

**The Hardships and Obstacles of Supervising English  
Master Students during Covid-19 Pandemic  
Case Study: Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar**

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الاستلام: 2023/01/02  
القبول: 2023/05/07  
النشر: 2023/05/31

**Abstract**

The current study intends to analyze the obstacles and hardships of teachers' supervision for English master students during Covid-19 pandemic. The type of this research is a descriptive one. This method has been opted for the sake of analyzing and describing the results obtained. In order to reach the objectives of the topic under investigation, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of ten teachers at the department of English and an interview were designed for two teachers in the hope of gathering the needed information and attempting to adequately, treats the issue raised. The result revealed that during their supervision for English master students, supervisors at Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar encountered many obstacles and hardships during Covid-19 Pandemic, but despite that they were enabled to carry on their educational activities and overcome all the hardships.

**Key Words:** Supervisor; Master students; Covid19; Tahri Mohammed University; Hardships.

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**Introduction :**

Corona pandemic had a great influence on higher educational institutions, including universities. In fact, it had extremely influenced academic performance. However, most of the higher educational institutions challenged the pandemic by developing innovative solutions to carry on academic and research activities through online learning and contact through the use of online tools such as e-mails, in addition to other technological means to proceed with the learning process such as Zoom, Google meet, Face book, messenger and so on.

As the other Algerian universities, Tahri Mohammed university of Bechar was also a subject of sanitary restrictions and distance regulations. Consequently, both teachers and students have no better way than the use of internet, media, and technology to prepare for classes, lessons, and researches. Moreover, teachers found themselves obliged to alter for technology to interact with their students and deliver their classes. The master class teachers also were required to use unconventional methods to supervise master students.

The current study is carried out to investigate the difficulties and obstacles encountered by supervisors in the supervision process of Master students during Covid 19 pandemic. Also, it will tackle the main ways used by the administration to manage and save the academic year during the pandemic. Tahri Mohammed University is chosen as a study case because we have estimated necessary to investigate the issue at our university.

The main goal of this research is to look for effective resolutions to the hardships that the supervisors face when supervising Master students in the period of Covid 19. To reach the intended objective, a questionnaire and an interview have been selected as data collection tools, as well as a sampling used to conduct the research, and research instruments utilized in this study.

To collect sufficient data, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

**1-**Were the supervisors at Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar able to cope with the challenges that they faced, while supervising English Master students during Covid 19?

**2-**How did the faculty of letters and Foreign Languages at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar manage supervision process during the pandemic?

**3-**Could online tools assist supervisors to perform their supervision task and save the academic year from suspension?

**4-**Were the supervisors able to perform their job effectively and assist their students to complete their theses in the time scheduled despite the hard conditions during Covid 19?

It is therefore hypothesized that:

- 1-Supervisors of English Master students at Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar were able to cope with the challenges that they faced during Covid 19.
- 2-During the pandemic, the faculty of letters and Foreign Languages at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar was committed to the utilization and integration of ICT devices and distance learning technologies at the university.
- 3-The use of online tools and distance learning technologies were helpful for the supervisors, and as a result their task was performed appropriately and the academic year was saved from suspension.
- 4-Despite the hard conditions during Covid 19, students could complete their theses on time and this is due to the supervisors' perseverance and the provision of students' needs.

## I. Literature Review

### 1. General Background of Supervision during Covid 19 Pandemic

#### 1.1 Supervision

The teacher has many tasks to perform among them supervision. In Pearson and Brew view, supervision is a formal job inside an organization that has more or less specific expectations and accountability to both the person being monitored and the organization that provides the environment for the supervisory interaction. Through whatever procedures the organization has in place, the institution (E.g. University through the School of Graduate Studies) is responsible for quality control (e.g., supervisory committee) of the supervisory relationship (e.g. student appeals, student evaluations and performance evaluations). Because this is an institutional function, both the supervisor and the student should be clear about their expectations (even if they are extremely modest) and follow the organization's rules (e.g., student or faculty code of conduct. (Pearson, 2002)

Moreover, supervision is a diverse and demanding task, according to Ballard and Clanchy, research student supervision is a combination of academic knowledge and the effective management of personal and professional relationships. (Ballard B, 1993) However, Welch proposes three different types of supervision. Firstly, she described the more directed approach, which is quite planned and includes a lot of advice for the student in the early phases. As the student's confidence and competence grew, so did his or her degree of control. The second method uses a highly directive approach at the start and conclusion of the project, followed by a highly non-directive time in the middle. Finally, the third method was described as being very directive, with the student being closely monitored throughout the assignment. Indeed supervision is a hard work that requires wiseness, patience and perseverance, in addition to that the responsibilities of both the supervisor and the student must be performed effectively in order to reach the desired goal.

