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**Empowering Teacher Autonomy through Online Teaching
the Case of EFL Teachers in the English Department of Ali Lounci
Blida02 University**

تمكين استقلالية المعلم من خلال التدريس عبر الإنترنت: حالة أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية في قسم
اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة علي لونسي البليدة 02.

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Abstract:

The current paper investigates the role of online teaching in empowering EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers' autonomy in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida02 University. The paper seeks to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers about the impact of online teaching on their autonomy. Moreover, this research sheds light on the challenges that might be encountered during online teaching. Data was collected through an open-ended Likert Scale questionnaire. The findings revealed that online teaching is vital for enhancing teacher autonomy. However, there have been several challenges that hindered EFL teachers' autonomy when teaching online. Some of the prevailing shortcomings are the deficiency in internet access, limited technological skills, and limited professional development opportunities. Hence, this study is a call for educational policymakers to support embracing online teaching by providing the necessary resources to enhance teacher autonomy in EFL departments of Algerian universities.

Keywords: Online teaching, teacher autonomy, EFL context, university.

الملخص:

يهدف البحث الحالي إلى دراسة دور التعليم عبر الإنترنت في تمكين استقلالية أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة علي لونسي البلدية 02. يسعى البحث إلى استكشاف ادراكات أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول تأثير التعليم عبر الإنترنت على استقلاليتهم. علاوة على ذلك، يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على التحديات التي قد تواجه أثناء التعليم عبر الإنترنت. تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان مفتوح ذو مقياس ليكرت. كشفت النتائج أن التعليم عبر الإنترنت ضروري لتعزيز استقلالية الأستاذ. ومع ذلك، كانت هناك عدة تحديات تعيق استقلالية أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أثناء التعليم عبر الإنترنت. بعض النقائص السائدة تتمثل في نقص الوصول إلى الإنترنت والمهارات التكنولوجية المحدودة وفرص التطوير المهني المحدودة. وبالتالي، تعد هاته الدراسة دعوة لصانعي القرار لدعم اعتماد التعليم عبر الإنترنت من خلال توفير الموارد اللازمة لتعزيز استقلالية الأساتذة في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالجامعات الجزائرية. الكلمات الرئيسية: التعليم عبر الإنترنت، استقلالية الأستاذ، سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الجامعة.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, online teaching has gained considerable attention in the context of higher education around the globe. Algerian universities are no exception, as they have applied online

teaching in recent years to meet the 21st century Algerian learners' needs. Online teaching has the possibility to enhance teachers' autonomy by providing flexibility, choice and creativity in course design and delivery. However, there are some problems and challenges that need to be addressed and

solved in order to guarantee that teachers are fully supported and trained to deliver quality online courses. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the potential of online teaching in empowering teacher autonomy in Algerian universities. To attain this objective, an open-ended Likert Scale questionnaire was distributed to EFL teachers in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida02 University.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1- Online Teaching

Online teaching is the process of educating students remotely via internet. It uses several digital tools, platforms, and technologies to facilitate learning online. As defined by Bates, A. W. (2019). Moreover, online teaching enables teachers and learners to communicate, interact and engage in virtual classrooms regardless of geographical constraints. Online teaching allows teachers to design lessons using different digital resources such as video lectures, multimedia presentations, interactive quizzes, and discussion forums. Learners can use these materials at their own pace and convenience either by their computers, laptops, tablets, or smartphones with internet connectivity. As explained by Ko, S., & Rossen, S. (2017). Furthermore, online teaching can be synchronous such as using live video conferencing, real-time interaction between teachers and students, as well as peer-to-peer discussion or correction. Additionally, online teaching platforms include features for submitting assignments, receiving feedback, and conducting assessments. As discussed by Conrad, R. M., & Donaldson, J. A. (2020). Consequently, online teaching provides teachers and learners flexibility in scheduling and location. It sets an adequate personalized learning according to each need of each learner. Online teaching also fosters the development of digital literacy

skills and promotes self-directed learning. As advocated by Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). However, online teaching can be faced with some challenges and difficulties such as the need for reliable internet access, access to necessary technology devices, and the potential for reduced social interaction compared to traditional in-person classrooms. As pointed out by Picciano, A. G. (2017).

