

Innovative Teaching Strategies in the Digitalized World during the Covid-19 Epoch: The Case of Islamic Studies

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Abstract:

The process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) unceasingly requires modernization. This phenomenon entails the practice of eclectic teaching methods and strategies fitting digital generation (D-generation)'s needs. However, reaching such a proper choice remains the major challenge for teachers and academics during the Covid-19 Crisis.

This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of English E-Learning in Islamic Studies contexts. The primary research methods used based on the researcher's observation and the survey assigned to Undergraduate Students of Sharia and Law. Results obtained have shown that Online English Teaching Course can be practical, and it demands supplementary consideration and focus on the learners' specific needs.

Key-words: *Covid-19, D-generation, E-learning, foreign language, Islamic Studies.*

الملخص:

إن عملية تعليم وتعلم الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية تتطلب باستمرار التجديد. هذه الظاهرة تقوم على ممارسة أساليب واستراتيجيات انتقائية للتدريس والتي تؤثر مباشرة على مخرجات جيل المتعلمين المولود رقمي. غير أنه البلوغ التام لهذا الاختيار يبقى أبرز تحدي بالنسبة للأساتذة والأكاديميين خلال أزمة كوفيد-19.

البحث بدقة حول فعالية تعلم الإنجليزية الكترونيا لأغراض الدراسات الإسلامية هو الهدف الجوهرى لهذه الدراسة. طرق البحث المعتمدة أساسا لإنجاز هذا العمل مرتكزة على ملاحظة الباحث والاستبيان الموجه لطلبة ليسانس تخصص شريعة وقانون. النتائج المحصل عليها أبدت أن التعليم الإلكتروني للإنجليزية من أجل الدراسات الإسلامية يمكن أن يكون عملي وذلك يستدعي التفات تكميلي يراعي التركيز الشديد على احتياجات المتعلمين النوعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الأجنبية، الجيل الرقمي، الدراسات الإسلامية، كوفيد-19، التعليم الإلكتروني.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning English as an additional language is expeditiously gaining motive force at non-English Departments, with no exception, due to the puissant position that English language globally shapes through its swift expansion. On this point, Mamur (2005) authenticates the leading role of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in different faculties and universities and more exclusively in Islamic Studies contexts. The ESP learning situations on the whole accentuate the enhancement of communicative skills specifically-oriented to the field of specialization as the major concern. Accordingly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) insisted on the necessity of centralizing learners' needs and valuating the communicative competence.

English for specific purposes (ESP) arose approximately in the late of 1960's, and forged its fundamental constructs in an attempt to establish a typical pattern that complies with the ideal parameters (Christopher, 2014). In doing so, research methods and aims varried among ESP scholars' community ; John (2013), for example, proposed a dichotomy that fragments ESP developments into four phases such as : first appearance (1960's), past episode (1980's), modern phase (1990's-2011), and future era (2011-up to now and so this is going). Studies with a voluminous focus on 'what, why, and how' questions have been continuing in order to productively present an all-encompassing prototype.

The current work's goal is to probe into the issue so that a solid background will be constructed not as a conclusion but rather as a preparatory initiative to go further in upcoming investigations. Therefore, this reasearch is exploratory in nature, and it is adopted since it is suited for the achievement of the primary objective that is to find answers to research questions and to solve the research problem as a beginning to subsequent inquiries.

- *Distance Learning within Covid 19 Span*
- *Overview*

The teaching learning process requires the implementation of constant ingeniousness to match the outgrowths of technology. Over the previous decades, views supporting the use of Web-based teaching tools widely came into light, and even forthcoming period is marking persistence on e-learning delivery ;ergo, a common opinion has been introduced that online education is beneficial in terms of raising students' immersion, boosting teaching practices, and promoting the approbation of e-assessment (Salmon, 1998; Salmon, 2002; Weller, 2002; Donnelly, Donnelly & Sweeney, 2009). Interest in the 'What, Why, and How' approach to profitably exploit applied remote education opens the door for a sound conduct. Thus a myriad of e-educational strategies were widely announced.

The chief goal hinges on the amelioration of higher educational systems highly ascertains the heaviness of distance learning. Then, the unforeseen accelerated widening of Coronavirus pandemic has prompted the rapid shift from classroom-based to virtual learning ; Covid 19 pandemic imposed the pivotal reality of acceptance and adaptation

(Nagaraju, 2020). Up to this point, the urgent need to employ e teaching and learning in insufficient time encloses teachers' possibility to decide upon the admission or refusal of remote learning and teaching (ibid.). Furthermore, the expeditious turning up caused by the Coronavirus disease enforced the reform in higher education basically represented in a strong appeal to strengthen ties between Higher Education and Industrialized environment (Tejedor, Cervi, Pérez-Escoda, Tusa, Parola, 2021 ; Chan, Bista & Allen, 2022).

