and provide both teachers and learners with sessions on how to use ICTs, especially MOODLE.
- ✓ Support the courses with videos or Zoom to further explain them.
- ✓ Use Facebook instead of MOODLE because it is free (for students who live in shadow areas).
- ✓ Create a YouTube channel for the Department of English.
- ✓ Make the lessons simple and short.
- ✓ Enhance communication between teachers and students.
- ✓

7. Conclusion

The study before hands examined EFL students' attitudes towards MOODLE platform, so as to identify the difficulties associated with E-learning during COVID 19 pandemic. The results showed that students faced many problems with the platform, and they tend to value the presence of the teacher and his undeniable role in the understanding of the courses. The research concluded that the students were not prepared for this shift, and they prefer a mixture of E-learning and traditional learning. This attitude is due to some challenges, like technical issues with the platform and Internet problems. Subsequently, to overcome those hurdles and better the process of E-learning, it is important to provide teachers and learners with training on ICTs and also to use some alternatives like Zoom and Google Meet in delivering the courses.

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Appendix:

Questionnaire for EFL students on E-learning

Dear participants, this questionnaire has been developed to investigate EFL students' attitudes towards E-learning and the challenges they have faced following this new way of learning. Thank you for your kind cooperation and participation in this study.

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Level:

- License 1
- License 2
- License 3
- Master 1
- Master 2

Have you ever been engaged to E-learning before COVID 19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No

How would you describe your Information and Computer Technologies' (ICTs) capacities?

- Weak
- Medium
- Advanced

I have positive feelings towards the use of ICT's in the process of learning at Hassiba Ben Bouali University.

- Agree
- Disagree

How would you describe your experience of E-learning at the department of English in Hassiba Ben Bouali University of Chlef?

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What are the main difficulties you encountered while using the MOODLE platform?

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What solutions would you recommend, if you had a chance, to overcome those challenges?

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Do you think that E-learning can replace class-learning effectively? Why?

- Yes
- No

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Do you prefer?

- Class-learning
- E-learning
- Mixture of both

After the disappearance of COVID 19 pandemic, do you prefer to continue studying through MOODLE platform? Why?

- Yes
- No

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