2.2- Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy is a multifaceted concept with various proportions and layers. Teacher autonomy according to Aoki. (2000), is conceptualised as the level of independence and responsibility about one's own teaching. In the same vein, Peter M. DeWitt (2016) argued that teachers are to make their own decisions about their teaching practices either in course design, instructional methods, assessment strategies, classroom management, and the overall learning environment. Autonomy empowers teachers to tailor their techniques and materials to meet the diverse learning styles and preferences of their learners. A recent example of the importance of teacher autonomy is the sudden shift in educational practices due to the COVID19 pandemic. The sudden shift to online teaching has required teachers to change their decisions and adapt their methods to suit online platforms and technologies. In this respect, Simon Breakspear (2020) explained that this shift has been an occasion for teachers to exercise their autonomy by selecting adequate digital tools, designing effective online lessons, and providing individualized support and motivation to their learners in a new learning environment.

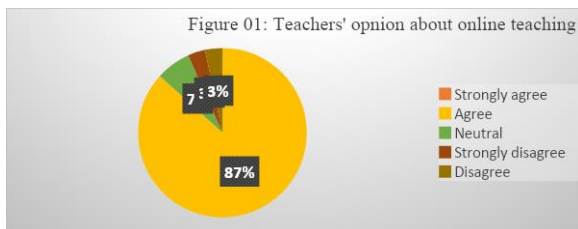
3- METHOD AND TOOLS

This paper is conducted using A Likert scale open-ended questionnaire. Robson, C. (2016) emphasizes the importance of using open-ended Likert scale questions to capture qualitative data alongside quantitative data. He suggests that

combining Likert scales with open-ended questions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives. Moreover, Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014) discussed advantages of using open-ended questions in conjunction with Likert scale items. They argued that open-ended questions can uncover nuances and provide richer insights, complementing the structured responses of Likert scales. Therefore, this study questionnaire contains 10 questions. Each question is constructed in a five-point Likert scale. Every question is followed by an open section where the respondent feels free to add a justification, an answer or feedback. The questionnaire was emailed via a Google form to 34 EFL teachers in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University. 30 of them have answered.

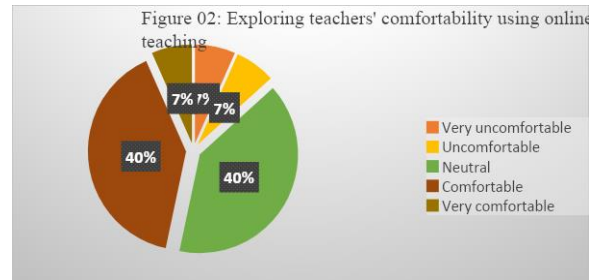
4- QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Question 01: Throughout your experience, do you think online teaching can empower teacher's autonomy in Algerian universities?



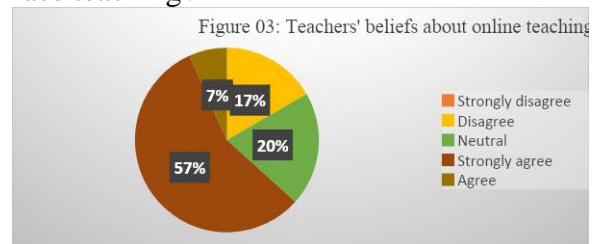
The majority 90% (87+3) of teachers agreed that online teaching has the ability to enhance teacher autonomy according to their experience. Teachers confirm that online teaching is a crucial asset in empowering teacher autonomy.

Question 02: How comfortable are you with using online teaching technologies to support your own autonomy as a teacher in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University?



