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Digital-Based Learning Between Acceptance and Rejection Post-Pandemic. Case Study of The Second-Year Students of English at Dr Moulay Tahar - Saida University

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ABSTRACT:

The development of the notorious Pandemic, Covid 19, forbade any form of face-to-face teacher-student interaction. As a result, on March 12th, 2020, the Algerian government made unprecedented decisions to close all universities and replace traditional classrooms with digital-based learning as a last resort to continue the academic year. Moreover, after the end of the pandemic, teachers and learners were confused whether to carry on with the new digital-based learning or comeback to the classical methods of teaching. This study aims to discover students' tendencies and reactions toward digital-based learning and asses their readiness to accept it. The overall population of the current case study included 150 second-year English students at Dr Moulay Tahar University, where we used questionnaires as a research tool.
The findings revealed an unfavorable attitude toward Digital-based learning and also suggested that the primary causes for this negative attitude were multiple shortages at the level of materials and the difficulties faced while accessing the platform "Moodle."

Keywords *Algeria, Reactions, Online Courses, Teaching/learning, Moodle platform.*

1. Introduction:

A traditional classroom is a tool of valuable importance to the teaching/learning process. In this sense, academic researchers committed to such a field of study constantly look for new ways to improve its relevance and productivity. However, the growth of technology increased students' needs with the state of being unsatisfied with what they learned in classroom. As a result, many students sought another source of learning. This latter was one of the primary causes that significantly contributed to developing a more accessible learning system, sometimes referred to as "Digital-based learning." In addition to that, the Digital-based learning can be easily accessed via various developed ICT tools both normalized and unnormalized such as social networks, emails, applications, and chat rooms that enhanced its appeal.

Consequently, many universities and higher education institutions paid close attention to digital-based learning and eventually began to include it in the teaching/learning process as extra support. Nonetheless, the emergence of the new Pandemic, Covid 19, resulted in university closures on March 12th. Therefore, the process of transitioning from traditional classrooms to Digital-based learning was a way to preserve the

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academic year. In this regard, varied perspectives concerning this implementation were seen, ranging from opponents to supporters, notably among English students. As a result, the current study seeks to ascertain the attitudes of second-year English students at Dr. Moulay Tahar University regarding Digital based-learning and whether those students are open to transitioning from traditional learning to Digital-based learning. In this sense, our research questions would be as follows:

- How do learners perceive Digital-based learning?
- What are the different features that affect learners' attitudes while indulging in Digital-based learning at Dr. Moulay Tahar University?

In order to answer these research questions, the following hypotheses are put forward:

- Second-year students of English project negative reactions towards digital based learning during and after the pandemic.
- The absence of the necessary tools may be the crucial reason to learners' negative reactions and attitudes.

2.Literature Review
2.1 Digital-based Learning in Algeria

The growth of technology and the rise of various ICT tools influenced the development of a new form of learning known as "Digital-based learning" or "electronic learning." As a result, learning is no longer the same, resulting in the emergence of a new learning theory called "Connectivism."

According to Siemens (2005), *traditional learning theories such as "behaviourism," "cognitivism," and "constructivism" were unable to keep up with technological advances.* As a result, a new learning theory is required. Siemens (2006) defines Connectivism as a conceptual framework in which individuals learn through a network influenced by technology and interacting with one another. He refers to learning that occurs outside of people and within organizations, which behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism, according to him, did not pay attention to and were limited only to internal learning.

- *The connectivist theory inspired the massive open online course (MOOC)* (Downes, 2012). It is free to use with open software, allowing students to share and download lectures and engage while being directed by their online lecturers (Downes, 2012). Furthermore, Negash and Wilcox (2008) classified Digital-based learning into six categories:

- Digital-based Learning with presence and without e-communication (face-to-face).
- Digital-based Learning without presence and e-communication.
- Digital-based Learning without the presence and with e-communication "asynchronous".
- Digital-based Learning with virtual presence and with e-communication are "synchronous".
- Digital-based Learning with occasional presence and e-communication: "blended/hybrid asynchronous".

- Digital-based Learning and e-communication: "blended/hybrid synchronous."