#### a. The Responsibilities of the Supervisor

There are many opinions about the responsibilities of supervisors. Above all, the supervisor should encourage, motivate, and provide students with regular meetings for consultation and discussion of academic progress and research. Besides, he

should organize his time, read the students' written work in a timely and thorough manner, supply constructive suggestions for improvement and continuation, and supply constructive criticism. According to Brown and Krager, the supervisor must be aware of the students' time and competence restrictions, as well as assist them in being conscious of their own limitations and constraints. (Brown, 1985)

Many of a supervisor's responsibilities revolve around providing advice, research completeness, clarity, methodology, topic selection, and comments on the development of written work. According to Spear, feedback is often offered on topic selection, techniques of investigation, writing style and layout, the clarity of the student's work and ideas, the completeness and direction of the work, and the student's general growth. In addition to that, advise on the appropriate quantity of reading, experimenting, and analysis will be expected. (Spear, 2000) Moreover, supervisors must be knowledgeable and talented in the research field in order to provide effective supervision. What about the relationship between students and the supervisor?

#### **b. The Relationship between the Student and the Supervisor**

The student-supervisor interaction should be effective. Both the student and the supervisor are responsible of the completion of master's research in an adequate length of time. The relationship between the student and supervisor involves selecting a research topic, designing a suitable planning for the research, identifying and acquiring the necessary resources, managing and conducting the research, carrying out the literature review, analyzing and interpreting the data gathered, writing the thesis and eventually defending it.

In fact, supervision process requires constant adjustment, great sensitivity and interpersonal skill on the part of both the supervisor and student. The most vital aspect of supervision is the good communication between students and their supervisor. Both of them should accept criticism, listen to each other, and communicate openly and honestly and initiate a good relationship. Students want their supervisors to be knowledgeable, reasonable, serious and support their work in both good and bad times. In most of the time, some clashed occurred between them, according to Donald, personality clashes, communication barriers due to age, cultural, or language differences, or personal differences in work approaches are all examples of personality factors. (Donald, 1995) In order to obtain fruitful results both the supervisor and the student have to perform the responsibilities that are on their shoulders, besides they should have a good relationship between them. As pointed out by Da Costa, supervision plays a vital role during thesis or research work and the relationship between the supervisor and the student determines the successful completion of the research thesis. (Da Costa, 2016)

### **1.2 The Closure of Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar and the Organization of Distance Learning**

The preventive measures announced by the University of Bechar against the spread of COVID-19 on March 11, 2020, had affected the lives and education of students and teachers at the university. Days later, the Dean of the university, the Dean of each faculty in cooperation with student representatives, began planning

distance learning for both teachers and students. Weeks later, distance learning began with sending the courses via emails and video chatting for students of different specialties, through which teachers, presented lessons for their students. Furthermore, teachers and supervisors opted for the use of online tools and technological means to proceed with the learning process such as Zoom, Google meet, Face book, messenger and so on. Besides, in the framework of the plans of the Ministry of higher education, for the further planning of distance learning, the tasks and responsibilities for the achievement of learning were published, through which the role of each party engaged in educational institutions in the country was specified.

### **1.3 The Challenges and Obstacles faced by the Supervisor during Supervision Process**

In fact, the use of technology provides several advantages, however, this cannot prevents some major difficulties and obstacles faced by the instructors or supervisors during the teaching and supervision processes. In their performance to their supervision task, supervisors may face many issues related either to the students, methods, or data. Despite the advantages that facilitate the teaching process for teachers, as supervisors, they may face some issues that may cause critical problems in certain situations. They may face various obstacles and barriers such as technical problems, lack of interactivity and training as well as access to internet.

