

Positioning E-learning in teacher professional development at the Algerian University in the post-Covid Era

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Abstract:

A close reading of the present situation reveals that the near future is still foggy after Covid-19. The transition from a face-to-face class to remote teaching and learning became the only urgent solution, yet the challenges associated proved the necessity to rethink new strategies to match the student's needs online. The Algerian University provided an e-learning platform which is Moodle. However, the student and teacher interaction online has not still matched the learning needs yet. The problem here is not related to the availability of virtual learning platforms. It is merely related to teacher professional development and the students' awareness towards using this alternative online classroom to the face-to-face classrooms. The challenge facing teachers of English online is mainly to raise their students' awareness of learning English online and to promote their learning autonomy to cope with the present situation during and after the global pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, e-learning platform, teacher professional development (TPD), students' awareness, learning autonomy

1. Introduction:

The digital transformation of the educational atmosphere in higher education has provided a new teaching and learning environment called electronic learning, e-learning. Corona pandemic has obliged the Algerian Government to close the classrooms of universities early

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in March 2020. This situation forced the Algerian teacher to virtualize their face-to-face practices. Facing such a global pandemic has uncovered weaknesses in the education system in terms of digitalizing university classrooms. Covid-19 effects have further demonstrated the low access to such e-classrooms among students. This issue proved the fact that the potential of using digital teaching methods has been underestimated from the digital educational projects before the Covid-19 pandemic. Rethinking the future of digital education must be built on the principles of professional development of the teachers and raising students' awareness to use technology and promote their learning autonomy to meet their own needs.

2. E-learning: its definition in the digital classroom literature:

It comprises all sorts of electronic sources of learning and teaching. Web ICT systems or other sources represent platforms to implement the learning process whether online or without (Tavangarian D. et al. 2004). E-learning is mainly used to refer to computer-assisted learning in all of its forms. It uses online training and teaching materials, CD-ROMs, learning management software, discussion boards, emails, computer-assisted assessment, simulation, and virtual conferencing. In other words, e-learning focuses on the learner as the main university partner in online education. E-learning can take the form of courses and modules, and it incorporates synchronous as well as asynchronous access (Wentling et al. 2000). E-learning is further a term used to refer to external and internal classroom educational experiences via technology databases. It is based on the computer and network-based transfer of skills and knowledge. Moreover, it includes applications and processes of web-based learning, computer-assisted learning, virtual classroom opportunities, and digital collaboration (Yacob et al. 2012).

Online learning is getting to be a new learning paradigm. Welsh, E.T. et al. (2003) defined "e-learning as the use of computer network technology, primarily over or through the internet, to deliver information and instruction to individuals". E-Learning can involve different learning styles and facilitate learning through a variety of activities. It develops knowledge of the Internet and computer skills that will help learners throughout their lives and careers. The Internet has further established e-learning educational systems and enabled students to study without limits in time, place, and cost. The implementation of e-learning at Algerian University has become a top priority. To do this, the University has provided an electronic gate to Moodle platform to both teachers and students.

Modern teaching and learning have been developed by using computers and digital technologies. An educational shift towards e-learning has enabled the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and the Internet in teaching and learning foreign languages. In other words, E-learning offers a different flexible, and easy education delivery. E-learning offers online courses as a support for face-to-face sessions in a blended learning environment. Thus, learners of multiple abilities have the chance to learn anywhere and anytime. Higher Educational institutions must decide the best approach to deliver education, such as online learning, face-to-face, or a blended approach.

3. Teacher professional development:

It is the non-stop process of learning and action to promote teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices that impact positively students' learning outcomes. The process of professional development aims to promote teaching practices of teachers to be professional practitioners in their subject. Greemers and Kyfiakider (2013) claimed that the teacher can moderate the classroom's actions and learners' achievement outcomes.

Teacher professional development is the formative assessment and evaluation that allows the teacher to learn from his in-field experience where they can be a learner with their learners who can be the source for developing their teaching career and enriching their knowledge Coe et al. (2020, p.5) suggested that teaching experience focuses on "developing competences guided by formative feedback in a supportive professional learning environment." the teacher professional development can occur in collaboration with peer teacher who can be peer assessor.

In higher education, teacher professional development (TDP) is an indispensable aspect of human resource management and development. The quality of education and training determines the importance of teachers' professionalism and then comes the coordination between theory and practice. Teacher professional development is a continuous process of upgrading teachers' knowledge and skills. Despite the long history, teachers' professional development as a notion was not a concern of human resource management and development in education until thirty years ago (Donnelly, Dove & Morales, 2002). By the mid-1970, innovations in education had brought great changes in education managers' and teachers' attitudes. Later, teachers seek for their effective professional growth and opportunities available for their professionalism. To fit the cultural, social, economic, and technological advances and demands, teachers are focusing on the quality of their training and professional development.

4. E-learning: current situation in Algerian University:

The Algerian government assigned the ministry of post and communication to implement the national ICT policy (Hamdy, 2007 cited in Guemide et al., 2012). International agencies participated in this implementation and were financed by the World Bank in 2002. By the beginning of the millennium, there were several initiatives to launch projects to integrate information and computing technology at home and work for all Algerians via wired and wireless techniques. In 2000, legislation was enacted to emerge new mobile networking operators working in parallel with Algérie Telecom. This legislation facilitated the establishment of three main operators: Mobilis, Djezzy, and Ooredoo.

