

Online Learning as a Refuge to Boost ESP Students' Motivation during Covid-19 Outbreak: Case of 3rd Year Biology Students' at Oran 2 University.

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Abstract:

The appearance COVID-19 pandemic in the whole world generally and in Algeria specifically has made all teachers and students to shift from face to face learning and teaching to working and studying from home doing all the activities online. This research aims at exploring the how third-year license biology students' motivation can be promoted via online learning which was new and unfamiliar to a number of students. To achieve the purpose of this study, a mixed method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques of data collection was adopted. In the quantitative method, a questionnaire was distributed to eighty seven third year Biology students at Oran 2 University. The findings of this study confirmed the hypotheses which claimed that online learning affects the learners' learning motivation negatively, thus ESP learners raise negative attitudes towards it. A number the students favor engaging in traditional teaching and learning activities. Also students feel demotivated when learning online due to many challenges. It is suggested that the teachers should vary the techniques when performing the online class and get well trained to teach online in order to be able to get the students engaged and stimulated to learn English.

Keywords: ESP, Online Learning, Learning Motivation, Students' Attitudes, COVID-19.

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1.Introduction:

The world has just seen one of the most devastating pandemics, Corona Virus Disease, which has made life exceedingly difficult across all spheres (COVID-19). The first COVID-19 case was reported in Algeria on February 25th, according to the country's ministry of health (2020). Algeria was one of the nations that implemented the extremely rigorous restrictions that the World Health Organization (2019) advised, including lockdown, self-quarantine, physical distancing, and social distancing. The governments instructed the people to stay at home in an effort to slow down and prevent the spread of this infectious sickness. This includes closing down the majority of non-essential enterprises, as well as events, shopping centers, movie theaters, and other locations that include huge crowds. Most nations included educational institutions in this (Hirsch,2020).

Hence, one of the major domains that experienced issues during this time was teaching and learning, which was conducted entirely online for more than six months. Since there were no physical contact between students and teachers, lectures and all educational activities were done online through videoconferencing. Schools were forced to integrate distance education or online learning as a result of changes in educational systems. The students had a restricted period of time to get used to this situation. Teaching a foreign language using online applications can be very effective in this period since the e-generation relies mainly on learning through new technologies and internet. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning foreign languages has gained popularity during COVID-19 period.

In certain countries where English is not the native language, most universities and institutions of higher education use an approach to English language instruction known as ESP (English for Specific Purposes). ESP entails adapting language teaching to satisfy and serve the needs of learners of specific subjects or fields, as well as studying the language relevant to such tasks. Most universities acknowledge the importance of helping non-native speakers of English “*master the functions and linguistic conventions of texts that they need to read and write in their disciplines and professions*” (Hyon, 1996,p.698). Hence, they have enclosed ESP programs as a part of their syllabuses so that all ESP students will have the competence to read and write in English without any complexity and difficulty.

However, learning a language without a human touch is not easy for non-native speakers. Learners can find online learning without the help of the teacher very hard and boring especially when it comes to a foreign language which highly requires the presence of the teacher so that he clarifies and explains the lesson and made it sound easy for them. Online courses are a new form of teaching in Algeria, and they have not previously been a part of normal classes. Exploring and evaluating how online courses can help developing students' motivation and the way they are viewed and perceived by students and faculties at various universities in Algeria will help educational experts in understanding and making changes to meet the needs of both teachers and students. This study endeavors to examine whether or not the students have problems with learning English online during the COVID-19 pandemic and also to find out whether they enjoy learning English through online e-learning compared to traditional classroom learning as well as to find out their attitudes towards learning English via online devices.

Thus, this step of shifting from traditional classroom learning to online learning and integrating new technologies in ESP classrooms arises many questions. The purpose of this study is to provide insight into students' perspectives on English language teaching in the COVID-19 period. In this vein, three significant research sub-questions have been formulated:

- a) Does learning online boost students' motivation in learning English during Covid-19 pandemic?
- b) What are biology students' attitudes towards learning English via online applications?
- c) Do they prefer online learning or face-to-face classroom setting?

