Online Learning in Algerian Universities and Institutions: The Reality and Expectations

التعلم عبر الخط في الجامعات والمعاهد الجزائرية: الواقع والتوقعات

RAHMANI Asma[*1]

University of Batna 1, (Algeria), asma.rahmani@univ-batna.dz

Abstract

The present descriptive research attempts to investigate the extent to which Algerian university teachers and learners accept online learning. Also, it tries to depict teachers' and learners' readiness towards such adoption. To collect the needed data, two emailed questionnaires were sent to a representative sample of 17 teachers and 79 learners selected from the whole population that comprises university teachers and learners at the department of Media and Communication, faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, university of Batna-1. The selection was based on the simple random sampling technique. The obtained results were coded, and treated using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The main findings of this research prove that teachers' as well as learners' reactions differ toward the adoption of this type of learning. Ultimately, their comments and suggestions pave the way to the success of online learning in the Algerian universities if the needed modifications are implemented.

Keywords: Online learning, Algerian university teachers, Algerian learners, Reactions, COVID-19 pandemic.

ملخص:

يحاول البحث الوصفي الحالي التحقيق في مدى قبول أساتذة ومتعلمين الجامعات الجزائرية للتعلم عبر الخط. كما أنه يحاول تصوير استعداد المعلمين والمتعلمين لهذا التبني. لجمع البيانات المطلوبة، تم إرسال استبيانين بالبريد الإلكتروني إلى عينة تمثيلية من 17 أستاذ جامعي و 79 متعلمًا تم اختيارهم من كل المجتمع الذي يضم كل مدرسين ومتعلمين في قسم الإعلام والاتصال، كلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، جامعة باتنة- 1. تم الاختيارعلى أساس أسلوب أخذ العينات العشوائي البسيط. تم ترميز النتائج المتحصل عليها ومعالجتها باستخدام الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS). تثبت النتائج الرئيسية لهذا البحث أن ردود أفعال المعلمين والمتعلمين تختلف تجاه تبني هذا النوع من التعلم. في النهاية، تمهد تعليقاتهم واقتراحاتهم الطريق لنجاح التعلم عبر الإنترنت في الجامعات الجزائرية إذا تم تنفيذ التعديلات المطلوبة.

كلمات مفتاحية: تعلم عبر الخط؛ أساتذة جامعات جزائريون؛ متعلمون جزائريون؛ ردود أفعال؛ جائحة كوفيد -19.

---

[*] Corresponding author

1. Introduction

The primary objective of online learning is to provide accessible, flexible, and beneficial sources of learning. Up to the year 2020, this type of learning was considered a choice rather than a must or even a priority, namely in the Algerian higher education context. The COVID-19 pandemic severely hits all sectors, including the educational fields with their different levels. The COVID-19 pandemic and all its drastic effects compel nations and countries to adopt distance learning, mainly online learning type to avoid the continuity of the prompt interruption in the learning process. For numerous countries, this adoption was sudden and immediate. This leads to different reactions from both teachers and learners regarding several factors.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The adoption of online learning in Algerian higher education, as in all other countries, was a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic to preserve lives and ensure the continuity of the learning process. The use of this type of learning was characterized by being immediate, and rapid. Its adoption was applied without any type of preparation for both university teachers and learners. This situation raises an inevitable question which is the center of the current investigation:

To what extent did Algerian university teachers and learners accept online learning?

To what extent are Algerian university teachers and learners ready to adopt online learning?

1.2. Hypothesis

The formulated hypotheses of this research are:

Algerian university teachers and learners accepted online learning.

Algerian university teachers and learners are not yet ready to adopt online learning.

1.3. Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to investigate Algerian university teachers' and learners' acceptance of and reactions to online learning. Besides, many other objectives can be targeted, such as:

1. Highlighting the different reasons behind the different reactions in both cases.

2. Considering any possible suggestions that may assist teachers and learners in this type of learning.

2. Methodology

The descriptive nature of this study requires the use of two emailed questionnaires, one for learners and another for learners.