Furthermore, the supervisor may find it difficult to convey instructions because of some students who have difficulties with the use of technology, especially computers. Despite the rapid spread of technology, some students are still facing difficulties connecting to internet platforms and the use of virtual classes. Other students face difficulties even with the basic use and functions of computers. Such cases create serious problems for supervisors as they find themselves unable to interact with their students and discuss their research topic with them because of the inability of some students to manipulate technological tools properly.

It is worth saying that supervisors at Tahri Mohammed University faced many challenges and obstacles during Covid 19 pandemic, but with their hard work and patience, in addition to the help of online and technological tools, their master students could complete their theses in the expected time.

## **II. Methodological Framework**

The type of this research is a descriptive one, in the sense that the results obtained are statistically drawn during the investigation. So, to test the hypothesis of the current study, two instruments are utilized to collect the data needed. They include a questionnaire and an interview addressed for English teachers. The questionnaire is composed of both close-ended and open-ended questions and contains seventeen items. It was administered to ten English teachers at Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar for the sake of getting information about the hardships that they encounter while supervising Master student during Covid 19. However, the interview was addressed to another two teachers. This interview

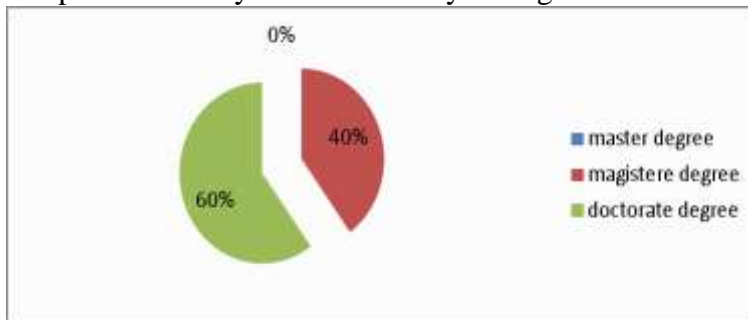
takes the form of an oral questionnaire, which requires the respondents to answer the same questions.

The study opted for the quantitative and qualitative research techniques to interpret the answers and the opinions of the English teachers, who have performed their task as supervisors during the pandemic. After having collected the responses of the participants under investigation, their answers were displayed via graphs, attempting to analyze their perceptions towards supervising English Master students and the obstacles and challenges that they faced. On one hand, percentages and charts will be used to represent the results of the questionnaire. On the other hand, all the results are presented in order, according to the numbers of questions and not to the rate. Initially, the study will firstly deal with teachers' questionnaire, the results of the interview will be analyzed in a simple paragraph.

## 1.Results

### 1.1 Results obtained from Teachers' Questionnaire

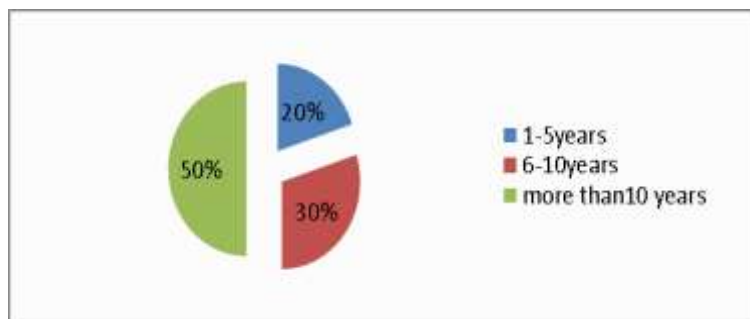
**Q. One:** please would you like to state your highest academic qualification?



**Figure 01:** Teachers' Academic Qualification

The purpose of this question is to know the degree and the qualification of the teachers, also its aim is to know how competent and skilled the teachers are in their specialties. Thus, it can be attested through this graph that the majority of teachers (60%) have doctorate degree, (40%) of them have magister degree, and no one has master degree.

