

E-teaching and E-learning challenges during the coronavirus: Case study of an Algerian University

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Abstract

Information and communication technologies have become vital in the educational realm over the past two decades and a significant subject in the English language educational system. E-materials are not available for all the students, and that causes an impediment for foreign language teachers at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida-Algeria. This research paper aims at investigating e-teaching and e-learning effectiveness in the Algerian university. The researcher only describes the existing phenomenon based on personal classroom observations and interviews with some teachers at Dr. Moulay Tahar University. The findings revealed that e-teaching and online learning are in vain as they are still new for both tutors and learners. Thus, e-education ought to start at an early age so that learners will get used to it. Both students and teachers should be trained in virtual learning and teaching methods.

Keywords: EFL students; English; ICT; online; language; learning; teaching.

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1. Introduction

EFL teachers at the tertiary level are expected to adopt a new view regarding their roles in the classroom as well as having professional development in the modern world (Talebian et al., 2014). E-tutoring is urged in each language skill; for instance, planning lessons and submitting lectures online, organising various tasks and videos as well as remedial activities. However, EFL teachers and learners are neither trained nor well-equipped with e-material skills and most importantly, tools. Nevertheless, e-education in Algeria is still in its infancy. A mixed method is employed to explore the current e-teaching-learning circumstances.

1.1. Review of literature

1.1.1. Information and communication technology's (ICT's) contribution to learning English

Learning and teaching are ongoing processes that develop through time and according to the circumstances (Sisco & Woodcock, 2015). For instance, coronavirus imposed on the world of learning and teaching virtually since universities and schools shut their doors (Chelghoum & Chelghoum, 2020). So, any learner or a teacher who has never employed ICTs found himself/herself coping with the newly imposed methodologies as well as technology. It is worth noting that some EFL instructors use the Data-Show an ICT tool that facilitates teaching as well as learning. However, it cannot be used for teaching all the modules such as written expression and grammar that entail the whiteboard instruction, i.e., the traditional method of teaching.

Therefore, the emergence of COVID-19 that swept the entire world enforces the use of various online platforms that help students carry on their learning process at home. Nevertheless, the Internet is a tremendous host for researchers in which they can undertake any scientific study easily. The online platforms provide both students and tutors with reading materials, and lessons, as well as video-conferencing and videos from YouTube...etc. (UL Amin, 2016, p. 155). Further, ICTs is often used in higher education to ensure content delivery and several studies have been conducted on the integration of technology tools as main resources for teaching the findings unveiled that although university professors are immensely interested in using ICTs in their teaching, 'their adoption is lower than is desirable' (Mikropoulos, 2018, p. 7)

The use of ICT's a challenge for both students and researchers (p. 153) mainly in the Algerian setting where Internet connection is poor, and therefore it causes great hindrances as far as e-teaching and e-learning are considered. More importantly, learners, as well as teachers, are not well-equipped with the necessary e-materials to proceed with learning-teaching virtually. Mikropoulos (2018, p. 153) quoted Al-Zaidiyeen et al. (2014) opined that face-to-face teaching and ICT complement foster as it enhances the learning process. She reported that using technological instruments in universities supplies opportunities for higher education to promote rich and varied lectures. Similarly, at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida, the administration provided Moodle platform, wherein tutors are expected to post their lectures online. The lessons should be varied from word and pdf documents to uploading videos, HTML courses...etc.

Up to now, Algeria is greatly encouraging the use of ICT to develop the educational system (Bensafa, 2015, p. 227). ICT integration in the educational setting leaves an influence on the teaching methodology as it calls for a new type of instruction and presents new lessons to guarantee the learner's interaction and motivation (Kouninef et al., 2013, pp. 1872–1873) the e-lectures differ from the provided hand-outs.

1.1.2. Advantages and drawbacks of using ICT and e-learning

ICT allows access to a wide range of audiences regardless of their physical location (Micropoulos, 2018, p. 154). The use of technology can have a positive consequence on both teaching and learning English in that it facilitates teaching practices and raise students' motivation and language awareness (Çakici, 2016, p. 75). Further, it enables teachers and administrators to vary course presentations to stimulate the students' interests and provide learning opportunities outside the classroom. Talebian et al. (2014, p. 301) quoted Mandal and Mete (2012) who asserted that,

ICTs are being used in different areas such as: developing course materials; delivering content and sharing content; communication between learners, teachers, and the outside world; creation and delivery of presentations and lectures; academic research; administrative support, and student enrolment.