The true beginning of Digital-based Learning in Algeria with the use of internet networks began in 2006 with a collaboration between two firms, "Microsoft" and "Thompson," and this service delivers 4.000 courses and lectures for teaching ICTs and communication skills (Guemide & Benachaiba, 2012)

• The Covid-19 Pandemic has shifted the balance, requiring Algerian universities to incorporate Digital-based Learning approaches and ICTs. Dr Moulay Tahar University was one of the first universities to adopt an asynchronous form of Digital-based learning at the start of the term, allowing teachers and students to communicate via video chats in Google Classroom, Moodle Jitsi and Zoom to finish the past years curriculums. Furthermore, at the start of each academic year, the administration employs a hybrid/blended learning strategy, which combines non-traditional (electronic) and traditional classes (Face to face presence). However, the university continues to struggle with digital-based-learning. It has multiple difficulties as a result of a collection of problems that occur regularly, which can be classified as follows:

• Statistics show that internet access is poor making Algeria one of the world's under-developed countries. Furthermore, this internet does not reach all of Algeria; certain areas do not have access to the internet (ADSL, 4G, 3G).
• Some teachers are uninterested in this learning style due to a lack of information or expertise or because it was not officially recognized as an educational instrument in Algeria.
• unequipped university sites, which affect all Algerian universities, lack of regular programming and organization, and a shortage of specialists, making them difficult to access.
• Some learners do not have access to a computers and smartphones.
• The students' lack of enthusiasm for Digital-based learning.
• The students' inability to access Moodle due to their lack of training in ICT

3. Methodology

3.1 Setting and Context

In this study we implemented a quantitative model in order to collect data from students and assess their attitudes regarding Digital-based learning. A closed-form questionnaire was employed as a research tool in this study.

3.2 Target Population

This study included 150 Second-year English students from Dr Moulay Tahar university. Those students had already been exposed to Digital-based Learning during 2021-2022 academic year and the new school year 2022-2023.

3.3 Data Collection Tools and Instruments

The questionnaires were divided into three sections. The first section addresses gender, while the second focuses on the instruments used when studying online, as well as an assessment of the internet connection quality and Moodle. The final section consists of seven items designed to determine the attitude toward Digital-based learning post - pandemic. In this section, a five-point Likert scale was used (5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3= neutral, 2 = disagree, 1= agree).

The questionnaire was initially administered in two steps. The initial stage was to assess its clarity, distributed to two students. Because their positive response was made available online to all second-year students, it was available for four weeks (from November 2nd to December 2nd). Even though there are 150 second-year students, only 80 responded.

4. Results and Discussions

The questionnaire results revealed that 81.25% of the participants were females while 18.75% were males. However, gender was not considered in the study.

	Number	Percentage
Female	65	81.25%
Male	15	18.75%
	Total 80	100%

Table 1 Participants' Gender

The following section was allotted to second-year learners of English at Dr Moulay Tahar University to determine their attitude toward Digital-based learning.

Statistics Descriptives

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
I would instead study Online rather than in the Classical way	80	2	5	2,76	1,034
Lectures detailed through E-platforms are better than the Classical method	80	2	5	2,75	1,037
I am opposed to Digital-Based learning	80	2	5	3,84	,561
I am in favour of Digital-Based Learning	80	2	5	2,66	,856
Digital-Based Learning is valuable during the Pandemic	80	2	5	3,71	,766
Digital-Based Learning is irreplaceable post-pandemic	80	2	5	2,47	,746

Digital-Based Learning is an addition to the Classical way of learning	80	1	5	3,89	,636
Total	80				

Table 2. Likert's statistical Scale Overview on Learners' feedback
Note: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

The five-point Likert scale is a well approved scale. Therefore, 1 to 1.8, refers to strongly disagree. From 1.81 to 2.60, means to disagree. From 2.61 to 3.40, this means neutral. Moreover, from 3.41- 4.20, this means to agree, and finally, from 4.21 to 5 means strongly agree.