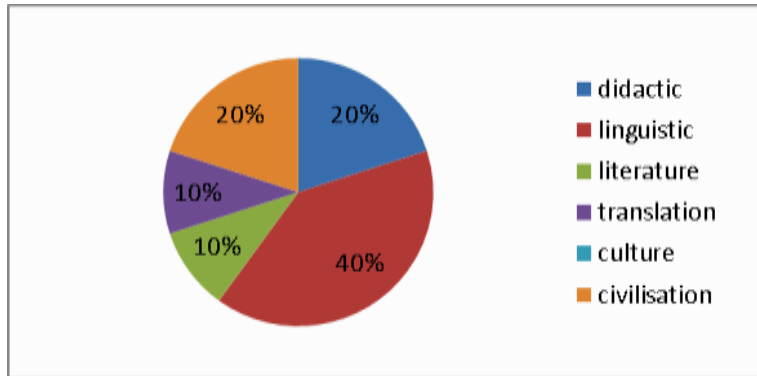
**Q. Two:** for how long have you been teaching English?



**Figure 02 :** Teaching Experience

This question seeks to know teachers' experience in teaching English at Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar. The average of teaching English of ten teachers is more than 10 years, which represents (50%). Whereas, three teachers (30%) said that they have been teaching English just between six to ten years, and only two teachers (20%) have been teaching English between one to five years.

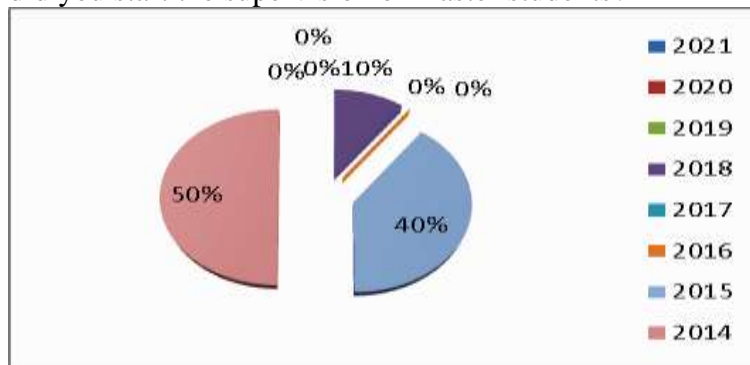
**Q. Three:** what is your specialty?



**Figure 03:** Teachers' Specialty

The purpose of this question was to know the teachers' field of teaching. The pie chart displayed that the majority (40%) of teachers have experience in didactics, (20%) are specialized in linguistics, (20%) in literature and only (10%) in both translation, and culture and civilization.

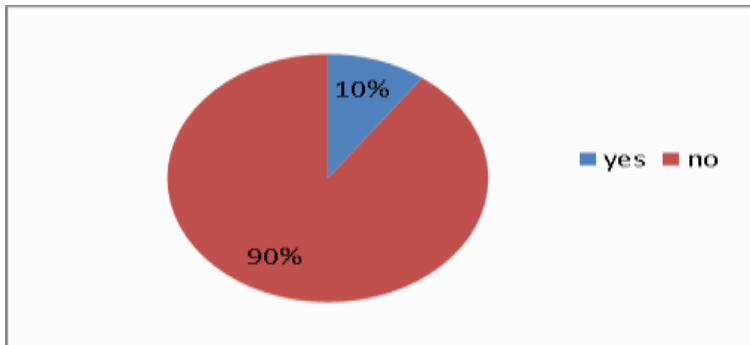
**Q. 04:** when did you start the supervision of master students?



**Figure 04:** Supervision Experience

This question was asked for the sake of determining the average years of experience for teachers' supervision for master students. According to the results obtained, half of the teachers (50%) have eight years of experience (50%), (40%) have five years of experience, and only 10% of the teachers inquired have one year of experience in supervision. The results clearly demonstrate that most of them have a significant experience in master students' supervision.

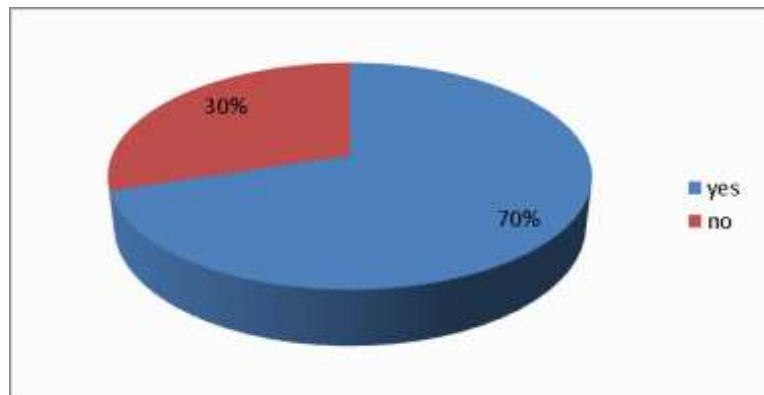
**Q. 05:** did you find any obstacles and hardships in the supervision process during the pandemic?



