Exploring lecturers' perceptions of third-year English students' online learning in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period

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Abstract

Covid-19 affected every industry, especially education; it was the only sector that went fully online. This study examines lecturers' perceptions towards online learning post-Covid-19, at the English Department of Borj Bou Arrerid University. A semi-structured interview was conducted with nine English lecturers to explore their perspectives and attitudes toward online learning. The results of this research show that most lecturers have a negative attitude toward online learning during post-Covid-19 and prefer the traditional way of teaching and, learning. They believe that face-to-face interaction is better than online learning because online learning is inconvenient and less effective for both lecturers and students.

Keywords: Covid-19; lecturer; online learning; perceptions; teaching.

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1. Introduction

The rapid spread of COVID-19 had an unanticipated negative effect on the world, prompting the World Health Organization to declare it a pandemic in March 2020. The devastating spread of the pandemic has sparked widespread fear across the world. To stop the spread of the virus, many countries around the world, including Algeria, have declared a state of emergency. The spread of COVID-19 led to high cases in numerous sectors, including the economic, socio-cultural, commercial, and educational sectors. In a short period, Covid-19 has changed the way students around the world are taught.

Thousands of educational institutions, including Algerian universities and institutions, believe that students or professors can conveniently access online learning mode without the need for face-to-face interactions (Sari, 2020; Koh & Daniel 2022). Therefore, the Algerian Ministry of Education urged teachers to use blended learning to minimize the spread of the disease and allow students to learn from home using digital technology. Teaching techniques are implemented in an online mode where a platform is developed for both teachers and students at all levels to post lessons and assignments by teachers (Dos Santos, 2022). Additionally, face-to-face sessions will be shifted to online mode where teachers can use either Google Meet or Zoom to conduct online classes with their teachers.

Algerian universities have been closed, and all subjects and courses have been taught virtually. The state of online learning necessitated effective teaching and the development of a new teaching-learning methodology. Since both teachers and students relied on that relatively new trend. It's crucial to understand the viewpoints of educators and to investigate their attitudes toward this innovative teaching approach.

1.1. Literature review

Throughout history, humanity has faced many health crises that have resulted in enormous losses and widespread disruption. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a particular impact on several aspects of life, particularly education. Schools and colleges around the world have closed their physical doors to prevent the spread of the virus, which has accelerated the shift from traditional face-to-face classes to online learning methods. Previous studies have looked in depth at online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulties this type of teaching presented.

In addition, several research projects have examined how teachers and students think about online education amid the pandemic. The researchers examined the different strategies and techniques used in online teaching as a result of the rapid shift to online learning during the crisis. However, it is important to learn more about how teachers view online learning. A successful online learning process depends on a thorough understanding of teachers' perspectives. Ignoring teachers' opinions could lead to poor quality education. In addition, understanding the teachers' perspectives enables a deeper examination of the needs of students in the context of online learning.

Learning can be described as a process of acquiring and generating new knowledge or understanding about a particular subject, or concept (Ambrose et al, 2010). Thus, the process of obtaining knowledge and information about particular subjects, disciplines, aspects, and abilities is known as learning. Learning is the process of obtaining and acquiring knowledge about a specific subject or skill through study, experience, and instruction.

Moreover, some authors, for instance, Boaz (1984), defined learning as the process by which individuals acquire the various skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to meet the general demands of life. According to Garry & Kingsley (1970), learning is the process of changing behavior through training or Practice, in contrast to Piaget's theory that learning is the creation by a person of a new experience of reality. According to Vygotsky & Cole (2018), learning is the basis of human intellect and a social process. Thus, the comprehensive process of obtaining and understanding new knowledge, ideas, attitudes, values , and skills can be referred to as learning.

1.1.1. Types of learning

In general, three main types of learning are recognized: face-to-face learning, which was almost the norm before the pandemic; online learning, which is currently the most popular form during COVID-19; and blended learning.

Face-to-face learning: In this traditional method, lecturers and teachers give lessons in front of students in a classroom at a predetermined time. In face-to-face teaching, the teacher provides the class with in-depth knowledge of the topic being discussed. This teaching/learning approach places great emphasis on eye contact and interaction with students to facilitate effective learning.