- **Workable Means**

Virtual learning can be an extremely joyful experience if the planned strategies suit the target learning situation. Hence, the exploration of theoretical foundations is the bottom line of success for designing super online courses, thereupon, the mode of exercising multiple instructional methods and techniques, either classical or modern, is multifarious. Correspondingly, Bates (2015) argues that online learning and teaching designs cannot be divorced from traditional approaches and theories such as Behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. In that event, the notion of amalgamation drawing on acknowledged evidence base to create new insights into the contested subject tends to be significant for molding new outlooks on online studying.

Yet, the fast-paced marketised world gave rise to inventions which can be functional and asset in educational district. Among the wide range of applications furnished, before and during Covid-19 time, Google Classroom, Zoom, and Youtube devices are prevailing the online educational classes. Recent studies reported the undeniable utility of Google services, mainly Zoom platform and Google Classroom application, in terms of fees, accessibility, relevance; therein, Korman stated that

Google Classroom is a free program for teachers and learners to collaborate. Teachers can create classes online, invite students to attend the class, and create and hand out assignments. Inside the forum, learners and teachers can interact with the assignments, and teachers can track the progress of students. To use this solution, schools can create a free Google Apps for Education account. Google Classroom offers teachers and students special features that are not part of traditional Google Accounts. (2020, p. 5)

Furthermore, affirmation that Zoom software is employable for educational purposes in diversified manners. Hence, audio/video conferencing techniques can be offered via a free Zoom account, and also assorted options can be effectuated to enhance the online studying. Accordingly, Buzzer (2020) points out that Zoom operating system gives the best choices for teachers and students as well to create interactive and participatory online learning communities. Making investments in Zoom and Google Classroom programs is the pre-eminent step toward ensuring profitable learning.

- **English for Islamic Studies (EIS)**

- **Globalization, English, and Islamic Education**

Islamic Studies is a broad field that includes many sub-fields, and Arabic language is the basic vehicle for transmitting knowledge. In this regard, an inquiry conducted by

Azniwati et al. (2016) certified that Arabic language is compulsory for learning Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, ...etc, and English language is classified in the second place as a necessary language to learn Islamic Studies, especially in the globalized world, despite the fact that the majority of Documentation in this area is available in Arabic because this latter is the language of the Holy Book 'Quran'. Arabic and English languages tend to be mandatory means of communication for Islamic Studies Students.

Learning Islamic Studies at tertiary stage stays in demand of exceeding the frontiers of disregarding other languages particularly English due to the central role this language possesses and unceasingly continues to hold in the globalized world. Hence, Arabic is basic for learning Islamic Studies and English tends to be also fundamental to invite others to Islam –preaching of Islam- and to teach Islamic practices and rituals. English Mastery is increasingly becoming essential regarding the status of English within the process of the worldwide integration. Muslim community is apt to become as an i community because of the profound impact of globalization on the entire planet (Nawi, Jamsari, Hamzah, Sulaiman, & Azizi, 2012). The relationship between Islamic Studies, English learning, and globalization is ceaselessly becoming stronger.

- ***Islamic Studies in Algerian Context***

In Algerian Islamic Faculties, majoring in Islamic Studies inevitably dictates the reality of taking and pursuing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses from First Year onwards- undergraduate and graduate levels. Respectively, English for Islamic Studies (EIS) subject has a prominent role in Islamic Studies Curriculum as a whole. Investigation in ESP sphere has been noticeably extended to tackle various branches of ESP such as Technology, Science, and so on ; however, the field of EIS in Algeria is still in its infancy (Smaïhi, 2019).

3. Figures and Tables :

- **Tables :**

Sessions of S1 & S2	N° of Participants Connected in S1—S2	Sample's Total N° (S1=S2)	(%) in S1 & S2
1	05 -- 00	180	%2.27- %0
2	09-- 00	180	%5-%0
3	08-- 01	180	%4.4- %0.5
4	14-- 01	180	%7.7-%0.5
5	30-- 01	180	%16.6-0.5
6	50-- 08	180	%27.7-4.4
7	80-- 20	180	44.4-11.1
8	95-- 28	180	%52.7-15.55
9	110-- 45	180	%61.1-25
10	120-- 67	180	%66.6-37.22
11	131-- 94	180	%72.7-52.22
12	150-- 150	180	%383.3-83.3

Table 1. Participants' Regular Access to English Courses via MOODLE during Semester 1
Source: Atamena, NH, 2021, p. 7

Observation: According to the aforesaid table (1), participants' reaction towards e learning is divided into two phases ; the first phase can be named as the null stage since no impartiality has been registered here, and the coming phase has marked the progress in students' responsiveness to e learning via Moodle with differing rates.