The mean of the first statement is 2.76, which means the participants were neutral. The mean of the second statement indicated it is 2.75, which means most participants were neutral to the idea, which stresses that lectures detailed through E-platforms are better than the classical method. Moreover, the mean third and fourth statements were found to be (mean= 3.84) and (mean= 2.66), respectively, indicating that most students are undecisive and remain neutral. Whereas, for the second portion, the (mean =2.66) shows that learners agree on rejecting Digital-based learning and prefer the classical way of teaching.

The following mean statement ,"Digital-based learning is valuable during the Pandemic, was found (mean=3.71), which revealed that students have a majority consensus on the importance of Digital-based learning during the late Pandemic. However, the results revealed that considering Digital-based -learning as a replacement for the classical teaching method is not an option for most learners. The (mean= 2.47) shows that students were against this idea. However, their answers concerning the last statement exposed that Digital-based learning can accompany the classical methods of teaching and support where the mean of this item was found (mean= 3.89).

The overall results show that second-year students of English at Dr. Moulay Tahar-University of Saida were indecisive about Digital-based learning during this Pandemic. However, the doubt they exposed was proven as they showed negative attitudes toward using Digital-based-learning all the time without the classical classroom. This latter proves the first Hypothesis: Second-year students of English project negative reactions toward Digital-based learning.

These findings are not similar to the study of Allegue (2019), which asserted that students of a given university have a positive attitude toward Digital-based Learning

In order to discover the factors influencing learners' choices and reactions towards Digital-based learning, learners were asked several questions about the different layers of Digital-based learning: connecting tools, internet connection accessibility, and navigation on normalized platforms such as Moodle.

The first question was exposed to pinpoint learners' tools to conduct their research and study online at home. The findings showed that not all learners study online at home,

as 43.83% of students do not study online while 56.17% divided between 39.73% who used their smartphones and 16.44% who used their computers.

	PC PORTABLE COMPUTERS		TABLETS AND MOBILES	
What type of Devices do you use during online courses?	*31*	*38.75%*	*49*	*61.25%*

Table 3. *The Various devices Used to Study Online courses by Dr. Moulay Tahar University Students.*
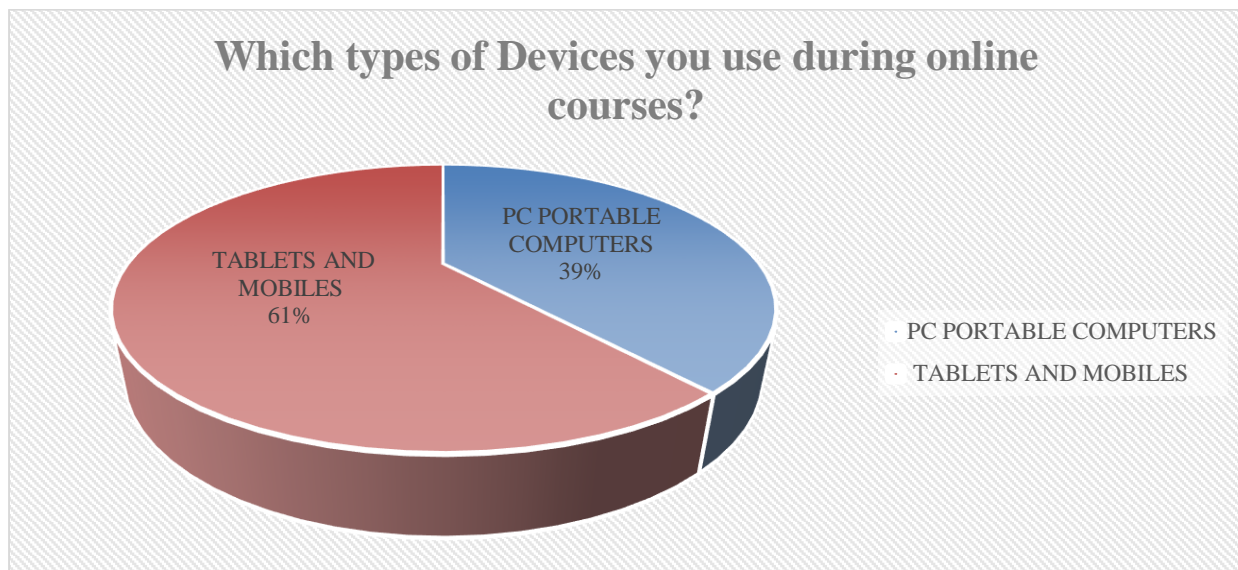
Figure 1. *Various devices utilized to Study Online courses by Dr Moulay Tahar University Students*