2.1. Questionnaires Descriptions

Each questionnaire consists of seven questions divided into two sections. The first section tries to collect general information about teachers and learners that may assist us better understand their reactions toward online learning. The second section deals with questions that unveil their reactions, acceptance, viewpoints, and provide any possible suggestions that may assist in the appropriate application of this type of learning in the Algerian higher education context.

2.2. Questionnaire Validity and Reliability

The questionnaires were translated into Arabic besides English as some participants showed little knowledge of English. This procedure was taken as a measure to ensure the reliability of participants answers. Also, the questionnaire was previously given to other teachers to make the necessary modifications before administering it to the sample's subjects.

To check the reliability of the questionnaires, we administered the teachers' questionnaire to 10 other teachers while learners' questionnaire was sent to 15 learners. The results were coded and treated using SPSS. The results of the psychometric test Cronbach's alpha prove higher internal consistency in both questionnaires. Also, the validity of both questionnaires was ensured as the questionnaires were given to other teachers to provide us with the necessary feedback. All remarks and suggestions were considered and modifications were made.

2.3. Population and Sample

The population of this study encompasses teachers and learners at the department of Media and Communication, Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty, university of Batna -1, Algeria. The selected sample of this study comprises: 11 teachers and 79 students at the department of Journalism. The selection was based on a simple random selection technique. Also, the obtained data from this questionnaire were organized, analyzed and interpreted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

2.4. Procedure

The questionnaires were sent to the subjects of the current study in the first semester of the academic year 2021-202. The respondents were given 15 days to respond to the questionnaire. Regarding the COVID-19 resulting

circumstances, the teachers' questionnaire was emailed to teachers in their emails while the learners' questionnaire was sent to learners via an educational Facebook page.

3. Review of Literature

The following section attempts to shed light on the most significant concepts which assist in the appropriate understanding of this research.

3.1. COVID-19 Pandemic and Education

The end of the year 2019 witnessed the beginning of a worldwide pandemic that affected all life domains. The quick spread of this highly infectious illness started in the Chinese city of Wuhan (Gianfranco Alicandro, 2020).

Consequently, the different educational systems' institutions closed their doors as one of many preventive measures which were taken. In this respect, the UNESCO data, obtained in a recent statistic done on April1, 2020, report that schools and higher education institutions stopped the teaching /learning process in 185 countries, disturbed 89.4% of total enrolled learners (Giorgio Marinoni, 2020).

3.2. Online Learning

The growing spread and interest in the internet's use around the world motivate university teachers and learners to look for online software (Guri-Rosenblit, 2016) (Kearsley, 2000). Many recent researchers note that online learning wins more supporters, significance, and highly expend in universities' teaching learning process (Md Aktaruzzaman, 2017) (Beese, 2014)In this respect, some universities relied partially on inter-faculty university programs to boost this type of learning and offer its learners extra sources of knowledge and exchange information.

Online learning can be regarded as a form of distinct learning. Distance learning is defined as "education or training courses delivered to remote (off-campus) location(s) via audio, video (live or prerecorded), or computer technologies" ((Lewis, Snow, Farris, & Levin, 1999), p.2).

This definition clarifies and emphasizes the tools that can be used to present different courses via distance learning while the upcoming quote will elucidate a simple definition of what distance learning represents. (Connick, 1999) notes that "Perhaps the simplest definition is that distance learning takes place when the instructor and student are not in the same room, but instead are separated by physical distance" (p. 3). In other words, distance learning refers to the type of learning where both teacher and learner are not physically present during the teaching/learning process.