Online Learning: An alternative to traditional classroom instruction is online learning, which allows students to learn in a completely virtual environment (Islam et al., 2023). It is a method that allows students from different locations to interact with academic institutions and learn at their own pace to earn a degree or certificate. Online learning is characterized as an educational approach that uses electronic means to interact, exchange information, and acquire skills. As mentioned earlier, it is an education system that offers students courses wherever and whenever they want. The process of obtaining information using modern technologies to learn and acquire knowledge is called online learning.

Hybrid or blended learning: is a technique that combines several teaching and learning approaches. it can be said that blended learning incorporates both face-to-face learning and online learning. Therefore, it can be described as self-directed learning.

1.1.2. Online learning during Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced educators to adopt online learning methods, allowing students and teachers to participate in remote classes from home with the appropriate technology. This change was highly necessary during the outbreak and has forced a shift in teaching methodologies. It is required by this shift those assignments, tasks, presentations, and evaluations must be done online. It can be said that by implementing online learning during a pandemic, the way the teaching-learning process was carried out was changed and online resources were used when necessary.

Since online learning saves time and does not require physical connection, it seems to be the only suitable option during this pandemic (Ngah et al., 2022). However, it is not always successful. Especially for academic institutions with limited access to virtual learning. Things become more difficult when educators are unfamiliar with this new way of teaching (Ponce et al., 2023).

1.1.3. Perceptions of lecturers and teachers towards online learning during the pandemic

The perception of teachers is considered another basic factor in the success of the online learning process since their thoughts, and attitudes can somehow reflect positively on the online teaching process. Some studies have been conducted on teachers' perceptions of online learning during the pandemic. Among these researches, a recent study, in 2021, was conducted in India on the perceptions of school teachers towards online learning and obstacles faced by them during the pandemic; the findings stated that most teachers show positive feedback regarding this new method of teaching, yet some old teachers still think that face to face teaching seems to be better than the online one, highlighting some difficulties as lack of interaction between them and their students.

Nevertheless, though this study is quite useful to take a clear and deep understanding of school teachers' perceptions regarding online learning during this pandemic, still did not cover the perceptions of teachers in universities and various colleges, so the results cannot be related to lecturers. Another study investigated the perceptions of EFL teachers towards the online learning of the English language, in its findings are kind of similar to the previous one, where old teachers view this new method as an ineffective one since they consider it complicated to comprehend. On the other hand, another study was conducted to assess lecturers'

perception and preference towards teaching in an online environment, the findings revealed that the majority of them have conducted online classes and online exams using online platforms. stating that the online teaching-learning process was almost effective, time-saving, and easy for sharing materials, but still less efficient in evaluating students.

In addition, The University of Uttarakhand found that most lecturers have a positive perception of online learning during the pandemic since it enhanced teachers' knowledge and developed their technical skills. It increases instructors' work hours because of the needed knowledge related to developed educational teaching materials, as it also creates a gap in communication between students and teachers. Teachers have a positive perspective regarding the use of virtual learning amid the Pandemic, whereas older teachers struggle with developing and creating appropriate content, and providing feedback through the system of online learning (Rahayu and Wirza, 2020). Since the spread of COVID-19, university students claimed that the online teaching abilities of lecturers have improved (Chakraborty et al., 2021).

On the contrary, some lecturers have a negative perspective towards online learning because they are not satisfied with the university's assistance; they believe that online classes do not provide an emotional bond between teachers and students as they used to in traditional classes.

1.2. Purpose of study

During the COVID-19 outbreak, teachers and students were forced to resort to online learning or conduct online classes from home using the appropriate technology tools. This means that all activities are conducted online, including assignments, presentations, assignments, and assessments. On the other hand, implementing online learning during the pandemic is not always effective. Particularly in a university context, students may have little experience with online learning. In addition, it becomes complicated when teachers are not familiar with the use of online applications through the learning system (Bird et al., 2022). As a result, the objectives of this study are as follows: To investigate the perceptions of English lecturers of Bordj Bou Arerridj University towards online learning during COVID-19.