The following hypotheses have been suggested as potential answers to the research questions that have been framed:

- 1- Online learning does not promote students' learning motivation in learning English during COVID-19 outbreak.
- 2- Online learning affects the learners' learning motivation negatively, thus students display negative attitudes towards it.
- 3- Students favor conventional learning over online learning when studying English as second language.

2. Related Literature Overview

1.2 Definition of Motivation

Learner motivation has long attracted the attention of experts and teachers since it is so intricately intertwined with accomplishment and desired goals. Lumsden (1994) views motivation as the willingness of learners to participate in the activity of learning a language.. Dörnyei (2015) sees it as an essential component of the difficult work of L2 learning, and its exclusion will fail individuals even if they have exceptional ability and a strong willingness to compensate for significant deficits. Motivation is the primary requirement for undertaking a learning assignment and serves as the motor that propels the process.

According to Dörnyei (2020), the notion of motivation is directly related to interest, and motivation should be provided in order to establish student engagement. He suggests that any instructional design should attempt to make students interested irrespectively of the learning situation, whether conventional or e-learning, which is a difficult task with this modern century's multitude of disruptions. Learner motivation, whether earned via classroom experiences or comes naturally to the learner, is critical in the classroom setting (Hedge, 2001).

2.2. ESP Defined

According to Mackay and Mountford (1978,p.2) ESP can be defined as: “*a term used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose.*” This means that ESP is the teaching of a specific kind of mainly scientific or technical English for students with

specific goals, careers or fields of study. The majority of ESP's users are adult learners who require foreign language proficiency for work in disciplines like science, technology, medicine, or academic study. This means that students should be taught English in a way that will allow them to apply it in their future careers or to read textbooks written in English that are related to their area of specialization. Porcaro pointed out that: *"In the sectors of science, engineering, information technology, and business, the importance of English is constantly growing. Consequently, so too are the demands on ESP practitioners to serve the needs of students and professionals in these fields to conduct their studies, research, and business in English in an international scale."* (2013,p.37).

ESP has many types among them English for Science and Technology (EST) which generally refers to English used in scientific publications, papers, textbooks, technical reports and academic lectures, etc. It is generally used in almost all scientific, technical and technological faculties, mainly in Algeria.

3.2. The position of EST in Algeria

In Algeria Arabic is the official language which is spoken by approximately 72% of people. It is used in administrations, courts, media, schools, universities and many publications. Then, French language is the second language in Algeria. It is used by 50% of Algerians which is regarded as the language of science and knowledge (Baghli, 2014). Most of the Algerians can understand it even though they cannot speak it fluently. English is regarded as a lingua franca throughout the world. It is the dominant language many domains such as medicine, electronics and technology. In Algeria it is the second foreign language taught starting from the first year of the middle school till the third year of secondary school. In universities, its position differs from one specialty to another. Some consider it as a compulsory module, whereas in other fields it is unimportant and it is just a supplementary one. Besides, in the Algerian society the use of English is not common. Most of the people do not speak it or understand it even though lately it started gaining popularity among the young people who are the sole category that use it in their everyday life.

However, according to Ghanmi in The Arab Weekly, Algeria's Higher Education Minister Tayeb Bouzid declared that: *"the French language does not get us anywhere"* and he mandated that English should be used in replacement of French at the government's 77 institutions and colleges. (Ghanmi,2019). He does not try to downplay from the importance of the French language but he tries to imply that English is the language of globalization and science. Therefore, the Algerian government started to recognize the fact that all the books, references and publications are written in English and many students suffer to understand them. They face a lot of difficulty to read and write articles and research papers in English.

4.2. EST in the Algerian Biology Department

English language module in the Biology department is taken once a week and for 90 minutes. Lectures are given in terms of texts and articles that are related to the field. These

language materials include definitions of technical terms, grammar, vocabulary and bibliographies of famous biology scientists. In addition, students' attendance is less common and relatively low in this department since English is just a supplementary module and being present during the class is not mandatory so most of the students prefer to not to attend (Baghli, 2014). However, this does not mean that students are unaware of the importance of English language but they want a good learning environment which enables them to learn and enjoy simultaneously. They are motivated and willing to study hard if teachers are well trained and if new technologies and autonomy in learning is included. During Covid-19 period the biology department ordered students to study online and download the documents that their teachers send via emails. The students are also asked to attend online videoconferencing and try to interact with their teachers.