The second question was given to identify the supported internet connection available to learners. Results exposed that most learners (87%) used fourth-generation (4G) Mobile internet connections linked straight to their mobiles provided To Mobilis, Nedjma and Djezzy Subscribers. At the same time, 5% of students used the 4G Home provider (provided by Algerie telecom) and only accessible home. The last percentage of learners shows that 8% used Asymmetrical Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL), revealing that, unlike 4G mobile, ADSL is not always linked to their mobiles.

	4G mobile *Mobile Internet provided to Mobilis- Djezzy- Nedjma Subscribers*	*4G home (Home Internet provided by Algerie Telecom)*	*ADSL* *Home internet provided by Algerie Telcom Asymmetrical Digital Subscriber Line*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Evaluate your internet connections	80	1	5	2,51	2.00
(Total)	80				

Which types of internet provider do you use while studying online?	70		87.50%	4		5%		6	8%

Table 4. *Types of internet providers used for Digital-based Learning*

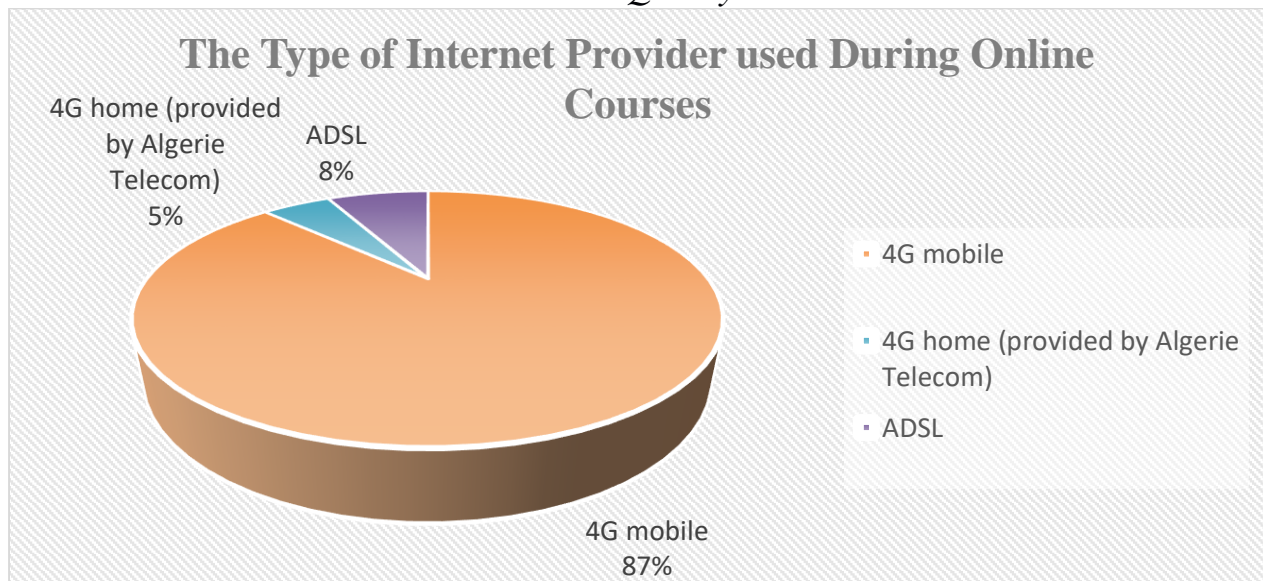**Table 5.** *Likert's statistics on the Internet Quality in Saida*

Figure 2. *The Various types of Internet providers utilized at Home Dr Moulay Tahar University learners*

This question complements the previous question, requiring learners to evaluate their internet provider's quality.