Talebian et al. (2014) added that distance education does not facilitate only transferring knowledge but also the method of sharing data from one person to another. It is of great utmost to mention that the foundation of e-platforms in Algeria is still in its infancy and are put into action last 3 years and has been greatly utilised during the coronavirus pandemic. However, some teachers consider Facebook as mainstream for sharing lessons as students immensely use social media. Studies revealed that ICT contributes profoundly to learning and teaching, but in Algeria, it posed a hindrance; for instance, students are not used to this type of learning particularly e-education.

Owing to COVID-19, teaching and learning altered suddenly from face-to-face learning to virtual learning; the pandemic forced universities to use different e-platforms and tools such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Moodle...etc. (Chelghoum & Chelghoum, 2020, p. 125). Implementing online learning is still struggling in Algeria to gain teachers' and students' interests because both of them are not used to this type of education. Nevertheless, distance learning remains confined to its traditional/classical method because students prefer printed lessons (hand-outs) sent by e-mail which implies that implementing online learning in Algerian universities is unreachable and has been described by many teachers and learners as 'miserable', albeit, the Algerian Ministry of High Education has spent a considerable amount of money on the success of e-platforms (Benharzallah, 2020, p. 13).

E-learning, on the other hand, has many advantages, students for instance have the opportunity to decide for the time duration; how long they want to study and can connect with their educators if any hurdle occurs. Further, distance learning does not require any expenses such as transportation or accommodations; the student can have his/her lectures virtually (Sivalingam et al., 2018, p. 14). Efficient e-education determines the student's learning style, content, purpose and skills; thus, the student's centredness. To put it differently, each student is responsible for his/her learning.

1.1.3. Teacher training on e-teaching

E-teaching is about electronic instruction and is the same as face-to-face teaching except that e-tutoring is offered in an e-environment (Owolabi et al., 2013, p. 88). According to Nakajima (2006 as cited in Bjekic et al., 2010, p. 203) e-teaching is defined as 'the system designed to improve teachers' performance, and their self-regulation and motivation. Its service designs are aimed at supporting teachers to teach effectively in an e-learning environment'. He added that e-teaching needs to be focused on teachers as e-learning focuses on learners (p. 203). E-teaching means knowing how to

guide learners online, how to use e-platforms, how to make students interact and get immersed in using distance education and how to assess students virtually.

E-teaching is becoming embedded into Algerian Universities and is mandatory for all tutors to apply it. The Ministry of Higher Education launched a program for newly recruited university teachers; the University of Saida started applying for teacher training in 2016. The teacher-researcher started the training on e-teaching in 2017 and was not obligatory for the other teachers but only for the new ones. So, training tutors to effectively instruct with technology (e-teaching) is of paramount relevance (Vargas & Tian, 2013, as cited in Woodcock et al., 2015, p. 21). The program includes objectives that lied in bridging the gap between universities and the digital era, enhancing the teachers' skills in using e-platforms and expanding their knowledge towards the use of it. It is worth noting that the administration of Saida organised training on Moodle platform.

Different conducted studies on e-teaching have revealed through interviews and surveys with e-tutors that some teachers feel unprepared when they first begin e-instruction (Kelly, 2009, p. 48) since it is different from the traditional way of teaching. Completing a syllabus online is not an easy task for an e-tutor, as it entails profound preparation as far as the lecture is concerned. Besides, selecting an appropriate video that explains a particular lesson is quite complex, because it requires a concise video that has understandable and straightforward language so that students will be able to comprehend the video's content.

Nevertheless, EFL students at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida did neither watch the videos nor upload their lessons because they are not used to this kind of learning which poses a great hurdle for teachers. This attitude on the students' part hinders the teacher's performance as s/he attempts to implement the biannual program in 5 weeks which seems quite impossible for any teacher. However, finishing the program in 5 weeks was the decision of the Algerian ministry of higher education and it also requires both teachers and students to carry out e-learning at the same. To put it differently, learners are urged to access e-platform (Moodle) before having face-to-face education (a month earlier), so that when they come to the classroom, they would have a holistic idea of the explained lessons. As for teachers, they were also required to access Moodle platform to assist their learners and to post varied lessons to facilitate learning for the participants.

Due to coronavirus, all university tutors must receive special training on e-teaching that encompasses how to post lessons online, how to upload videos from YouTube, how to use video-conferencing...etc. Woodcock et al. (2015, p. 21) quoted Woldab (2014) who argued that such training ought to be provided with practice. Similarly, the administration of Saida University is currently providing experimental teacher training, i.e., tutors learn about Moodle platform, share at the same time their lectures and deliver knowledge online.