2. Method and materials

2.1. Participants

The participants of this research were nine English lecturers from the Department of English Language and Literature at Bordj Bou Arrerridj University. The aim is to explore their perceptions and experiences of online learning during the pandemic.

2.2. Data collection instruments

A semi-structured interview was conducted with English lecturers at Bordj Bou Arrerridj University, to explore their perception of online learning during the pandemic. The participants were nine lecturers who were selected randomly. The interview contains ten questions which are as follows: the first question aimed to know if lecturers are conducting online sessions for their students, and the second question aimed at exploring the lecturers' satisfaction with online learning. The third question aimed at knowing whether online learning makes teaching easier or not and the fourth question was designed to know the lecturers' preference between face-to-face learning and online learning. The fifth question aimed to determine whether lecturers motivate their students during online learning or not. The sixth question aimed at knowing whether online lessons take more time than face-to-face lessons. As for the seventh and eighth questions, they aimed to explore the strategies and approaches for students' evaluation and assessment. The ninth question aims at knowing whether online learning is suitable for lecturers or not, while the tenth question aims at knowing whether online learning is effective or not.

2.3. Data analysis

The data were collected using a face-to-face interview; the total participants of this interview were nine English lecturers at Bordj Bou Arrerridj University, consisting of four females and five males, who were selected randomly. The information that the lecturers had provided us with was recorded, to be analyzed later on, and

each record was coded using F/M and numbers, i.e.; (F: Female, F1, M: Male, M2,). To analyze the data from the interview, we transcribed the recorded data into written ones. Then it was thematically categorized according to the questions of the interview.

2.4. Ethical consideration

Informed consent was sought from all participants. All the participants remained anonymous throughout the study.

3. Results

This section represents the results that were obtained from the interview, which aim to explore the perceptions of lecturers towards online learning during the pandemic.

3.1.   The perceptions of lecturers towards online learning during the pandemic

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has caused a profound change in the educational system, requiring educational institutions and lecturers everywhere to change their traditional approaches and replace them with online learning. Meanwhile, lecturers ' perspectives regarding online learning have become a crucial field of study, providing important insights into the opportunities and problems that come with this change in education. This section uses qualitative information from interviews with a group of lecturers to explore the complex views that lecturers had about online learning during the pandemic.

3.2. Online lecturing

According to the data collected, we found that four lecturers out of nine participants (M4, M9, M8, F3) believe that online learning is a good option for them since it can facilitate the interaction between lecturers and their students. In addition to that, they said that they can teach anytime and anywhere; it has flexible time, also they are not so worried if the students miss the lessons because they can still provide materials to their students, for that, they use online learning because they found it beneficial, helpful and better than nothing. They felt that a great deal could be accomplished through online lessons as they could quickly provide learners with activities and worksheets that challenged them and encouraged progress. As some of them had stated:

 "I use online learning mainly with first-year students and I organize meetings with students up to six to seven sessions reaching 3 hours per session .60to 70 students attended the online classes each time out of 300 hundred students and the results for the exam and the tests were good results and very effective for those who attended only". F3

As for the M4, he usually teaches online, presents online, prepares a PowerPoint that contains the major elements of the lesson and tries to explain and have a debate. Whereas for M8, he makes online sessions in which he opens a messenger group for his students and provides them with exercises since he has no idea about the Google Meet option.

 As for M/9, he usually conducts online teaching using Google Meet, and saying also;

''Sometimes I work on platforms like Moodle and sometimes I deliver lectures in terms of recorded videos, sometimes I just upload some files related to what the students take inside the classroom, in this way, I am combining the in-person teaching in the classroom and online teaching via the use of Google meet and the different platform available especially Moodle.''

3.3. Satisfaction towards online learning

The data revealed that two respondents (M7, M8) are satisfied with the online learning system, which they believe is complex and multidimensional and includes many factors, such as communication, students' participation in online discussions, flexibility, workload, and technology support. they believe that online learning is beneficial for students' easy accessibility to knowledge, and proper content delivery. Online

learning has helped universities keep their doors open for students during the lockdown to decrease the spread of the disease. although it is the only available solution during the Covid-19 pandemic. As follows:

"It is good at least students will have something to do, it is an obligation that we have not chosen, it is imposed on us, so we have to work on this by using this technology" (M8).