Note: 1 very dissatisfied, 2 dissatisfied, 3 neutral, 4 satisfied, 5 very satisfied

The five-point Likert scale is a well approved scale. In this sense, 1 to 1.8, this means Highly dissatisfied. From 1.81 to 2.60, this means unsatisfied. From 2.61 to 3.40, this means neutral. Moreover, from 3.41-4.20, this means satisfied and finally, from 4.21 to 5 means very satisfied.

Students were required to assess their internet connection providers' quality, whether 4G Network providers at home and for mobiles or Asymmetrical Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL). This item's mean (mean= 2.51) indicated that students were dissatisfied with their internet connection quality.

Learners were asked if they had full access to Moodle account, and results revealed that the majority of learners, 80% had an account since the university made it compulsory for learners to obtain
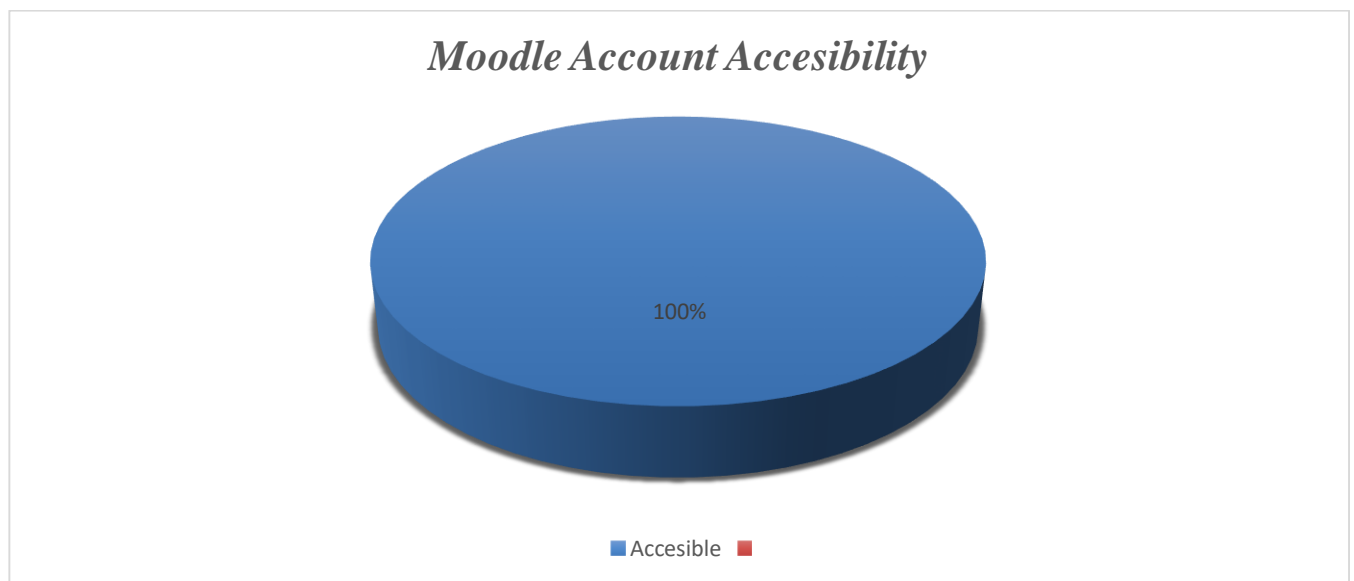

Figure 3. The Accessibility to Moodle platform among learners of English at Dr. Moulay Tahar University

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Evaluate the problems faced on Moodle platform?	80	3	5	4.11	4.00
N (total)	80				

Table 6. Likert's Statistics of the problems on Moodle Platform

Note: 1 never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 usually, 5 always

The five-point Likert scale is a well-considered scale. Therefore, starting from 1 to 1.8, this means never. From 1.81 to 2.60, means rarely. From 2.61 to 3.40, this means sometimes. Moreover, from 3.41-4.20, this means usually, and finally, from 4.21 to 5 means always.