This question reports that 47% (40+7) are comfortable with using online technologies to support their own autonomy. While 53% (40+7+6) vary from 40% neutral to 6% very uncomfortable. This can be explained that some teachers still face difficulties in using online technologies, which is a crucial issue for policy makers and stakeholders. Some teachers specified their online difficulties. The majority claimed that they suffered slow internet debit. Some said that they display incompetence in using online tools. Other teachers encountered deficiencies uploading video courses and they suffered continuous glitches of Moodle platform.

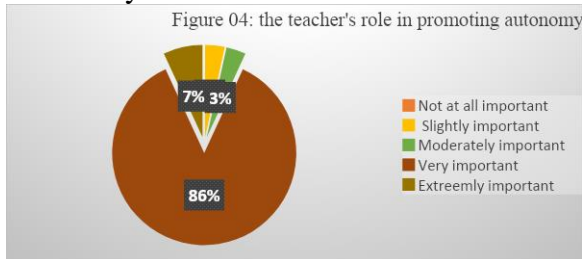
Question 03: To what extent do you believe that online teaching can provide more opportunities for teachers to exercise their autonomy compared to traditional face-to-face teaching?



Most participant teachers 63% (56+7) argued that online teaching has a greater potential to enhance teacher autonomy than face-to-face teaching. While 20% favour neutrality in their opinions. Another 24% reject the advocacy of providing more opportunities for teachers 'growth using online teaching. Therefore, online platforms allow teachers to express their creativity in an independent manner. These platforms are equipped with all necessary teaching instruments for more control and freedom. In this specific context Davidson, C. N. (2011) asserted that if face-

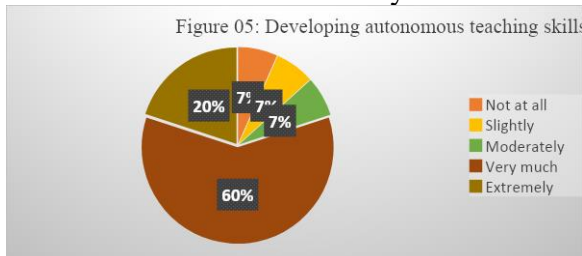
to-face teaching can provide some room for teacher autonomy, it is limited in comparison with the limitless features that can be provided through online teaching.

Question 04: How important is the role of the teacher in promoting his/her own autonomy through online teaching in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University?



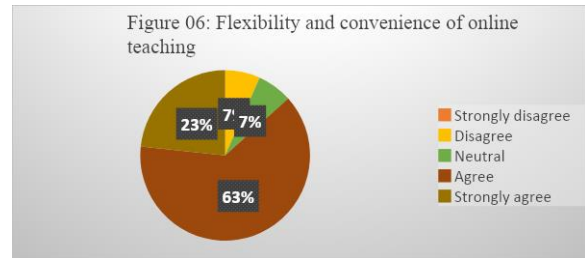
Substantial number of participant teachers with 93% (86+7) claim that online teaching is important to promote teacher autonomy. It is an opportunity to exercise self-reliance and control of one's own teaching.

Question 05: How much do you believe online teaching can foster self-directed teaching skills in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University?



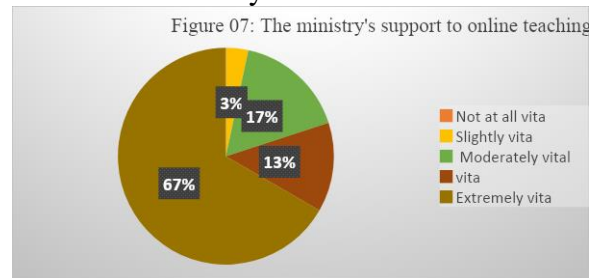
The majority of respondent teachers stated that online teaching enhances self-directed teaching skills. Online teaching advocates better time management skills, more accurate assessment and feedback, and a more creative course design and delivery.

Question 06: Do you agree that online teaching can provide flexibility and convenience for teachers to exercise their autonomy in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University?



