# Online Learning Vs. Classroom Instruction Of Efl: The Case Of Second Year Licence Students At Kasdi Merbah University-Ouargla

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**Abstract**:

the present paper deals with the comparison between online and classroom instruction of EFL. It raises the problem of whether distance learning can replace the role of the teacher in the traditional classroom. The study aims at bridging the gap between these two contexts of learning via fusing online instruction with face-to-face learning. The experimental type of research was adopted with the quantitative approach where the researcher presented lectures of written expression in both teaching contexts to $2^{nd}$ year licence students at the University of Ouargla. Also, a questionnaire was administered to 100 students of the same level. The results reveal that online instruction is useful but cannot replace the role of the teacher.

**Keywords**:online learning, face-to-face instruction, EFL, EFL learner, EFL teacher.

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## 1. Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) requires different challenges. Teachers have to be familiar with technology development to vary their teaching methods and materials. In this regard, English instructors moved towards distance learning, especially during Covid 19 pandemic. However, the question of the effectiveness of either traditional learning or the online one is still under discussion among researchers in the field of didactics.

Online education has become increasingly popular in teaching FLs. It is assumed that about three million students nationwide will be enrolled in at least one online course. E-learning has been considered as an answer to population growth, institutional competition and changing learners' needs (Steinweg *et al*., date unknown). Distance education has gone through many generations of progress. The concept of education from a distance began with traditional printed materials as early as 1892 when Penn State provided a distance education program that followed the US Postal Service (Carnevale 2000).

Online educational opportunities have blossomed as parents, students, college and university administrators and state and federal legislatures try to grapple with the problem of increasing education fields. There are various potential advantages of presenting online lectures: there is a perception that online classes are a more effective way to introduce some courses. Students and teachers need not physically presence in a classroom (Arias *et al*.  2018).

Consequently, people, in remote areas, can have access to courses to which they might not have had access earlier. In the case of asynchronous lectures, students can more easily fit their learning time into their schedule. This offers more flexibility, especially to the non-traditional students who may have family or work conditions not normally associated with the traditional undergraduate students. Hence, Learners can consume the material simultaneously without the need of more classroom capacity (Fortune *et al.*  2006).

This kind of distance learning was extended in the mid and late-1900's (today, considered the second generation of distance education). This last utilized radio, television, and audio recordings. The earlier materials, including the first and second generations of distance education, were designed to produce and distribute learning tools of technology of the day permitted while leaving no space for reflection on the lack of interactive communication between the learner and the instructor (Mirakian 2007). Distance education has since evolved into the third generation, which includes interactive video, email, and World Wide Web technologies. They are the most adopted and utilized forms of distance education since these modalities allow learning activities to be redefined to include student-teacher interactions (Katz 2002).

Spooner *et al.* (1999) define distance education as any form of education that separates geographically the instructor and learners, with communication via media. Recently, media is represented by the computer and the Internet including email, the World Wide Web, zoom, Google meet, and different means of social media and is referred to as online education. Comparing online education to the traditional one needs to be established to develop e-learning by focusing on the students' level progress and satisfaction (Spooner *et al.* 1999).

In the light of this, the following problematic is raised in the present paper: can distance learning replace the role of the teacher in the traditional classroom? The research questions below can also be developed:

1.  What is the nature of both traditional and e-learning?
2.  What are the differences between traditional and distance learning?
3.  Do teachers prefer teaching in the traditional classroom or the modern one?

Concerning the main problem of the study, we hypothesize that distance instruction can support but not replace the teacher.

For the sub-questions above, the following hypotheses are suggested:

1. E-learning needs more equipment than the traditional instruction.
2. Unlike traditional learning, distance instruction provides the opportunity of synchronous and asynchronous learning.
3. Because of time and efforts needs, teachers prefer to follow the traditional method.

To test the research hypotheses, the nature of both traditional and distance instruction will be explained in details. Also, the main differences between these contexts of learning will be clarified. Furthermore, we will highlight the teachers/learners attitudes towards the modern classroom.

## 2. Literature Review

Different researches and views on the issue of teaching and learning online have been suggested. However, a lot of studies dealt with the types of instructional techniques used when presenting online courses. This phenomenon is always under question because of the issue that *"Some faculty members are suspicious of online courses [….] have significant reservation about the loss of face-to-face contact,…and because distance education was previously viewed as an inferior form of education."* (Connolly *et al.* 2005). In other words, enhancing technology use in the different educational institutions needs a serious focus on developing novel materials and methods. Many factors lead to a growing need for more research in this area as institution needs, small sample sizes, and the progressive number of online programs in the area of education (Kirtman 2009).