This question's mean concerning the evaluation of the problems encountered while accessing Moodle is found to be (mean= 4.11), which indicates that students usually encounter problems while accessing Moodle. Which means that students do access Moodle accounts but find difficulty using, downloading and following online lectures Overall, different factors are influencing learners' reactions toward Digital-based learning. In addition, the results of students' satisfaction levels concerning the quality of the internet revealed that they were neutral as the mean of this item is found (mean= 2.51). while 20% of students did not have an account in Moodle, students with Moodle accounts stated that they often faced problems accessing Moodle as this item revealed a (mean=4.11).

These results indicated that the lack of materials (Internet connection quality, Device availability, and Moodle accessibility) directly linked to the negative expectations of Digital-based learning in Dr Moulay Tahar University students of English, which asserts the second Hypothesis of this paper. Furthermore, these results are compatible with the study by Benharzallah (2019), which revealed the weakness and quality of the materials obstructing the progress of Digital-based learning in Algeria.

	Facebook Groups		Gmail		Zoom Meet	
The Use of Alternatives platforms	56	44.80%	69	55.20%	12	9.60 %

Table 7. *Alternative platforms used for Digital-based learning*
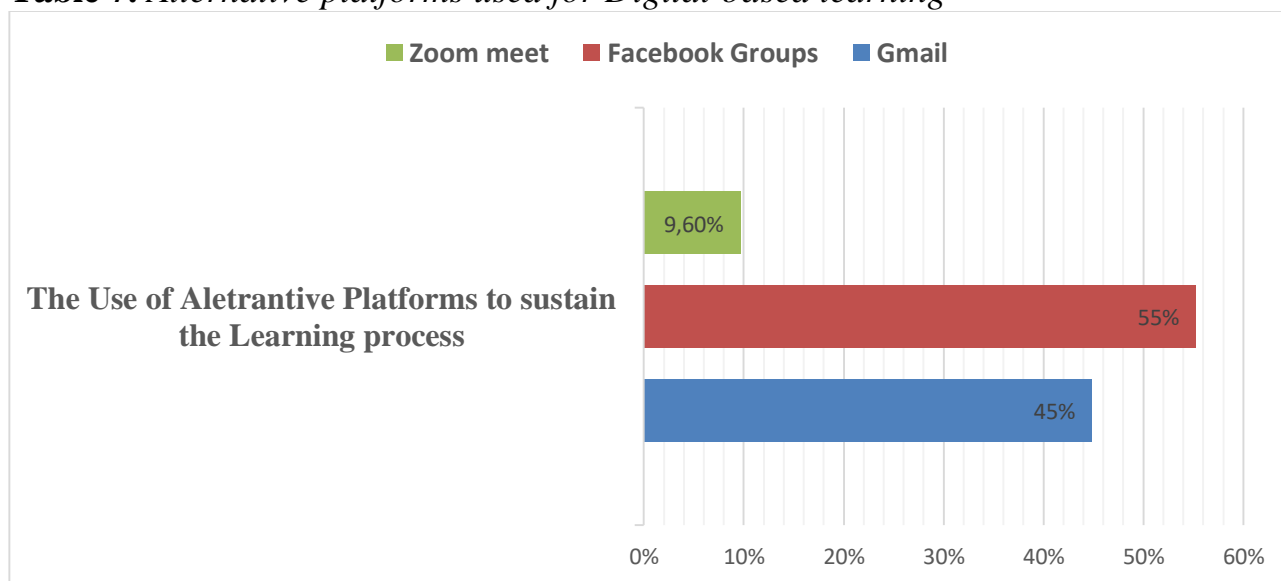

Figure 4. *Participants use Alternative platforms to Sustain the Learning process*

In this part, learners were asked to provide the most suitable alternatives during online courses and were asked to select one of the following platforms. These alternatives are exemplified in Gmail. Facebook groups and Zoom meeting

The results revealed that students used different alternatives to stay in touch with their teachers and opted for the most accessible platform through their available tools. It was noticed that most learners were in favor of the continuous use of 'Facebook normalized groups', obtaining 44.80%, while 55.20% were the proportion for the use of 'Gmail

accounts' and emailing system to send and receive lectures. However, only a few students with a proportion of 9.60% were given to show the use of 'Zoom Meet', making it the least used platform.