Online Learning in Algerian Universities and Institutions: The Reality and Expectations

Online learning offers two distinctive types of learning known as: synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous learning indicates that both teachers and learners are present during the presentation of courses through the Internet. In this respect, (Connick, 1999) reported that " Synchronous communication is communication in which all parties participate at the same time. Synchronous communication in distance learning emphasizes a simultaneous group learning experience. Teachers and students communicate in 'real time'" (p. 8). This type of learning involves learners in the teaching/ learning process and encourages collaborative learning through exchanging information, and asking questions. Still for the same researcher, the second type of learning i.e. asynchronous learning implies asynchronous communication that "Is communication in which the parties participate at different times. Asynchronous communication offers a choice of where and, above all, when you will access learning … you may read or view these materials at your own convenience" ((Connick, 1999), p. 8). This reflects that the simultaneous presences of teacher and learners are absent. For instance, teachers can publish the courses online and learners can select another different and more appropriate time to read, and interact.

3.3. Online Learning and Teachers

Online learning efficacy is largely dependent on teachers' perceptions and commitment (Hung, 2016). Teachers are supposed to create courses' content and evaluate learners, and on some occasions, they are even asked to motivate learners to embrace this type of learning. In a research study conducted by (Anderson, 2011), teachers related the success of this type of learning to good management of time factor as well as the avoidance of some technical problems. In the same spectrum, some researchers related the effectiveness of online learning to financial support and the relevance of the evaluation and assessment phase. (John D. Meyer, 2010)

Online learning is a type of the educational process that uses the Internet as a medium for teaching and learning. It is considered as a form of distance learning as learners and teachers are not present in the same location (Hrastinski, 2008); (Joi L. Moore a, 2011)).

Preparing online courses necessitates that teachers should take care of and respect certain specific norms and criteria. For this reason, many teachers and instructors are trying to create online courses that correspond to learners' educational needs (Lan, 2006). On the same spectrum, many instructional designs were proposed to conform to the different educational situations and levels. Among these models, many researchers such (Patrick R. Lowenthal, 2011) hold that the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model developed by: (Garrison, 2000)is the most effective practical model for online design courses.

Still for the same researcher, this model proved its adequacy as it combines, highly considers, and balances three significant elements: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence.

3.4. Community of Inquiry (CoI) Model

To (Anderson L. (., 2001) the teaching presence element refers to the fact of organizing the teaching experience, moderating the interaction during the online courses, and suggesting the appropriate and effective assessments. While the social presence component indicates the connection and interaction between the learners and the departments and faculty they belong to (Patrick R. Lowenthal, 2011) believe that the major aim of establishing such connection is restricting the barrier between learners and the teaching and education bodies to encourage and boost the legality of this type of course to attain the preselected educational goals.

Ultimately, cognitive presence, which is the last component, implies how learners conceptualize and comprehend the content of the learning experience (Joanna C. Dunlap, 2007)For the same researchers, both of the two first elements assist learners to better and relevantly understand the online courses which can be referred to as having a correct conceptualization of the courses' content.

To better understand the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Model, the following figure can serve as a good illustration.

Figure 1: The Community of Inquiry (CoI) Model
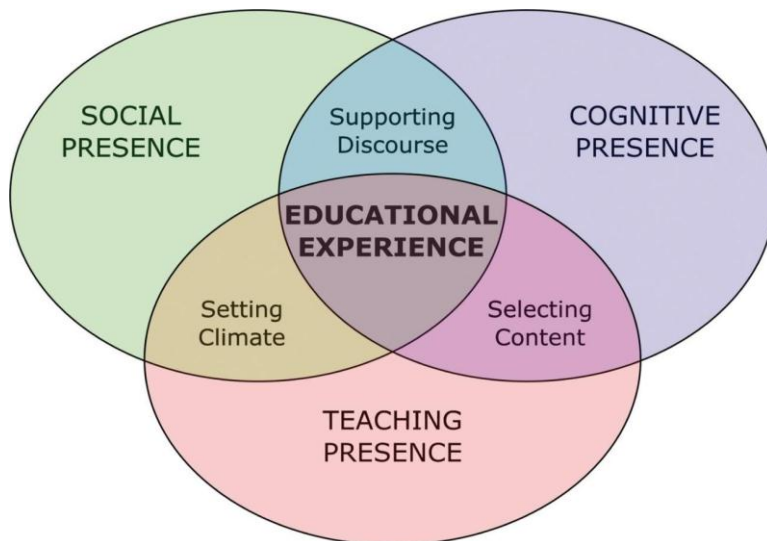
Adapted from:
https://openpraxis.org/index.php/OpenPraxis/article/view/721/421#CIT0026_721.