As a result, a variety of projects were created to integrate ICT into Algerian daily life. The Algerian University and Schools were at the first class. These national ICT projects were launched by 2005

- The project of the Ministry of Education to equip all schools with computers by 2005
- The distance education project
- The virtual university project

- The research network to be put in place by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
- The health network developed and maintained by the National Health Development Agency (ANDS)
- The Djaweb Internet platform (Hamdy, 2007, cited in Guemide et al., 2012)

To run to the exploration of the e-learning pace, Algerian telecommunication managers launched e-learning systems in 2006 based on a convention with Thomson and Microsoft corporations which provides 4.000 courses to teach ICT skills (Guemide et al., 2012). The E-learning strategy was first launched by Djaweb.

5. E-learning and teacher professional development at Algerian University:

In-service teacher education faces a challenge of professional development (PD) that enables them to respond to national curriculum and policy change. Teacher professional development (PD) is a key vehicle that improves teaching and improves student achievement in turn. Professional development helps introduce the curriculum and pedagogical reforms (Carr et al., 2000). Effective PD needs to be sustained over time, with intensive learning experiences, and it needs to be contextualized (Garet et al., 2001). In this context, teachers need to experience ‘ongoing sessions of learning, collaboration, and application, accompanied by school- and classroom-based support, over an ample period to incorporate new behaviors fully into a teacher’s repertoire’ (Killion, 2005-2006, p.5). In conclusion, the teacher does not cease learning in the classroom or via electronic gates.

Delivering English language learning via ICT tools became a necessity, especially in the era of the Covid-19 Pandemic. E-learning platforms provide an urgent solution to teach university students using online, hybrid, and synchronous platforms without regard to the physical location, time constraints, and the choice of device used to access these platforms (Guemide et al., 2012). Yet, the problem posed in the Algerian context is the lack of in-service training, or in other words, neglecting the teachers’ professional development to use e-learning strategies to match the student's needs, especially during the global pandemic.

The shortage of serious programs for university teachers’ professional development reflects the unstable teaching and learning process in the Algerian university, especially in the present situation of the Global pandemic. The Algerian university has provided symbolic programs that did not fit the teachers’ real needs and skills to perform better in their expected virtual classrooms before the Covid-19 pandemic which influenced the learning outcomes to cope with the challenges of meeting the student's needs in distance and via e-learning platforms provided the Algerian universities websites. The Algerian in-service teacher at university has to deliver his/her courses online via Moodle platform, but the question is whether he/she is competent enough to use this platform and other meeting platforms like Google meet and Zoom to deliver the English language curriculum effectively. As a university teacher, the observed situation is that there are fluctuating competencies between the teachers of English in using these e-learning strategies and platforms.

6. E-learning and students’ awareness at Algerian university:

For students, e-learning is more interesting since it provides them with information, and can be flexible with the high flow of internet access. It can help them to develop their knowledge and encourages them to be responsible for their learning. They can learn at their own pace regardless of their time and expenses. However, the implementation of e-learning at university must be evaluated carefully in terms of technological infrastructure and leadership support to guarantee its success (Yacob, 2012). Designing effective and comprehensive e-learning strategies can prove the university's readiness to adopt and implement e-learning experiences. This can help university students to learn and be assessed more efficiently because nowadays students know to use mainly social media databases. Therefore, implementing serious e-learning strategies and training programs for students will help them to interact with various instructional materials by logging in to the available platforms using a username and a password provided and delivered by the technicians of the university platforms. A heavy task to be achieved by the university teacher is to raise students' awareness of the benefits of using e-learning platforms to receive their courses and to be assessed distantly in their homes during this global pandemic.

In the Algerian context, E-learning is considered a potent option for mass education. Consequently, the university is hastily adopting it to meet nowadays education demands during the pandemic, often without considering the awareness and use of e-learning platforms in EFL classes with an emphasis on parameters such as perception, training, accessibility, and infrastructural availability. The students do not know adequately about e-learning platforms, and further lack adequate training. Moreover, the major mode of internet access is mobile phones. Students get acquainted with social media with less experience in using e-learning platforms as a source for official instruction.

7. Conclusion and suggestions:

The present situation pushes the Algerian university to rethink the teacher's professional development as well as students' training and awareness to use e-learning platforms adequately to fit the current needs to deliver the curriculum. The emergence and use of IT and the Internet revealed a complex web of challenges and opportunities for education. To integrate ICT effectively into the teaching and learning process, it merely depends on vital constructs such as e-learning perception, e-learning training, e-learning accessibility, and adoption of e-learning. E-learning perception and awareness are mainly related to the professionally developed teachers' and students' exposure; attitudes; knowledge; motivation; and values that influence e-learning platform usage. Active support from educational administrators can be an effective catalyst for shaping students' perceptions of e-learning and teacher professional development.

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accessibility, and adoption of e-learning. E-learning perception and awareness are mainly related to the professionally developed teachers' and students' exposure; attitudes; knowledge; motivation; and values that influence e-learning platform usage. Active support from educational administrators can be an effective catalyst for shaping students' perceptions of e-learning and teacher professional development.

Thus, we suggest in the present paper:

1. Systematic training on e-learning should be organized for teachers to develop their teaching profession via electronic platforms as an alternative face-to-face classroom.
2. Systematic training for students to raise their Awareness of the importance of these e-platforms by enhancing their use of these platforms.
3. An e-learning department should be established under the ministry of education to develop comprehensive national e-learning platforms to serve as a complementary form of learning for students in formal education and as an educational option for people outside mainstream education.
4. Furthermore, classrooms and laboratories should be fully equipped to support the patronage of e-learning.

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