These results indicated that the learners' choice of alternative platforms, such as normalized Facebook groups and Gmail, had a direct link to their incapability to use Moodle platform sufficiently in Dr. Moulay Tahar University students of English, consolidating the second Hypothesis of this paper.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, it is imperative to stress the importance of normalized platforms that are mobile and easy to use amongst learners. These alternatives allow learners to access lectures anytime and download them anywhere with the help of a Mobile internet connection. Moreover, these facilities raise the positive reactions of learners and encourage them to opt for learning. i.e., human perception is an essential factor in the success of digital-based-learning (Aviram & Tami, 2004). Therefore, this paper ponders learners' different reactions toward Digital-based learning among second-year English Dr. Moulay Tahar University students. The previous results show that even with the Moodle platform by the university of Dr. Moulay Tahar Saida, learners reacted negatively to the online classes or courses during the Pandemic, resulting in negative attitudes.

Results were various factors colliding together to result in such negative reactions in Dr. Moulay Tahar second-year students of English. These results exposed those materials such as Internet Quality, the learners' incapability to use Moodle platform fully, and some learners' incapability to possess Mobiles or PC Portable Computers were the main factors thwarting the success of Online courses.

The Algerian Ministry of Higher Education is doing its best to sustain and encourage digital-based learning as an alternate new tool during the Pandemic. However, the combination of the Classical and the new electronic way of teaching in the Algerian university is a multilayered quest that is still being processed as learners are still used to classical face-to-face lecturing (synchronic lecturing). At the same time, online courses are considered secondary or supplementary tools.

Learners in Algerian universities are not yet assimilated into blended learning, consisting of online courses and classical face-to-face interaction. In this sense, we need to give more attention to the different aspects that will help ensure the success of this kind of blended learning by taking into consideration the different factors tackled in this paper.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Formulaire sans titre

E-Learning Challenges and Reactions during the Covid 19 Pandemic. Case Study of The Second-Year Students of English at Dr Moulay Tahar - Saida University
This questionnaire is a part of the current study to investigate Second-year students of Dr Moulay Tahar university's reactions and attitudes toward E-learning during the Pandemic of Covi-19

* Required

1. Email *

   _____

2. 1. What is your Gender? Mark only one

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female

3. 2. What type of Devices do you imply during online courses?   Mark only one

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ PC PORTABLE COMPUTERS
   ☐ TABLETS AND MOBILES

4. 3. Which type of internet provider do you use while studying online?   Mark only one

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ 4G mobile Mobile Internet provided Mobilis- Djezzy- Nedjma Subscribers
   ☐ 4G home (Home Intertent provided by Algerie Telecom
   ☐ ADSL Asymmetrical Digital Subscriber Line provided by Algerie Telcom

5. 4. Is Moodle platform accessible to you? Mark only one

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Accessible
   ☐ Not Accessible

6. 5. Evaluate your internet connection Quality   Mark only one

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Very satisfied
   ☐ Satisfied
   ☐ Neutral
   ☐ Dissatisfied
   ☐ Very dissatisfied

7. 6. Do you have a Moodle account? Mark only one

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

8. 7. If yes, how often do you have problems accessing your Moodle account? Mark only one

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Always
   ☐ Often
   ☐ Sometimes
   ☐ Rarely
   ☐ Never

9. 8. What are other Alternate platforms accessible to you?   Mark all possible Alternatives

   Mark only one oval per row.

	Gmail	Facebook Groups	Zoom meet
Suitable Alternative	◯	◯	◯
Not suitable Alternative	◯	◯	◯

10. 9. Based on your Level of Agreement, tick the box(es) you agree with Check all possible what is possible and relates to you.

    Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree Strongly agree
I would instead study Online rather than in the Classical way.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lectures detailed through E-platforms are better than the Classical method.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am opposed to E-learning.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am in favour of E-learning.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-learning is valuable during the Pandemic.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-learning is irreplaceable post-pandemic	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-learning is an addition to the Classical way of learning.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