In the light of this, the huge number of students receiving online courses has been observed. 56% of 2/4 year level institutions introduced some type of distance learning and about 90% of the world universities present some of their lectures through online educational contexts (D'Orsie and Day 2006).

## 2.1 The Nature of Online and Face to Face Instruction

Classroom learning is also called traditional or offline learning. Learning is acquiring new knowledge, skills, behavior, and preferences. Bransford *et al*. (2007) believe that it is an active process of engaging and manipulating experiences to build mental models of the world. Learners learn as they explore, observe and interact with the world around them. Consequently, it requires building on prior knowledge. According to Bransford *et al*. (2007), learning is a social activity that needs people who interact with the learning space. So, formal education requires students and teachers to meet at a physical place (referred to as a classroom). This is because the technologies that existed in formal education could not allow online presentation of lectures. As a result, most of the educational books written before the 21$^{st}$ C were directed towards traditional learning. In spite of the popularity of e-learning, traditional learning remains dominant (Darkwa and Antwi 2001).

Classroom learning takes place in school, and there is a calendar or timetable and rules and regulations that dictate the procedure of learning/teaching. Classroom instruction requires students to be active in different learning contexts. Instructors and learners have to be physically present in the classroom so that the teacher manages the classroom. Classroom instruction insures face-to-face interaction exchanging ideas. Tis phenomenon enhances the meaning of socialization at the learners' level. Teachers have to encourage and develop the students' sense of group work and interaction in the classroom (ibid).

At early stages, the online environment was used as a means to enhance the traditional delivery of classroom tools. Hence, there are many studies that assume that utilizing online material in addition to presenting lectures in the traditional way has many advantages. For example, Coates and Humphries (2001) argue that online material available is effective but emphasize the necessity of learners' interaction concerning the material to be useful. However, researchers

agree on the fact that additional tools can improve the learners' level. (Arias *et.al*. 2018).

In the 21$^{st}$ century, online learning topic has become popular. Distance learning is the producing instruction via digital resources. This type of learning is insured through the use of electronic devices. It can also be called online education, internet learning, and computerized electronic learning. The introduction of online learning means the students can now access their learning materials online and anytime. Recently, technology development has paved the way for easily accessible education (Darkwa and Antwi 2001).

Printed emails and sent materials to students and teachers represent the early stage of distance or online education. Now, the progress of distance learning systems and web resources, due to technology, revolutionized e-learning via reinforcing the fact of information spread. In this regard, live chats, live videos and recorded one are part of this kind of revolution in education (Kaltura 2019).

Here, the teachers can activate the learners' capacities either through distance instruction or asynchronous assessment to be sent later via emails or any other means of online communication (Darkwa and Antwi 2001).

## 2.2 Comparison between Distance and Traditional Learning
## 2.2.1 Traditional vs. Online Learning Context

Researchers focused on the effects of learning environments/contexts on the learners' performance. Some focused on studying the link between learning approaches and the context/space of teaching: they found that the environment has impact on the students' social and psychological level. So, e-learning with its new context can have a direct relationship with the learners' level of education (Ni 2013).

Customized learning, currency of material, flexibility, and feedback can be insured with new techniques in the online education

case. On the other hand, others believe that confusion and isolation are the main features of distance education as comparison with the tradition classroom (Brown 1996).

## 2.2.2 Learners' Attitudes

A successful context of learning requires students/teachers communicative and social interaction. These learning features can include sharing ideas, asking questions, and refusing an opinion. In other words, new issues can be introduced via discussion and dialogues. So, the teachers' objectives can be realized via encouraging students interaction via different skills and tasks.

In distance learning, teachers have to be eclectic and develop their teaching methods and techniques. Online lectures can offer distance discussion via synchronous chat, and sent emails. Students can have more opportunity of free learning and self-reliance. They can also develop self-confidence of learning. Unlike face-to-face learning, the online one can develop learner-centered environment. In addition, the learners can reduce the stress of fear to face the teacher or during participation (Ni 2013).

## 2.2.3 Learners Educational Behavior

Researchers have studied the learners' performance in both cases, online and face-to-face learning. They focused on their level, semesters results, gathered information, and assessment. Scholars have found that about eighty percent of difference is registered for the students' grades, in the case of online education, where only ten to twenty percent is noticed in the traditional classroom. In this last, the learners may feel more stressed and have no time to check their information (ibid).