**Figure 05:** The Obstacles and Hardships in Supervision Process

The purpose of asking this question is to know if the teachers faced any difficulties in the supervision process during Covid 19. The result obtained shows that most of the teachers (90%) did not face any difficulty in the supervision process.

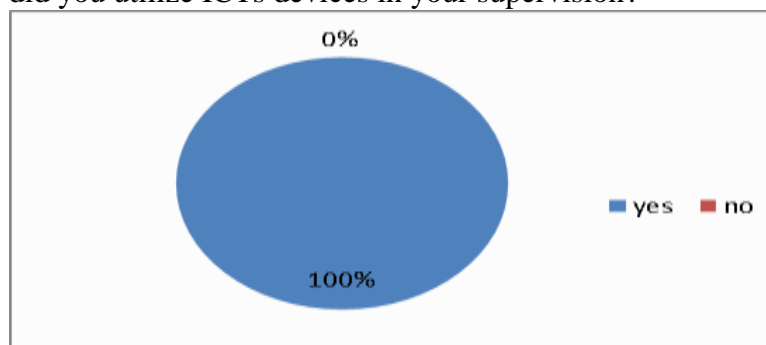
**Q Six:** did you supervise in your specialty?



**Figure 06:** Supervision in the Same Specialty

This item was asked to see if the teachers supervise in the same specialty. As the pie chart shows, the average of them (70%) answered (yes), and only (30%) said no.

**Q. Seven:** did you utilize ICTs devices in your supervision?

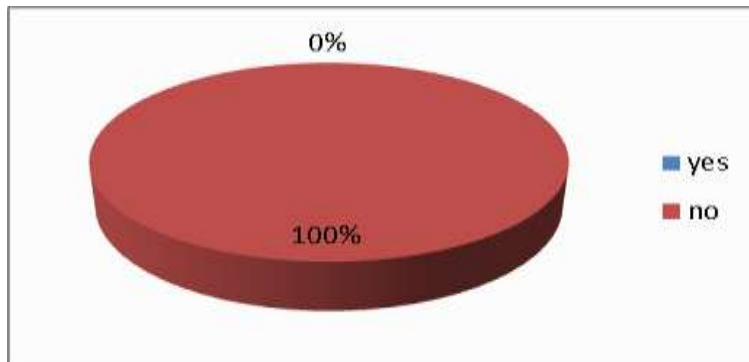


**Figure 07:** the Use of ICTs Devices in Supervision Process



The objective of this question is to know to what extent the teachers were familiar with the use of ICTs in the supervision process during the pandemic. The results clearly demonstrate that all the teachers 100% enrolled in this questionnaire were familiar with ICTs devices.

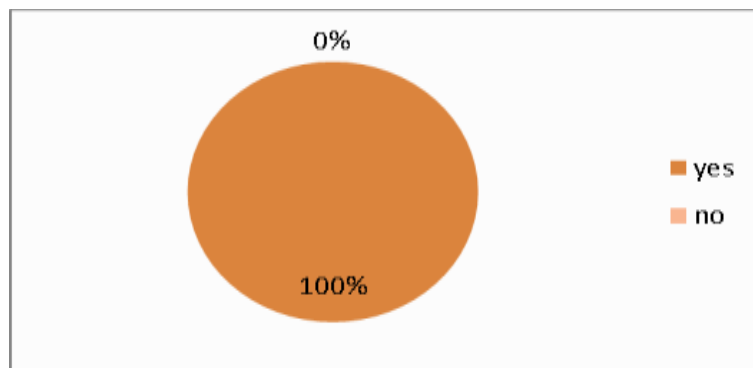
**Q.Eight:** have you received any training on how to manipulate ICT devices?