4. Field Work and Results

The obtained results from both teachers in the first and second sections are reported in the following passage.

A. First Section's Teachers Answers: The obtained results reveal the following:

Item 1: Select the answer that represents your age.

Item 2: select your teaching experience.

Item 3: Do you have any previous experience about online teaching before the COVID- 19 pandemic?

These two first items were three-point Likert scale questions which reveal teachers' age and teaching experience. These questions were included as age and teaching experience may affect teachers' acceptance of online learning. The treated answers reveal the following:

● Teachers differ in age but the great proportion (79%) belongs to the category of (30-45) years while a minority (20%) rated their ages to be between: 46-51 years. Only one subject selected the category of above (52-67years).

● They have different teaching experiences: the majority of them (85%) have more than 10 years, (12%) more than 5 years, and (3%) more than 15 years of teaching experience.

●   When asking them in item 3 about their previous experiences in online teaching, the lion's share of participants rated not implicated before (99%). Only 1% of them used this type of learning. Those teachers note that they use this type of learning as a helping tool to assist learners and remain in contact with them.

B. Section Two: Information related to the use of online learning

Teachers' answers concerning the following

Item 4: To what extent do you believe that online learning was successful during the lockdown in higher education? was rated on a five-point Likert scale. The mode of this question was equal to 3, indicating that the majority rated Moderately. Respectively, (13%) and (7%) of the respondents rated the success of online teaching as Very and Slightly successful. Noticeably, none of the teachers selected Extremely nor Not at all suggestions. These results reflect that teachers acknowledge the efficacy of this type of learning during this crisis. Some teachers hold that this type of learning was to some extent effective as learners are used to using the new technologies to learn. They add that this experience emphasized the need for such type of

teaching to bridge the gap of information between teachers and learners of this millennium. Other teachers who rated very and slightly successful relate their selection to the fact that some learners did not welcome this type of learning due to   several factors that will be discussed in upcoming items.

Teachers' answers concerning Item 5 which investigates if teachers used the online assessment unveil that the (48%) of teachers depended on the online evaluation in form of research or essays to assess their learners. Teachers believe that assessing learners correctly is considered as an important factor in the success of this type of learning. Teachers' answers in This research conforms to the findings (John D. Meyer, 2010). Those teachers note that they are responsible for the directed works/ subjects (TD). The rest of the teachers did not use the online assessment as they were obliged to assess learners according to formal exams following the ministerial instructions.

When asked by teachers in Item 6 to report any obstacles met during this new teaching experience, teachers' major complaints were centered on internet-related problems. In addition, some learners do not join virtual classes as a fault of lack of computers, internet subscriptions or both. A considerable number of teachers and mainly those who belong to the second and third age categories suggested in the first section of this questionnaire (40%) reported that they found some hindrances to apply this type of learning particularly in posting the needed courses. They add that on many occasions they consulted the faculty engineer to obtain assistance. Two teachers report that they asked other persons to type their courses and sent them to the responsible of the university educational platform. They justify this as they really possess a very low ICTs mastery. Ultimately, teachers insist that preparing online courses is very difficult especially at the beginning of this transitional phase. However, teachers add that the appropriate time management when preparing these courses is a key element to success. These findings conform to (Anderson L. (., 2001) findings mentioned above.

Ultimately, the teachers provide us at the end of the questionnaire with some constructive recommendations which will be reported after the analysis of the learners' questionnaire.