5.2. Motivation in Online ESP Classes during COVID-19 outbreak

Online learning classes are gradually becoming a crucial part of the educational system around the globe. Over the years, all the web-based education programs have gained popularity with the new terms like e-learning or online learning. Due to the fast growth of technological innovations, the e-learning has become more interesting and fun since it entails the audio, visual and animation effects to become a more promising platform. (Shyamlee and Phil, 2012) According to Newton (2003) e-learning system has three main areas such as to improve the access to education and training, to develop the quality of teaching and learning, and to maintain competitiveness in higher education. E-learning is commonly referred to intentional use of networked information and communications technology in teaching and learning. (Mohammadi, 2010). It is the application of electronic systems such as internet, computers, multimedia CDs which their aim is to reduce the amount of expenses and goings and comings. This form of learning has gained celebrity when COVID-19 was widespread and shut down all the possibilities of face to face learning .Therefore, the integration of E-learning in Algerian universities especially during the pandemic has been introduced through Moodle and Blackboard platforms as ordered by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Hartnett et al. (2011) define motivation in online learning as a complicated phenomenon influenced primarily by individual characteristics and particular settings. Students are less likely to take part in distance learning courses (Kyewski & Krämer, 2018), and significant attrition percentages raise motivating concerns for pedagogical designers in online education.

Therefore, According to Campbell and Sarac (2018), technology is increasingly being implemented into language instruction in order to increase students' motivation and enhance their comprehension of the subject. According to Rubio (2013), a well-integrated course with online and offline features can be more successful compared to an effective face-to-face or entirely online course in enabling students optimize their motivation and performance in second language study.

This research puts emphasis on learner motivation in an entirely online environment in the Algerian setting.

3. Research Design and Methodology

1.3 Sampling

The data was collected from a sample of 87 third-year license biology students at Oran 2 university in Algeria. Microbiology was the students' field of study. The pupils are mixed-gender and their ages range from 21 to 24 years old.

2.3 Research Instruments

The majority of the data gathering used in the current research is conducted using quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. A questionnaire is used to specifically extract data from the informants in order to get the information required for this fieldwork. This research tool is employed to provide more reliable and genuine data. To investigate the two hypotheses in this inquiry, students are given questionnaires. There are 10 mixed-type questions in total. Both closed- and open-ended questions are employed. On the one hand, the framework is intended to elicit the students' perspectives regarding adopting new technology to study English during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, it seeks to explore affluent details how distance learning can be effective in learning English when online devices and applications are utilized.

3.3 Data Presentation and Analysis

In this subdivision, the results are analytically revealed. They are treated both quantitatively and qualitatively to validate the research hypotheses.

- **Questionnaire: Student' Attitudes towards Online Learning during COVID-19.**

Q1: How would you assess your English mastery?

When students were asked about their level and mastery of English language, the following results have been collected:

Table 1: Biology Students' Level in English

Good	Average	Bad
28%	31,5%	40,5%

Q2: Do you think that learning English language is important? If yes, why?

The majority of the students (91%) said 'yes,' whereas only (9%) answered 'no'. They justified their answer 'yes' by the following reasons:

- English is the language of international communication
- It is the language of science, medicine, computers, media and the internet.
- It enables us to read books and articles of our field of study.
- It helps us to participate in international conferences.

- When your level in English is good you can be autonomous and ameliorate your level in it without the assistance of the teachers.
- When you are competent in English you get to write articles and disseminate them in classified journals.

Q3: In the session of English, what do you generally study?

The aim of this question was to explore the language materials taught to students and their answers were as follows:

- Teachers give us handouts about biology and explain them in Arabic.
- They give us lists of biological terms and try to clarify them in French or Arabic.
- Sometimes teachers give us freedom to look some words up in our phones.
- We focus on grammar and we shadow other aspects like pronunciation and vocabulary.
- Media and technology are rarely integrated in our sessions which are crucial in learning English.
- Most of the time we feel bored and demotivated since there are no fun methods in learning and all teachers use the same traditional ways; handouts, boards and markers alongside neglecting technology and new techniques.
- Even though the mark of the exam is insignificant but that is not our goal, we want to develop our English so we can speak and write with it, and this is impossible since we feel that the sessions do not match our needs.