**Figure 08:** Training on how to Manipulate ICT Devices

The aim of this question is to detect whether the teachers had any kind of training on the use of ICTs. The results show that all the involved teachers (100%) have never went through a sort of training on how to manipulate ICT devices.

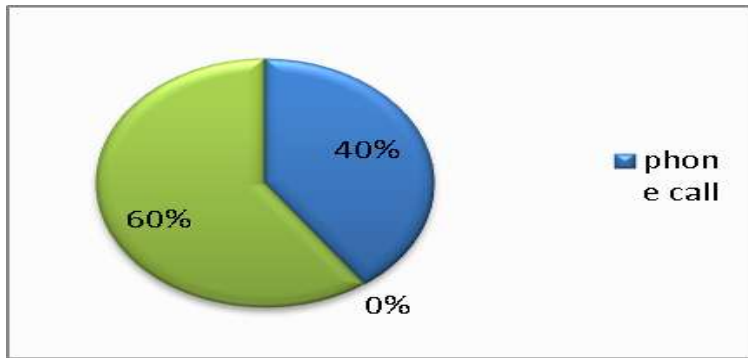
**Q.Nine:** were your students familiar with the use of ICTs devices?



**Figure Nine:** Whether the Students were Familiar with the Use of ICTs Devices

This question is asked to know if teachers' students had any familiarity with ICTs; according to the teachers, all of their students 100% were familiar in a way or another with the use of ICTs devices.

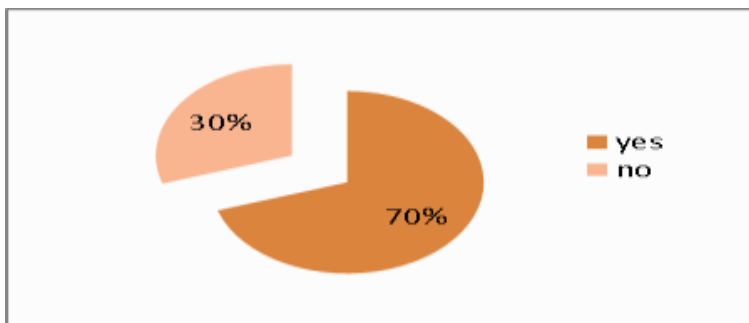
**Q. Ten:** what is the main way you utilized to interact with your students?



**Figure 10:**The Main Way used by Supervisors to interact with their Students

This question aimed at knowing which method of communication was used by teachers and students to interact with each other. The result shows that (40%) of them relied heavily on phone calls, whereas, (60%) opted for the use of emails, no one utilized video communication.

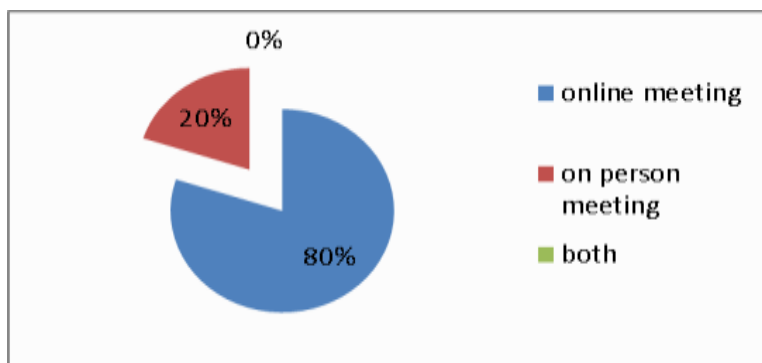
**Q. Eleven:** was the use of distance learning technology at the university during the pandemic effective?



**Figure 11:**The Use of Distance Learning Technology at Tahri Mohammed University

This item intended to know to which extent higher education institutions were committed to the use and integration of ICTs devices and distant learning. According to the result obtained, on one hand, 70% of the teachers believed that the fact that the university was instructing and facilitating more reliance on distant learning during the pandemic made it effective, on the other hand 30% believed the opposite.