 A. First Section's Learners Answers: Similar to the first question of the first questionnaire about age, the obtained results reveal the following:

● learner differ in age but in majority are young learners:

A great proportion of learners76% belongs to [18-20] category, while (17%) of them selected the [21-24] category, and only a minority (7%) belongs to this age category [25-30].

Item 2: In which year you are?

This question was included to check if the educational phase affects the acceptance of online learning. The treated answers show the following:

● Learners' educational level shows the existence of a variety: 2nd year (45%) stream, 3rd year (30%), and Master phase (25%).

When asking learners if they have previous online learning experiences, the following answers were reported:

● More than half of respondents reported they having previous experiences in online learning (69%). They assert that they used internet resources to prepare some research and occasionally follow some classes on YouTube, for example, to enlarge their knowledge.

B. Section Two: Information Related to the Use of Online Learning

When asking learners in Item 4 about the extent to which they believe that online learning is sufficient, the mode of this question is (mode=3). This denotes that learners have believed in the effectiveness of this type of learning. The lion's share of learners' answers (86%) considers that this learning is Moderately successful. Learners report that at the beginning they found studying from distance is something weird and unusual, particularly for novice learners. However, learners noticed that this learning offered them a wide opportunity to learn at the time and place they selected. i.e.: flexibility of learning. None of the learners rated Excellent and only (2%) of them selected the Not at all category. Those learners are freshmen who felt lost about how and what to learn. The rest of the learners, (8%) and (4%) respectively rated very and Slightly successful.

The following Item (5) targeted learners' use of the online assessment, where (48%) of them experienced and performed this type of assessment. Learners note that some teachers' evaluations were based on some emailed searchers or essays while they presently passed exams in their department in some distinctive subjects. The learners add that besides this online assessment they were assessed in face-to-face sessions.

Concerning learners' item about the obstacles they met during the adoption of this type of learning, learners' answers in Item 6 reveal that the main problem was internet related problems. They add that the lack of personal computers, smartphones, tablets or any digital devices was a problem for some learners (24%).

As in the teachers' questionnaire, learners at the end of this questionnaire were invited to provide us with some suggestions or recommendations to improve this type of learning. All these are summarized in the following.

5. Recommendation

A. For Teachers:

● Establishing norms: teachers should note that this step is mandatory as it gives learners the true   impression that this type of learning is serious particularly at the beginning of this adoption. As an illustration of these norms: punctuality in posting courses, punctuality in commenting on and discussing their courses.

● Creating fair assessment(s) that suit this type of learning. In this respect teachers, should consider the subject's properties. For instance, learners' abilities and giving learners and exact timing needed to answer.

● Adopting multiple online teaching roles such as moderating, commenting and others to assist learners to better understand the subjects' content and raise their learning's motivations. Additionally, this measure is needed to fulfill learners' different learning styles and preferences.

● Adopting some social hours: At least teachers should dedicate one hour per month to meet their students and discuss issues away from the subject they teach but still in the educational domain. This procedure is an imitation/simulation of the face-to-face learning situation that will enable teachers to work on the psychological and social sides of learners and the teaching\ learning objectives.

● Teachers should rethink their ICTs abilities, literacy and improve them appropriately to facilitate their online teaching and encourage their creativity.

● Encouraging learners to engage in synchronous rather than asynchronous activities. This measure will encourage the exchange of information between students and therefore promote collaborative learning.

B. Learners' Recommendations:

● Inviting teachers to use multiple online teaching tools.

● Inviting teachers to use more vivid instruments while representing the courses' elements such as PPT presentations and avoiding PDF form.

● Creating some competitive activities to encourage learners and raise their motivation.