The teacher-researcher received training in 2017 for nearly 1 year and it was done on Saturdays from 9 o'clock to noon at the University of Saida. The program focused primarily on Moodle Platform and was a detailed training that was guided by an engineer. The other teachers who were already recruited before 2016, commenced the training in 2020–2021 because COVID-19 forced the schools and universities to lock down. Thereby, the administration planned and designed a program for these tutors which includes how to use the different features of the e-platform when attempting to put an online course.

In online courses, teachers try to be online several times per day to check the students' questions, clarifications or e-mails. The teacher-researcher frequently checks Moodle platform and informs her students that she would be available in the evening from 6 o'clock to reply to the learners' questions and address questions on Moodle platform. Further, she also verifies her e-mails to correct the students' written assignments.

Up to now, different seminars and conferences are done via Google Meet and Zoom. Even teachers who have never employed these technological tools learned how to use these instruments and present their oral contributions. Further, some teachers use Google Meet to offer a lecture to the students. Likewise, a teacher conducted an online course with the students of the English language at Dr. Moulay Tahar University, where the teacher presented her lecture to Master learners, but only a minority attended.

1.1.4. E-evaluation

Teachers at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida have been trained recently in e-evaluation; where the teacher can examine his/her learners online. E-evaluation entails setting up questions for the students at a specific time, for example, the test or exam starts at 10 o'clock and finishes at 11 and 30 minutes and it is the teacher who opens the examination duration and then closes it. Examining or testing the students distantly facilitates correction for the tutors. To put it differently, the teacher has the opportunity to set answers for his/her questions and mention points (1, 2, or 3 pts depending on the exercise) for each question and it is the system that gives the final mark. It is worth noting, that the students cannot see the answers but only the questions. When testing the learners online, the tutor has to know how to plan and how design his/her examination because e-evaluation is different from classroom examination. E-evaluation has not yet been implemented since it is quite complex for both students as well as teachers.

Online evaluation requires thinking on the administration's part since the latter is different from classroom assessment. Although the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education is doing immense efforts to make e-learning a success. However, it might not be possible to be deployed in third-world countries in the same way as it is implemented in the USA or European countries because e-issues should be addressed and suitable alternative solutions ought to be explored (Fernando, 2008, p. 1885). The university administration is launching a new experience that embodies the E-Master program. From 2022, Master students and mainly those who want to pursue their studies online, will pay a certain amount of money and then could carry out their classes online as well as be tested virtually. This is a new and good experience in the Algerian universities.

1.2. Purpose of study

The main purpose of this piece of work is to show the relevance of both e-learning and e-teaching, particularly during severe circumstances. The participants are students at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida. Literature showed that e-teaching is vital as well as e-learning, whereas both failed in some universities. Therefore, the following questions are formulated:

- 1- Is e-learning better than face-to-face education in universities?
- 2- Is e-teaching effective in Algerian universities?
- 3- Are students motivated to study through e-platforms?

2. Materials and methods

The research is descriptive as the researcher only describes the existing phenomenon based on personal classroom observations and interviews with some teachers at Dr. Moulay Tahar University. No research method was tackled to collect data since scrutinising this piece of work was based on the existing situation as it is related to teachers' use of e-teaching and students' use of e-learning which are regarded as e-challenging that the teaching profession and learning are facing in Algeria.

3. Results

3.1. The current status of e-learning and major challenges in the Algerian University

Implementing technology in teaching and learning English as a foreign language has witnessed slow growth in Algeria, due to some reasons that are summarised in the following claims:

- Students' demotivation towards learning itself.
- They are not used to this type of learning in which they started accessing the e-platforms in 2019–2020.
- They are not trained in e-education at an early age.
- Some students do not have personal e-accounts because of technical impediments.
- They are much more used to social media and prefer to get in touch with their tutors via Facebook.
- Some EFL teachers post lessons that have more than a hundred pages which demotivates the learners.
- Learners do not implement their assigned tasks via e-platforms and wait for their teachers to spoon-feed them.
- Some students are not equipped with personal computers, smartphones and Internet connections as they live in rural and isolated areas.

Much research has been done on e-learning in Algeria and which drives the Minister of Higher Education to confess in 2020–2021 that e-education has failed in its first year. Similarly, the observational sessions proved that second-year students at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida have not accessed Moodle. When seeking a reason for not consulting the platform, the students did not answer and remained silent. The same case to first-year and third-year students, their teachers complained about their learners that they do not follow their courses on Moodle. Such attitude caused a barrier for the tutors for one hour does not suffice to finish the course.