- **Figures**

Fig.1. Useful Data about Kinds of exchanges during the first Semester

Source :Atamena, NH, 2021, p. 8

Fig.2. Useful Data about Kinds of exchanges during the Second Semester

Source: Atamena, NH, 2021, p. 8

- **CONCLUSION**

English language is rapidly positioning as a paramount tool of communication mostly in the EFL empire and specifically in the Islamic Studies province. On that account, there is a pressing need to enhance the teaching and learning of English language in a specific-field that is Islamic Studies. The current research is an attempt to obtain an in-depth insights about the issue of what, why, and how to teach/learn English for Islamic Studies (EIS) which is still in its embryonic stage. The nature of this research problem drives to opt for the exploratory research design since it suitably helps in achieving the primary research goal.

The present work's primary aim is to further explore the phenomenon of Islamic Studies students' exposure to online learning and teaching tools (Moodle platform) during the pandemic at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Algiers 1 University. Hence, observation is used as a data gathering tool at the preliminary stage of this research. Thereby, an unstructured and uncontrolled observation has been taken on in order to minimize the risk of bias regarding, first, the current research aim and, second, the nature of the research problem. Then, covert type of observation has been utilized in which participants, at the beginning, were not informed about the observer's real identity, and the impetus behind such a decision as not to positively/negatively affect the pursuing of the investigation. Conveniently with Burke and Christensen (2017)'s affirmation, observation tends to be the most appropriate tool to collect needed information about participants as for it allows to attain the actual data about students' behaviors and skills without any interference on their side.

The observation process occurred pending the Covid-19 disease inclusively for the two semesters of the academic year 2020-2021. The researcher's role was dynamic in a way to gradually alter from entire observer to observer as participant along the extended course of study. Eminently, the initial observation has been undertaken naturally, afterwards a leading up checklist was prepared for directing the groundwork. In this study, center of interest set up inside the confines of linguistic behaviors displayed via Moodle database, the reason for that selection was the recording of high frequencies for the repetitiveness of Islamic Studies Students' linguistic behaviors.

Islamic Studies participants' manifestations towards learning via Moodle platform are displayed in terms of : feedback given in forums/ chat rooms, reaction times, and respect of deadlines. The number of participants involved in online English courses at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Algiers 1 University, usually augments after the second session in the first semester ; however, the number of students affiliated rises from the

first session of the second semester during the 2020-2021 academic year. The increase in percentages of students logging in Moodle platform expressed students' familiarity with the technological device to learn from home what has been already planned for being delivered in classroom, tables 1 respectively displays the statistics about students' access to English courses via Moodle platform.

Results obtained from the questionnaire can be summarized in two main points. Firstly, participants affirmed to encounter hardships when it comes to utilizing Moodle as for their common conviction is that other applications (Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Telegram...etc) are easy-to-use and simple to access. In this regard, participants heavily rely on those applications to chat and to connect with each other. Secondly, more than half of participants' feedback (65%) conveyed students' insufficiency of mobility to interreact with the teacher, and with the content itself. The cause of this alertness might be the shortage of being equipped with required communicative and technical skills. Islamic Studies informants still need assistance and reassurance to boost their motivation towards remote learning.

Yet, the fundamental aim of this study is to generate new knowledge and not to pinpoint an end. The exploratory sequential approach used to conduct the present research and to achieve the goal highly served for the accomplishment of the pinned aim. This study's conclusion recommends the following important points :

- Further explorations would be beneficial in order to profoundly tackle the issue of integrating e learning in Islamic Studies Contexts.
- Rethinking about qualified teaching and learning for English specified to Islamic Studies setting should be classified as a renewable aim in Higher Education.
- The concept of 'reevaluation' plays a prominent role in Online teaching of English for Islamic Studies. Matching the information impartment might be done creatively by investing in up-to-date technological devices, and this concern tends to be an urgent need especially in 21st Century Education.
- Triangulation in research methodology is decisive for succeeding in undertaking more trials to intensify the English for Islamic Studies outlook.

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