5. Conclusion

This descriptive research is an attempt to answer the following research questions: To what extent did Algerian university teachers and learners accept online learning? And to what extent are Algerian university teachers and learners ready to adopt online learning? The hypotheses set for this study note Algerian university teachers and learners accept online learning. Algerian university teachers and learners are not yet ready to adopt online learning. The

analysis of the obtained results confirmed this hypothesis. The majority of the sample subjects in this research paper accepted this type of learning and acknowledged its benefits. However, some of them refused its adoption and this can be mainly related to problems of lack of good mastery of ICTs, lack of computers or intelligent devices, and internet-related problems. The respondent's answers denote their partial readiness for accepting this type of learning as learners and teachers reported that they show some resistance in the early phase due to many reasons such as its newness. Ultimately, this research ends up with some constructive recommendations that would assist in the appropriate adoption of this new type of learning in the future.

Bibliographie

1. Anderson, L. (. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.* (N. Y. Longman, Éd.)
2. Anderson, T. &. (2011). Three generations of distance education pedagogy. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning,, 12(3)*, 80–97.
3. Association, A. P. (2011). *APA Style*. Récupéré sur http://www.apastyle.org.
4. Beese, J. (2014). Expanding learning opportunities for high school students with distance learning. *American Journal of Distance Education, (28)4*, 292-306.
5. Connick, G. P. (1999). *The Distance Learner's Guide.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
6. Garrison, D. R. (2000). ritical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education. *The Internet and Higher Education,*, 87-105.
7. Gianfranco Alicandro, G. R. (2020). Italy's first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has ended: no excess mortality in May, 2020. *The Lancet Journal, VOLUME 396, ISSUE 10253.*, E27-E28.
8. Giorgio Marinoni, H. v. (2020). *THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION AROUND THE WORLD.* Paris: The International Association of Universities.
9. Guri-Rosenblit, S. X. (2016). Distance higher education in the digital era: Challenges and prospects. *JournalDistance Education in China, 6*, 16-25.
10. Hrastinski, S. (2008). Asynchronous and Synchronous E-Learning . *EDUCAUSE Review.*
11. Hung, M.-L. (2016). Teacher readiness for online learning: Scale development and teacher perceptions. *Computers & Education, 19*, 120-133.

12. Joanna C. Dunlap, D. S. (2007). Supporting students'cognitive processing in online courses: Designing for deep and meaningful student-to-content interactions. *TechTrends, 51(4)*, 20-31.

13. John D. Meyer, A. C. (2010). Infrastructure and Administrative Support for Online Programs. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 13(3)*, ISSN 1556-3847.

14. Joi L. Moore a, C. D.-D. (2011). e-Learning, online learning, and distance learning environments: Are they the same? *The Internet and Higher Education*, 129-135.

15. Kearsley, G. (2000). *Online education: Learning and teaching in cyberspace.* (Vol. Vol. 91). Belmont: CA: Wadsworth.

16. Lan, M. K.-R. (2006). Teaching Courses Online: A Review of the Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 76:93.

17. Lewis, L., Snow, K., Farris, E., & Levin, D. (1999). *Distance Education at Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1997–98.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Read more: Distance Learning in Higher Education - Related Terms and Concepts, Goals of Distance Learning, Technologies Used in Distance Learning - StateUniversity.co.

18. Lord, I. (2011). *Gestionnaires inspirants : les 10 règles de communication des leaders.* Montréal, Québec: Éditions Logiques.

19. Md Aktaruzzaman, &. M. (2017). Institutional and Community Perceptions of Distance Education in Bangladesh: Preparing for The 21st Century. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 18*, 20-34.

20. Merkling, J. e. (2010). *Psychologie, sociologie, anthropologie*. Récupéré sur books.google.fr/books?id=j1ilcF5JwcC&printsec=frontcover&dq=2010+sociologie&hl=fr&ei=L5dKTomqH4.

21. Patrick R. Lowenthal, J. C. (2011). Investigating Students' Perceptions of Various Instructional Strategies to Establish Social Presence. *Conference: American Educational Research Association.* New Orleans, LA.