"Online learning is good to a certain extent, it can help students, and it is better than nothing" (M7.)

3.4. Motivating students during online classes

The results of this section indicate that six lecturers (F3, M4, F5, F6, M8, and M9) motivate their students during online classes. According to them, motivation is one of the key factors that affect learners' success and performance since it is very beneficial for them. Fostering students' motivation is a difficult but necessary aspect of teaching that lecturers must consider. The role of the lecturer is to help their students engage in the truth that they care for them.

"When I record a lecture, I always go back to something related to the previous lecture, and at the same time I say I believe you remember this, I believe you searched about this, I trust that you worked hard on this so need to explain again, it's kind of motivation when you believe in your students, you implement confidence in them, they feel that they are responsible because their teachers believe in them" (F5)*.*

The way these lecturers engage their students online also has an impact on their motivation.it is even more important to provide them with a detailed syllabus to help them set their goals. M4 believes that rewarding is very effective in getting students motivated, he stated:

"I always praise my students to keep going. To reinforce positive behavior in them and students eventually internalize a desire for learning" M4*.*

As for M9, he claimed that motivating learners to online learning is not an easy task, stating that:

"Students who are motivated in face-to-face learning are likely to be motivated in online learning. My task is to make these demotivated motivated, by mastering the subject matter, giving them something interesting, mastering the technological tools I usually use pictures, giving them options, and choices of what they like to work on, not imposing things on them to happily study via online" M9.

3.5. The effectiveness of online learning

The majority of the respondents (M1, F2, F3, M7, M8, M9) confirmed that online learning is suitable for them. F3 claimed that the online learning experience worked for them, they appreciated it though it consumed time, and energy and needed more effort than the classroom. As for M1 and F2, they believe that the online learning experience is suitable for them but it is not appropriate for their students, as follows:

"Yes, it is suitable, yet, for students, it is not a good idea to follow, especially with a large number of students" M1.

Whereas, M8 clearly stated that online learning is suitable for him, as he thinks that there are a lot of options he has not explored yet, and he believes that it would be helpful for teaching. For M9, he thinks that online learning is suitable for him, it just needs more practice, more training, for education to be an effective process, as stated:

"Practice makes perfect, the more you practice online education, the more you become a better online teacher" M9.

3.6. Unfamiliarity with online lectures

The data revealed that five of the respondents do not conduct online learning lectures because they find it ineffective for them and their students, also the appropriate technology and connectivity problems were issues, that impacted the learning process. These lecturers claimed that the overall online learning process has become disrupted due to insufficient time as well as the drop in student interaction which in turn also

made it hard for the student to understand their lessons. In addition, some lecturers have no idea about how to use Google Meet or Moodle applications and this makes it hard for them to teach online. But still, they submit lessons on the platform, and sometimes they share lectures, summaries, some recorded lectures, and some videos, into the group of their students.

As M1 said, he makes online lessons but he does not teach online because some students do not have the appropriate materials, like laptops, and the internet, some of them do, but he cannot risk teaching a few students only, and exclude the others. He does put some lessons online, but he does not teach them online. They go and upload the lessons print them and bring them to the classroom. F5 explained that she did not teach online due to the lack of materials (connection problems, absences). She said that she recorded lectures, explanations, and videos and posted them on the platform of the university sharing some websites and some videos with the group of the students which included an extra explanation. F6 said that she cannot use online learning since she is teaching literature and civilization modules so the students must be present in the classroom for the lessons because she thinks that teaching such modules online would be ineffective, but sometimes she provides her students with lessons on platforms, and summaries audio-video, to make them understand more. Also, F2 believes that online learning is not useful for students because the teacher is just repeating what is written in the handouts. As for M7, he explained that he did not make online sessions because he had already given them everything on a flash disk.