Researchers have also compared the different syllabi in the case of online and face-to-face learning. They concluded that distance instruction is more useful in terms of students' behavior and attitudes.

However, they agree also that the students who have been already excellent in the traditional classroom will achieve high grades in the case of online courses (Ni 2013).

McLaren (2004) conducted his research in both cases in the field of business classroom where the study outcomes revealed that the environment of instruction affects the learners' performance. Acquiring marketing terms requires a high level of teaching methods and tasks programs. Also, students have to be familiar with the new context of online learning (McLaren 2004).

More importantly, Brown and Wack (1999) believe that it is more complex to measure the learners' performance in the online educational context (Brown and Wack 1999). Researchers focus on the following main points when evaluating the learners' performance: their satisfaction and attitudes towards distance learning, and their results and level development (Moore and Thompson 1990).

Unlike face-to-face learning, in online education, the instructor have to focus on the learners' performance in both synchronous and asynchronous contexts. The learners' seriousness and their ability to get access to the Internet and have the needed devices. So, their grades will not be affected by their understanding of the lectures but also by their ability to have the necessary materials of online education.

## 3.Methodology

This study follows an experimental type of research where the researcher presented lessons in the traditional classroom and online laboratory. The sessions were programmed for $2^{nd}$ year licence students, in written expression module, at the University of Kasdi Merbah-Ouargla. The class contains 40 students. For collecting data, the researcher depended on the quantitative approach via administering a questionnaire for 100 students, of the same level, among 245 ones of the section. The questions of the questionnaire focus on the students' performance in the two different contexts of learning (traditional and online classrooms).

## 3.1 Research Design

Our data collection was supported by programming sessions of written expression in both environments of learning in order to make comparison between the learners' performance in both cases. In the first semester, the researcher presented lessons of writing essays where she first introduced their rules and asked the learners to choose a topic to speak about in an essay form. She provided an immediate feedback and asked them also to do homework about the same task. On the other hand, via "Google meet," the researcher designed courses (in the second semester) of the same topic without any change of its content: the students used online dictionaries to help them translate the needed words. Also, they used the chat box to discuss with one another as well as with their teacher via asking questions and suggesting ideas. In addition, they sent their essays to the teacher in her chat box where she provided immediate online correction and guidance to each student. Concerning their homework of writing essay, they were asked to send them at the teachers' email. The researcher did also send them the lesson content in pdf form.

## 3.2 Research Tools

100 students of $2^{nd}$ year licence level at the University of Kasdi Merbah, Ouargla received a questionnaire that tests their familiarity with online courses and their preference of in classroom or distance instruction. The questionnaire contains three items: the first one is about the students' age and gender. The second one deals with the description of their usual sessions of written expression in the traditional classroom. It contains 12 questions. However, the third item (with 13 questions) focuses on the comparison between the students' attitudes in the traditional classroom and e-learning. The comparison includes the issues of course content, assessment, and the learners' performance.

## 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

*Question.1* Do you use the different means of technology to learn English at home?

**Table 1 Using means of technology to learn English at home**

| Possibilities | Number | Percentage |
|---------------|--------|------------|
| Yes | 100 | 100% |
| No | 00 | 00% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

When we asked them if they use the different means of technology to learn English at home, 100% of them said that they have the habit too use them.

*Question.2* Do you prefer to receive your lesson via online courses or in the classroom?

**Table 2 Preferring online courses or the face to face learning**

| Possibilities | Number | Percentage |
|---------------|--------|------------|
| Online courses | 67 | 67% |
| In the classroom | 33 | 33% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

More than half of the population (67%) said that they prefer e-learning while only 33% of them still believe in the traditional instruction.

*Question 3:* If you chose the first option, would you explain the reasons?

## Table 3 The reasons of preferring online courses

| Possibilities | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Possibility of recording the lectures | 30 | 44.77% |
| Ability to find the lessons at any time | 37 | 55.22% |
| Total | 67 | 100% |

*Question.4* Do your teachers organize online meeting sessions to teach you the different modules?

## Table 4 Organize online meeting sessions

| Possibilities | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| always | 00 | 00% |
| sometimes | 00 | 00% |
| rarely | 00 | 00% |
| never | 100 | 100% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

The results reveal that teachers still prefer the face to face teaching and they do not organize online sessions.

*Question.5* Do your teachers encourage you to chat with native speakers from foreign English universities?