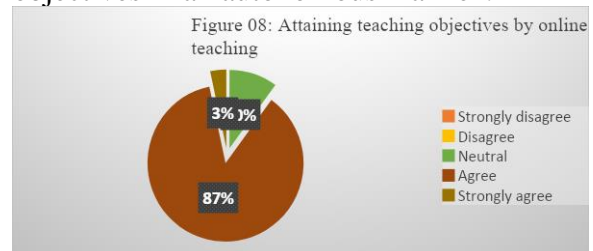
86% (63+23) of teachers approve that online teaching can provide flexibility and convenience for teachers to exercise their autonomy. Online teaching provides more instruments and tools to foster teachers' control over the teaching content.

Question 07: How vital is it for the Algerian ministry of scientific research and higher education to invest in online teaching technologies to support teachers' autonomy in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University?



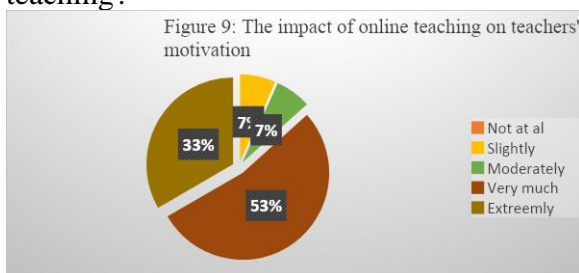
The overwhelming majority of teachers with 80% answered that it is important for the Ministry of Scientific Research and Higher Education to invest in online teaching technologies. This investment is significant for teachers because it involves improving the technological infrastructure, such as reliable internet connectivity, access to necessary hardware and software, and online learning platforms.

Question 08: Do you agree that online teaching can help EFL teachers in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University to achieve their teaching objectives in an autonomous manner?



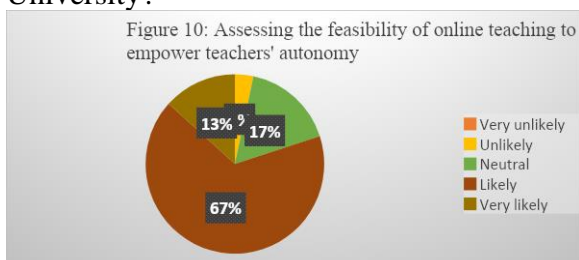
Based on the total approval of respondent teachers with 90% (87+3) that online teaching can help EFL teachers in the English department of Blida 02 university to achieve their teaching objectives in an autonomous manner, it can be deduced that online teaching supports and promotes autonomous teaching. As argued by Simon Breakspear (2020) that online teaching grants EFL teachers the autonomy to customize instructional material according to their teaching objectives. He added that online teaching allows flexibility in instructional delivery, assessment and feedback, and professional development opportunities such as webinars, online courses, and virtual conferences.

Question 09: How much do you believe that online teaching can enhance EFL teachers' motivation and engagement in autonomous teaching?



The noticeable agreement of 86% among EFL teachers in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University that online teaching can enhance their motivation and engagement in autonomous teaching highlights the positive impact of online teaching on teachers' professional engagement, enthusiasm, and improvement.

Question 10: How likely are you to recommend online teaching as a means to empower EFL teachers' autonomy in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University?



According to the response of 80% (67+13) of EFL teachers in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida 02 University indicating that they are likely to recommend online teaching as a means to empower teachers' autonomy, it is undoubtedly clear that online teaching is considered as a valuable proportion in promoting teacher autonomy.

5- RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Throughout the previous answers to the open-ended Likert Scale questionnaire, EFL teachers in the English department of Ali Lounci Blida02 University shape the significance of online teaching to promote teacher autonomy.

To start with, respondent EFL teachers emphasized that online teaching enhances teacher autonomy. This includes aspects such as customization of instructional materials, individualized learning experiences, flexibility in instructional delivery, and the promotion of self-directed teaching skills.

Then, EFL teachers highlighted the role of the teacher him/herself. Teachers play a distinguished role in escalating their own autonomy through online teaching. Their active engagement, adaptability, and willingness to explore online teaching technologies contribute to the efficiency of autonomous teaching practices.