Q4: How were the courses of English delivered during COVID-19 outbreak?

The aim behind this question is to discover how students studied English during the appearance of COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of students agreed that in this period of time teachers used to send them handouts in PDF files without the explanation. Students stated that distance and online learning was used in a limited way because of two factors; not all students had access to the internet and those who were able to access they could not get to load the platform websites like Moodle and Zoom because of the weak signal of internet.

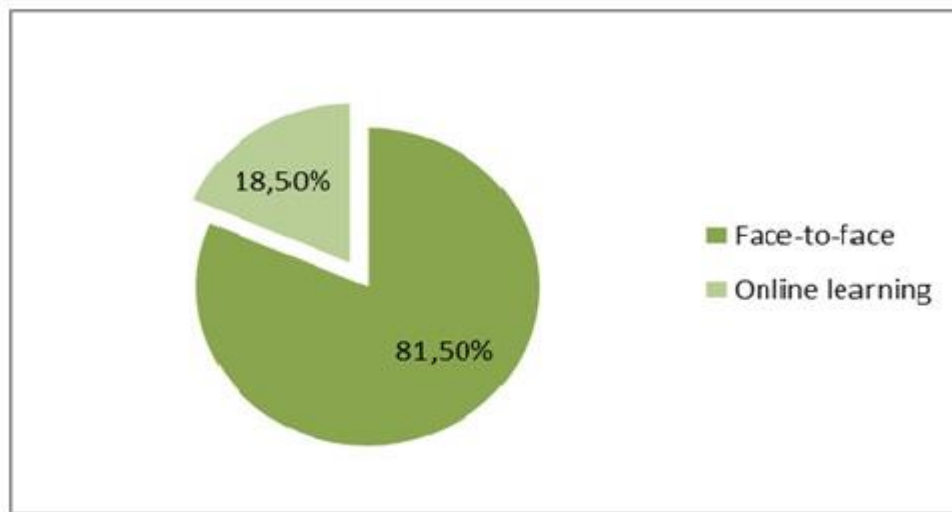
Q5: Have you received training on how to use technology (Moodle) to access the content online during the pandemic?

In this question, it is asked that whether students have been trained to use technology (Moodle) to access the content online during the pandemic. What could be derived from the students' answers is that about (89%) of student did not get any training on how to use the digital tools (Moodle) either by the faculty or the staff members in ESP instruction during the pandemic. Whereas (11%) of the participants claimed that they have received training on using technology for online learning purposes maybe because they are interested in bettering their level in English and they were trained prior the appearance of COVID-19 to get in touch with native speakers from around the globe and perhaps they learned the basic tips on how to get access to this online learning platform. This highlights the importance of technical support in engaging actively in online learning activities.

Q6: Do you have preference for face-to-face learning or online learning?

This question was asked to find out students' preferable learning environment and the results were in such a way:

Figure 1: Students' Preference for Face-to-Face or Online Learning.



The chart above demonstrated that the majority of participants (81,5%) preferred face-to-face learning over the online one. Justifying their answers, arguing that they are familiar with the traditional methods of language learning and they are not ready for this shift from the conventional language learning methods to these new innovations not to mention the lack of training. Besides, the student-teacher interaction creates positive classroom environment that impacts the learning and growth of the linguistic level of students. Moreover, when teachers have enough time they can design courses that meet the levels and needs of students. In addition the supportive feedback delivered by the instructors plays a critical role in enhancing learners' learning motivation. However, the minority of students (18,5%) favored online learning due to some reasons. To them, language learning is not solely restricted to classroom environment, but rather they can learn in any place and at any time. Furthermore, online learning is very time-saving and effortless in the sense that it helps the students who cannot multitask like working and studying simultaneously in which it is possible for them to access online courses from home instead of coming to the university on a daily basis.

Q7: Do you think that learning English online during COVID-19 outbreak advantageous? Justify your answer.