Teachers checked their students' facilities and unveiled that the sweeping majority have smartphones and internet connections. Likewise, the teacher-researcher asked her learners to verify Moodle platform in the classroom, so, the students activated their network and some shared the Internet connection with the minority who had not or their mobile phones ran out of net credit. The findings revealed that students do not have any hindrance as far as their smartphones or easy access to the net, albeit, the latter is poor. In this regard, Assareh and Bidokht (2011, p. 792) assumed that 'Before starting the course we have to check the learner's facilities at their home. It is one of the most important factors for learners to help them in their communication'.

Students are required to read the given lesson on the platform as part of their course, watch videos that are displayed by their tutors and read the assigned texts so that when they come to the classroom, they would already have a holistic picture of the lecture. Students favour face-to-face instruction and prefer to be taught in the classroom. It is of great utmost to mention that students at

Dr. Moulay Tahar University attend their classes because of TD marks and because teachers enforce their learners to access the e-platform and provide them with questions through Moodle applications. Thus, to be scored, our learners found themselves obliged to access and implement their e-tasks.

4. Discussion

The shift from traditional learning to virtual learning was imposed throughout the world since the pandemic was and still is rampant. The EFL learners must assume responsibility for their learning (learners' centredness). Nevertheless, the findings revealed that students are not used to this kind of study and their eagerness towards learning has been extinguished as they study only 2 months per year. Moreover, students could not implement their assignments unless they are forced; this proves that students are extremely passive and uninterested in e-learning as it is a new experience for them. Students' high engagement in online learning facilitates the teachers' role and thus, reach academic success (Sisco & Woodcock, 2015, p. 18).

As far as e-teaching is concerned, EFL teachers did enormous efforts to make e-learning a success, but their students did not respond mainly at Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida. Tutors' efforts have been doubled since they have to teach in the classroom (face-to-face instruction) and post lectures on an e-platform and correct the students' written assignments. So, it was more teachers' centredness. Hence, the sudden shift from classical tutoring to e-teaching and e-learning was quite complex as both teachers and students were not well-prepared for distance education.

So, e-learning is ineffective since students showed negative attitudes and laziness toward using e-platforms. Students prefer printed courses (hand-outs); they do not favour online courses. Although obtaining a course entails a simple click, they could not access Moodle and download the lecture. It is worth noting that second-year students were copying each written word on the whiteboard which indicates that they did not take the lecture from the e-platform. Some learners are de-motivated because the e-environment is not encouraging as some teachers display chapters and not courses. It is of great importance to know that e-teaching is different from traditional classroom instruction; e-instruction requires straightforward lessons that have major points. Student's dislike reading chapters that have more than a hundred pages. Encourage students to talk and pose questions via using student-teacher chat. Integrating e-learning from primary school so that learners will get used to it is essential. There's a need to support novice online learners and encourage them in this new type of learning (Andrade, 2015). Support could be done by facilitating and designing suitable course content.

5. Conclusion

In brief, this research paper fills a crucial gap by illustrating the relevance of e-teaching and showing the importance of providing e-materials to both teachers and learners. E-learning and e-teaching provide opportunities for diverse students mainly during the spread of the coronavirus. The study shows that our students show negative behaviour towards the use of e-platforms because they are not used to them. In Algeria, tutoring still depends on teaching centred approach and students are not self-independent learners which makes e-learning a failure in Algerian University.

Based on the results of the study, some e-teaching strategies are highlighted below:

- Content courses must be well-developed to meet the student's needs.

- Content courses must summarise the main points with examples and be supported by videos.
- Providing students with videos that are short and have easy language can immerse them as well as engage the learners in the e-learning process.
- Special training (pre-service training) must be planned and designed for university teachers to better guide their e-teaching.
- Providing teachers with videos that facilitate the e-teaching such as how to evaluate online, how to make video conferencing...etc. so that they can foster their e-teaching from their home.
- Teachers must be well-equipped with e-materials to be able to deliver knowledge adequately.
- Teachers' ought to take into account their students' learning styles.
- Working with different sources to facilitate understanding for the learner; such sources can embody word-pdf documents, audio, videos, HTML service, video-conferencing posing questions...etc. Varying e-sources can motivate the student.
- Tutors need to adopt new instructional methodologies that are suitable for their learners and which are different from classroom methodologies.
- Providing the students with feedback when they ask for clarifications to reinforce their e-use of platforms.

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