Moreover, teachers distinguished between online and face-to-face teaching. They argued that online teaching provides limitless, flexible, and accessible opportunities for development and growth than what can be provided by face-to-face teaching.

Furthermore, EFL teachers acknowledge that online teaching allows more flexibility and convenience. The capacity to customize instructional delivery, adapt to students' needs and schedules, leads to a more autonomous teaching experience.

From another perspective, some EFL teachers discussed that they faced problems during their online teaching practices which

hindered their autonomy. The dominant problem was the inadequate internet connectivity or infrastructure. Issues about slow internet debit disrupts online teaching sessions. Even some teachers complained about the continuous glitches of Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) platforms. While online teaching offers various professional development opportunities, some EFL teachers still lack access or participation in such activities. Other teachers have very limited technological skills and familiarity with online environments.

To address these challenges and fully empower EFL teachers' autonomy in online teaching, it is crucial for the Algerian Ministry of Scientific Research and Higher Education to invest in online teaching technologies. Adequate infrastructure, professional training, access to digital resources, and support for research and innovation are crucial for empowering teachers' autonomy in the online teaching environment.

6- CONCLUSION

The study aims to clarify the role of online teaching in boosting teacher autonomy. Teachers who experienced online teaching recognize its efficacy to promote their autonomy. It provides opportunities for personalized instruction, flexibility in instructional delivery, access to diverse resources, collaboration, and continuous professional development. By recognizing and addressing the challenges, the Algerian Ministry of Scientific Research and Higher Education can maximize the benefits of online teaching and create an environment that empowers EFL teachers in English language departments to exercise their autonomy effectively.

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APPENDIX

Teachers' questionnaire

Dear teacher, this questionnaire is part of a doctorate research. It is conducted to investigate mainly the influence of online teaching on EFL university teachers' autonomy. Your answers will be kept anonymous and will take less than 15 minutes from your time. Thanks for your cooperation.

01/ Throughout your experience, do you think online teaching can empower teacher's autonomy in Algerian universities?

- Strongly agree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Justify your answer or specify more:

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.....

02/ How comfortable are you with using online teaching technologies to support your own autonomy as a teacher in the English department of Blida 02 university?

- Very uncomfortable
- Uncomfortable
- Neutral
- Comfortable
- Very comfortable

Justify your answer or specify more:

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.....

03/ To what extent do you believe that online teaching can provide more opportunities for teachers to exercise their autonomy compared to traditional face-to-face teaching?

- Strongly agree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Justify your answer or specify more:

.....
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04/ How important is the role of the teacher in promoting his/her own autonomy through online teaching in the English department of Blida 02 university?

- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

Justify your answer or specify more:

.....
.....

05/ How much do you believe online teaching can foster self-directed teaching skills in the English department of Blida 02 university?

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Moderately
- Very much
- Extremely

Justify your answer or specify more:

.....
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06/ Do you agree that online teaching can provide flexibility and convenience for teachers to exercise their autonomy in the English department of Blida 02 university?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Justify your answer or specify more:

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.....

07/ How vital is it for the Ministry of Scientific Research and Higher Education to invest in online teaching technologies to support teachers' autonomy?

- Not at all vital
- Slightly vital
- Moderately vital
- Too vital
- Extremely vital

Justify your answer or specify more:

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08/ Do you agree that online teaching can help EFL teachers in the English department of Blida 02 university to achieve their teaching objectives in an autonomous manner?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Justify your answer or specify more:

.....
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.....

09/ How much do you believe that online teaching can enhance EFL teachers'

motivation and engagement in autonomous teaching?

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Moderately
- Very much
- Extremely

Justify your answer or specify more:

.....
.....
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10/ How likely are you to recommend online teaching as a means to empower EFL teachers' autonomy in the English department of Blida 02 university?

- Very unlikely
- Unlikely
- Neutral
- Likely
- Very likely

Justify your answer or specify more:

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