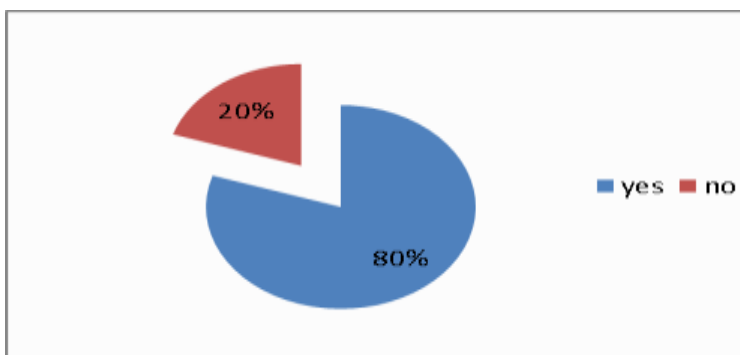
**Q. Twelve:**how did your faculty manage supervision during the pandemic?



**Figure 12:**the Faculty Management of Supervision during COVID19

The objective of this question is to know whether the faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages respected the instructions of distant learning and how supervision process was managed during the pandemic. As the results show, 80% of the teachers stated that their interactions in the faculty were based on online meetings; however the remaining 20% were still using person meetings.

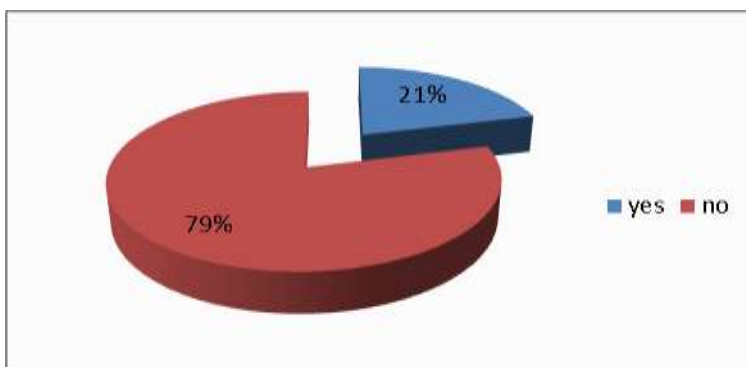
**Q.Thirteen:** were the students under your supervision punctual in online meetings during COVID 19?



**Figure 13:**The Students' Punctuality in Online Meeting

The purpose of this question is to test the students' punctuality in online meetings. While asking this question, 80% of the teachers stated that the students were punctual during their online meetings, whereas only 20% claimed that there were some problems with the punctuality of students during online meetings.

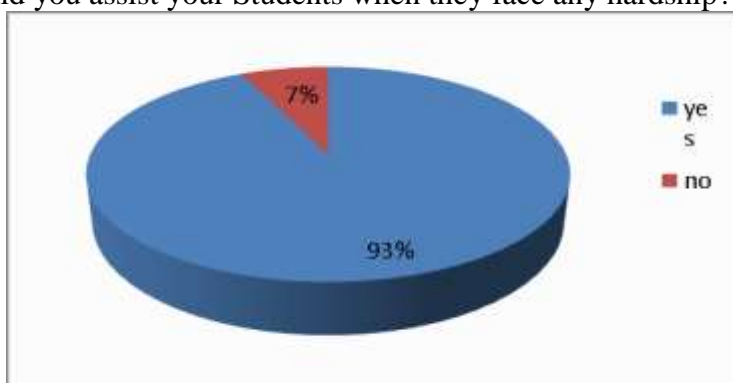
**Q. Fourteen:** did your Students encounter any difficulty in their research endeavour during COVID 19?



**Figure 14:** Difficulties in Students' Research Endeavour during COVID 19

This question spots light on the difficulties faced by the students while performing their research task during the pandemic. As the pie chart shows, a huge percentage of the students (79%) did not face any difficulties during their research process in light of COVID 19. On the other hand, only 21% encountered problems and difficulties during the pandemic.

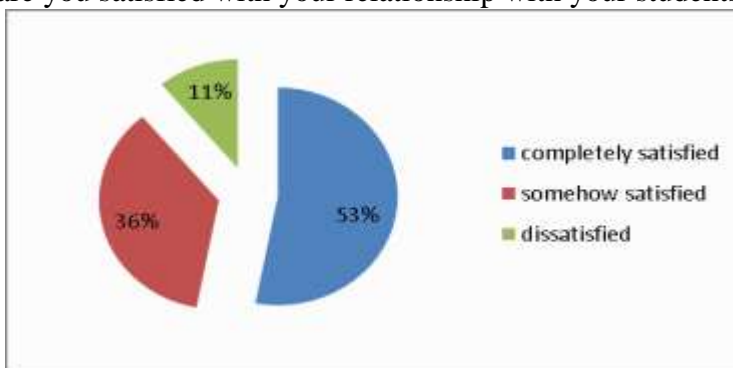
**Q.Fifteen:** did you assist your Students when they face any hardship?