The majority of the students (25%) said 'yes,' whereas only (75%) answered 'no'. The justifications of the students who said 'yes' are as follows:

- ❖ When studying online we feel motivated and can learn better with the digital tools rather than studying in the classroom using the traditional tools.
- ❖ We can better our skills and become like the developed countries when we study online.

However, the students who said 'no' had different views and justifications and these are some of them:

- Distance and online learning can never be beneficial since the signal of internet is weak and not all of us have access to it.
- Not all students can afford to purchase personal computers to get connected and study with.
- We find difficulty when studying English in the classroom and we can barely enjoy the session even when the teacher is around so what about online and the teacher is away.
- Traditional classroom environment is very gainful especially when it comes to foreign languages.
- Online learning is new to both students and teachers so we still need training.
- The physical presence of a teacher keeps students motivated via interactive and interesting tasks.

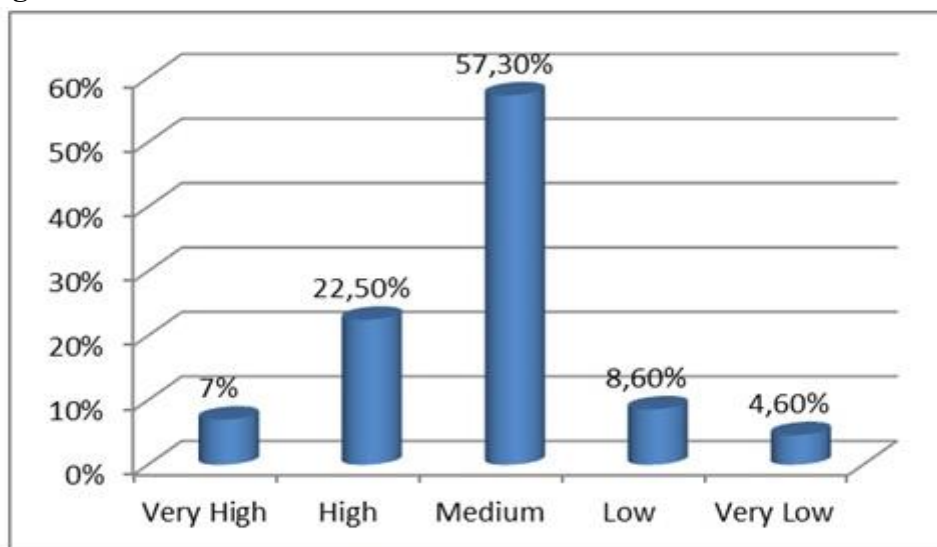
Q8: Do you believe that online learning is less effective than face-to-face learning?

This question endeavors to know whether students believe that online learning is less fruitful than face-to-face learning. The obtained results showed that the majority of students (89,5%) see that online learning is not as effective as face-to-face learning maybe because the difficulties and the issues they faced when studying which effected their learning process and their academic results. Whilst (10,5%) of the participants stated the contrary in which they consider e-learning as useful way to learn languages and it is more advantageous than classroom based learning because of its affordability and flexibility, ability to gain technical skills, autonomy, better time management and a customizable learning environment.

Q9: How would you rate your level of motivation towards face-to-face learning?

This question sought to know how learners rate their level of motivation towards face-to-face learning. The results of this question were as follows:

Figure 2: Students' Level of Motivation towards Face-to-Face Learning.



The findings showed that most of the participants claimed that their level of motivation towards face to face was medium with a rate of (57,3%). This shows that the majority of ESP students have favorable attitudes towards face to face learning since it promotes collaborative learning, improves social skills, and keeps students stimulated not to mention the feedback provided by the teacher who is considered to be having the major role in the delivery of course content. However, some respondents see that their rate is of motivation is high with (22,5%) and (7%) of them with very high for the reason that they rely mainly on the teacher and think that his presence boosts their confidence and motivation in learning alongside the social interaction with peers which plays as an essential factor in arousing the level of the motivation of learners. However, only few participants with the rate of (8,6%) and (4,6%) saw their motivation low and very low owing to some issues and challenges that effected their learning motivation as their poor level of learning as well as learning anxiety.

Q10: How would you rate your current level of motivation towards online learning?