3.7. Dissatisfaction with online learning

Most of the respondents (M1, F2, F3, M4, F5, F6, and M9) are not satisfied with online learning. no assessments or assignments were completed by the students. Moreover, longer preparation and time were needed, technical problems and difficulties were an issue, also students' participation in online discussions was lower than face-to-face. They said that more colossal efforts and time were devoted to online teaching compared to face-to-face instructions.

M1 said that he is not satisfied with the online learning system and the way it is implemented here in the country, according to him, some things need to be enhanced, providing the appropriate materials, also the number of students is huge and some of them are coming from different backgrounds, and therefore it is difficult for him to teach online.

"I can teach them online, but if I do that certain students will not have the ability and the chance to access online sessions, and this is not fair. So, I have to teach my student fairly." M1

F2 also was not satisfied with online learning because of the problem of internet connection. Saying that it was difficult for many students to open an account to access the platform for studying. And this reflected the system negatively.

As for F3, she appreciates the idea but the problem was that most of the students were demotivated starting from the pandemic.

"I try to motivate my students by saying that one hour in the classroom is not beneficial, you have to attend online sessions too, I select the appropriate time for them and whatever I did I kept finding the same members attending the online classes". F3

"I have conducted online sessions five to seven times and the internet was horrible, we could not hear each other, and we did not have the facilities to communicate, online learning is not an overnight process, especially for our country, it is not qualified for that, not well equipped, some students are poor literate in the use of ICT, are not trained for that." (M/4)

Also, F5 was not satisfied with the online learning due to some reasons such as; poor internet connection, and the lack of concentration from students.

"I do prefer face-to-face interaction, I prefer to interact with my students and give them the chance to play the role of the teacher through research papers, questions, and even discussions." F5

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"online education is not an option sometimes you find yourself obliged to use online teaching, but still, it is something useful, interesting, important, and helpful for teachers and students, it has some drawbacks as internet connectivity, we do not have that fast connectivity to the net which is going to make online teaching hard and difficult, because sometimes it is difficult for the students to learn online and access to platforms, also technological tools are one of the drawbacks, students cannot all of them have highly developed materials such as laptops smartphones to connect via the net and learn online, also the difficulty of evaluating and assessing students online." M9

3.8. Preference for face-to-face learning

The majority of the lecturers (M1, F2, M4, M8, F5, F6, and M7) agree that face-to-face learning is better than online learning because they believe that students can learn better when they are in a real environment and they have more chances of learning and acquiring new knowledge and information.

"Online learning is just the teacher giving the lessons while in the classroom students are more familiar with the process, know what they are expecting, they know what they want from the teachers." M1

"Face-to-face teaching is better than online teaching, when I teach my students in the classroom, I can see their level, their interaction, how weak they are, their body language, they give me a hint if they understand or not, but during online, I cannot really grasp their level until the exam, and then in the exam, we find disasters and catastrophes" F6.

"They are learning in a real environment, there is interaction, different learning styles, for instance, some students learn from gestures while explaining the lesson, movement." F2

M4 and F5, think that most teachers and learners in Algeria are not ready yet for online learning.

" There are some advantages and disadvantages for instance; there are some students who feel shame to ask questions in the classroom, but online, they feel free, especially if they do not log in with their identity, they feel free to ask questions but it has also disadvantages; may have internet caught, some students might be distracted with things at home, or advertisement online, but I would prefer face to face teaching not ignoring the fact that online learning has advantages" M8.

This means that online learning is a double-edged sword, as much as it has features; it also has disadvantages that could interrupt the process of learning.

3.9. Ineffectiveness of online learning

The data revealed that three respondents (M4, F5, and F6) said that the online learning experience was not suitable for them at all. F5 and M4 claimed that lecturers and students, in general, are not prepared yet for such a method

"Online learning is good but we are not prepared, it happens suddenly, for example; some students do not even know how to use email" F5.