## Table.5 Encouraging the students to chat with native speakers from foreign English universities

| Possibilities | number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 00 | 100% |
| No | 100 | 100% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

All the informants said that their teachers don not encourage them to chat with native speakers from foreign English universities

*Question.6* Do your teachers send you lessons/homeworks via email or Google classroom?

## Table.6 Sending lessons/homeworks via email or Google classroom

| Possibilities | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| always | 00 | 00% |
| Sometimes | 14 | 14% |
| rarely | 86 | 86% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

The majority of the students (86%) said that rarely their teachers send them lessons/homeworks via email or Google classroom. However, only 14% of them replied that they sometimes do so.

**4.Discussion**

From the results above, the teachers are still depending on face to face instruction. They rarely send lectures or homeworks via all distance means of learning. Also, they do not provide online live or recorded videos of lectures. On the other hand, the students use the different means of technology to learn English at home. When, the researcher asked the leaners which kind of instruction they prefer, they said that they like in classroom learning to receive immediate feedback from their teachers. The group who said that they prefer distance learning sees that it offers them the opportunity to record the lectures to be revised at any time. So, what can be noticed from the questionnaire outcomes is that distance learning is useful, especially in the recent development of technology, but it cannot replace the teacher(s role and immediate feedback in the real classroom. Hence, e-learning can occur as a supportive means, but not replace the face to face instruction.

Concerning the presented lectures in the traditional classroom, the researcher encouraged the students to ask questions about any missed point. Some of them revealed a sense of shyness in face-to-face interaction where this phenomenon could not occur in the case of online instruction because distance learning can be considered as a comfortable zone for shy learners to ask questions. However, the students with high grade showed excellent performance in both cases. For homework, the outcomes reveal that in one done in online learning was submitted by the students the right time. However, some did not do so in the traditional classroom because of their fear of mistakes since it was a face-to-face interaction. Also, the learners in distance learning felt more comfortable to ask questions and the use of the online dictionary was more useful for them.

## 5.Conclusion

In spite of the sharp development of technology and its influence on teaching methods and materials, the role of the teacher in face-to-face classroom is still necessary. Online instruction has been effective in transmitting knowledge all over the word, especially in difficult times as Covid 19 pandemic period. However, EFL learners, mainly beginners, need the presence of the teacher in the classroom to ensure immediate feedback. The results of this study reveal that EFL learners, as signs of the recent generation, prefer more than their teachers online learning while the instructors still believe in the traditional method of teaching, which represents the source of their knowledge. So, researchers and educators have to bridge the gap between the learners' needs/interests and the teachers' beliefs. In addition, they have to raise the teachers' awareness about the necessity to fuse online with classroom instruction. In this regard, both teachers and learners need to be familiar with technology development to realize successful and effective teaching/learning contexts.

In the light of this, the Algerian universities have to develop the online education without neglecting the traditional one. Also, they have to provide the necessary laboratories and electronic devices for the students to be ready to receive and accept this kind of instruction. Learners need also to face the challenge of having access to the Internet at home to adapt with technology for learning EFL.

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**Appendix**

**The Students Questionnaire**

*Dear students,*

The present questionnaire is about online learning vs. classroom instruction of EFL. I would be grateful if you could answer all the included questions. You could tick the appropriate boxes or write full sentences whenever necessary. Thank you for your collaboration.

**Section One**

Before handing in the questionnaire, could you please give us some information about yourself?

1. Gender:    Male                    Female

2. Age: ............


**Section two**

1. Do you use the different means of technology to learn English at home?

　　　　　Yes                                No

2. Do you prefer to receive your lesson via online courses or in the classroom?

　　Online courses                         in the classroom

3. If you chose the first option, would you explain the reasons?

…………………………………………………………………………

4. Is the online curriculum working for you?

          Yes                         No

5. Are you satisfied with the technology and software you are using for remote learning?

          Yes                         No

6. Do you have access to a device for learning online?

          Yes                         No

7. Do your teachers organize online meeting sessions to teach you the different modules?

    Always          sometimes          rarely          never

8. Do your teachers encourage you to chat with native speakers from foreign English universities?

          Yes                         No

9. Do your teachers send you lessons/homework via email or Google classroom?

          Always          sometimes          rarely

10. Could you easily manage your time while learning remotely?

          Easy                    difficult

11. How important is face-to-face communication for you while learning remotely?

……………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………
……

12. How ideal is your home environment for online learning?

          Useful               Inappropriate

13. Was remote learning successful for you during the Covid-19 pandemic?

          Yes                         No

*Thank you for your time*