When the informants were asked about their rate of motivation towards online learning their answers were as demonstrated in the table below:

Table 2: Students' Level of Motivation towards Online Learning.

Options	Percentage
Very High	2,5%
High	3,5%
Medium	13%
Low	63%
Very Low	8%
Total	100%

As it can be seen, most of the students (63%) rate their level of toward online learning as low. In addition, (13%) of participants rate it as medium and only (8%) of them rate it as low. However, only a small proportion of students who rate their level of motivation high and very high with (3,5%) and (2,5%) sequentially. Thus, after comparing the results, it is clear that the vast majority of students are demotivated to take online classes primarily because of the following reasons: lack of face-to-face communication with the instructor limits and reduces feedback which in turn leads to social isolation, and may result in a lack of motivation. Besides, a lack of focus is a disadvantage since it makes it more likely for students to drop out. Students were not prepared and did not receive any training from the university administration and they relied on self-training. Another problem to be mentioned is the technical difficulties for students that might include slow internet, malfunctioning device hardware, and unstable electricity resulting in a loss of coherence in learning and makes student not stimulated to join online sessions due to these challenges.

4. Discussion of the Main Results

The purpose of this research is to provide a clearer picture of how ESP students' motivation can be boosted through online learning and how it affects their motivation to learn. The results showed that the majority of third-year biology students do not find online learning as a reliable way to promote motivation and they have unfavorable attitudes towards online education primarily during the COVID-19 outbreak. Their responses explain clearly that they encountered issues and challenges when courses and language content were delivered through online applications mainly due to the lack of technological devices, inadequate internet access, lack of training, time management and poor quality of online learning which did not suit the learners' learning styles and needs. The online courses were apparently provided in terms of the course material, based on the replies from the students. This is mostly due to the fact that the quality of online courses did not satisfy the expectations of the learners because they are text-based in nature, only offer a summary of the entire lecture, and are lacking of any kind of explanation for difficult constructions and this made students dissatisfied and demotivated.

Besides, the majority of students reported that online classes fell short of their expectations. This may be because online courses in Algeria were primarily text-based, which can be boring for certain students because it did not take into account their learning preferences and requirements. Additionally, they stated that the online course discussions, student-instructor interactions, student-student interactions, and student-content interactions were disappointing. This shows that the Moodle platform has failed to include the students in discussions with their teachers and classmates through discussion boards, where they may work together to learn and receive help from the teachers as needed.

5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic's shocking effects on higher education institutions throughout the world have made the adoption of online learning a necessity. In reality, the implementation of this new learning method can be either useful or useless in both learning and teaching depending on the existence or the absence of certain central elements which play a major role in having a positive or a negative online learning experience. Accordingly, the more successful and interesting an online learning environment is, the more satisfied and motivated teachers and students are to take online courses, and as a result, both of them develop positive attitudes toward online learning. In contrast, the more difficult an online learning environment is, the more instructors and students are dissatisfied and demotivated, and as a result, both of them develop negative attitudes towards online learning. Thus, this research aimed at investigating the way online learning can be implemented to increase ESP learners' motivation and attitudes towards the impacts of online learning on the learners' learning motivation during the pandemic of COVID-19, at the department of Biology at Oran 2 University. As a survey method, students' questionnaire was used as a tool of investigation to get their standpoints concerning online learning and its effects on the learners' learning motivation. The results showed that learners do not find online learning advantageous for

promoting their motivation and they have negative perceptions regarding how online learning affects their motivation to learn. This shows that they prefer to learn in a traditional face-to-face environment, which includes in-person elements that seem to be entertaining, interesting, and motivating. After conducting this survey, research questions were answered and the three hypotheses were strongly approved and confirmed; that is, students feel demotivated when learning English online and they have negative attitudes towards online learning and they favor conventional face-to-face learning or online learning. Hence, despite the complexity of certain ideas that could be found, it is advised that students recognize the benefit of online learning materials. Besides, staff members should provide students extensive training on how to use technology to apply the course material. Last but not least, in order to properly provide the curriculum and to practice a great online learning experience, higher education institutions should offer both students and teachers the appropriate technical tools and platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Skype.

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