Whereas, F6 has confirmed that she is against the online teaching-learning process because she could not consider everything when it comes to online teaching, as she mentioned:

"For example, when I give my students an assignment, they just try to find ways to work less, and online learning taught them laziness in studying." F6

This means that students are trying to take advantage of the situation, by only copying, and past the information, ignoring the fact that they need to improve their learning abilities, and not getting the mark only. she also added that, since the pandemic, the level of students had greatly decreased, stating that:

"This experience has not succeeded in our university or educational system." F6

M1 thinks that online learning could be effective if there was a small number of students, and when all students have the appropriate materials and can access the internet and different platforms. As for F2, she

claimed that online learning is not effective at all, most of the students are struggling due to many reasons including poor internet connection, the poor comprehension of the lessons.

Whereas, for F3, she claimed that since she has not reached her objectives behind her sessions, she cannot say that it was effective, yet it could be effective if students take things seriously. However, M4 declared that online learning was a helpful option during the pandemic, but he believes face-to-face learning is more effective.

"I can interact with my students, I can see them in actual presence, and I can talk to them one by one." M4

Moreover, F6 said that face-to-face teaching is more effective than online teaching, according to her, this new method has only made both learners and lecturers/teachers lazier, adding that online learning could be useful if the students were ready to work more on their selves and improve their skills. As for M7, he thinks that online learning is efficient for those who believe online is good and not for teachers who are active and prefer the presence of the students in the classroom. Furthermore, M/8 believes that online learning is convenient for him as a teacher, yet some conditions need to be improved, especially the number of students,

"It is impossible to work with a large number of students, from the one hand I can work with all the students but I cannot evaluate all of them because of the big number. It may be inconvenient but it has a lot of advantages to explore by the teachers and the students." M8

AS for F5, she believes that online learning can work perfectly with students whom she has taught for the whole three years, mentioning that:

"We discuss, we interact online because we had enough time to know each other, I could determine their levels, their needs, and they could know my methods too." F5

While M/9, strongly recommends that online learning must go in hand with face-to-face learning, he believes that they complete each other,

"We have to use online education because it has become a necessity in the multimedia age." M9

4. Discussion

The data indicate that lecturers had negative perceptions towards online learning in terms of effectiveness, interaction, assessment, evaluation, and satisfaction, they believed that teaching must take place in the classroom, and requires a face-to-face interaction between students and teachers, although it can be a helpful option during the pandemic, certainly is not effective as classroom learning. Moreover, poor internet connection, learners' discipline, appropriate materials, as well as the students 'motivation to learn more, are important factors for determining effectiveness and satisfaction with online classes which unfortunately were non-available. So generally, lecturers perceived online learning negatively. This is in comparison to a study conducted by Kamal & Illiyan (2021), who found that most teachers showed positive feedback regarding this new method of teaching, yet some old teachers still think that face-to-face teaching seems to be better than online, highlighting some difficulties as lack of interaction between them and their students.

However, most lecturers have a positive perception of online learning during the pandemic since it enhanced teachers' knowledge and developed their technical skills. It increases instructors 'work hours because of the needed knowledge related to developed educational teaching materials, as it also creates a gap in communication between students and teachers. Similarly, teachers have a positive perspective regarding the use of virtual learning amid the pandemic, whereas older teachers struggle with developing and creating appropriate content, and providing feedback through the system of online learning (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020).

5. Conclusion

To ensure an effective teaching-learning process, there must be appropriate conditions for both learners and teachers. Over the years, the traditional method of teaching and learning was the only available option in

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the educational system, but since the start of the pandemic, the way of teaching and learning has been changed to online mode. Throughout the academic year of 2019-2020 the process of teaching and learning in Bordj Bou Arerridj University, English department has been quite changed into online mode. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the perceptions of lecturers towards online learning during Covid-19.

The findings of this research revealed that a minority of English lecturers showed a positive perception of online learning, they thought that online learning was a good option during the pandemic, and it could be more effective if the appropriate materials and fast internet connectivity were available. As well as the students 'motivation to learn more, they believe that online learning must go hand in hand with face-to-face learning. However, the majority of English lecturers showed a negative perception towards online learning, because according to them, teaching must take place in the classroom, and needs a face-to-face interaction between students and teachers, still, it can be a helpful option during the pandemic but certainly is not effective as classroom learning.

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