**Figure 15:** The Assistance of the Supervisor to his/her Students

This item aims at exploring the role of the supervisor in case his/her students faced problems. The results show that most of the supervisors assisted their students when they encountered difficulties, whereas only 7% stated that they did not help their students because according to them they have to rely on themselves.

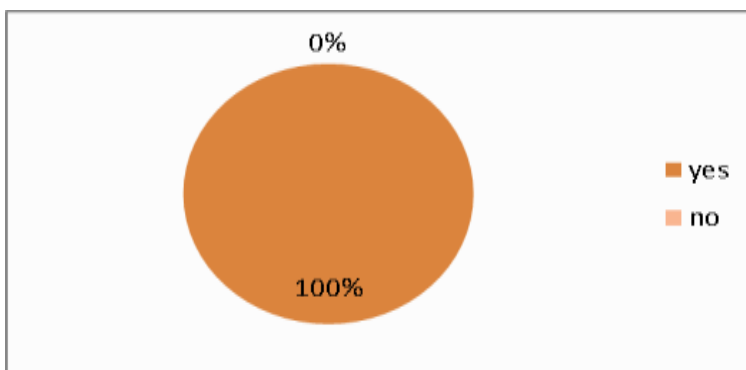
**Q. Sixteen:** are you satisfied with your relationship with your students?



**Figure 16:** The Relationship between the Supervisor and the Students

The result of this question, as illustrated above, revealed that more than half of the supervisors (53%) were satisfied with their relationship with their students, and 36% of them were fairly satisfied to some extent, however only 7% were unsatisfied with their relation with their students.

**Q. Seventeen:** did your students complete their research work on the expected time?



**Figure 17:** Whether the Students complete their Research Work in the Expected Time

The objective of this item is to know whether the students were able to complete their research works in the expected time. According to teachers' answers, all of their students (100%) were able to complete their research works in the expected time as the pie chart shows.

### 1.2 Analysis of Teachers' Interview

For further information, an interview was administered to two English university teachers. Each question from this interview is going to be analyzed separately.

**Q.One:** as a supervisor, how was your relationship with your students during Covid 19?

The target of this question is to clarify how should the relationship between the supervisor and the students be. In both of the two teachers' view the supervisor and his students should establish a relationship based on mutual respect. Also they said that the supervisor must provide individual attention to students with special needs by giving them positive feedback regularly.

**Q.Two:** was it easy for you to contact your students when they were distanced?

According to the teachers answers, it was very hard for both of them, one of the informant claimed that feedbacks are so necessary because they are one of the most important and meaningful way that assist the teacher to be engaged with his/ her students. Second informant asserted that poor internet connection was the greatest obstacle for him, as a result his contact with his students was extremely difficult.

**Q.Three:** are you satisfied with how Tahri Mohammed University Managed studying and supervision during the pandemic?

The informants shared the same view. Both of them were not satisfied with how Tahri Mohammed University managed studying and supervision during COVID 19

and this was due to the fact that teachers were not ready to use ICT. Also, the university staff needed training and improvement in the field of distance learning.

**Q.Four:** do you think distance supervision encourages students to do their best to have the necessary information and rely on themselves?

One of the respondents asserted that distance supervision pushed the students to do more research, whereas the other claimed that during distance supervision students could become confused and uncertain about his/her progress in the research, it would be better if it was face to face in order to receive feedbacks. Moreover, according to him the teacher could evaluate and criticize the students' work directly.

**Q.Five:** according to you, should Tahri Mohammed University rely on one way in supervision?

All teachers agreed on the necessity of using various ways so as to reach an effective supervision. In face to face meeting, interaction happened instantaneously, it was useful for students to get answers and clarify points of confusion, whereas in distance supervision, the teacher was in constant contact with the students.

## 2. Interpretation and Discussion of the Findings

After dealing with data analysis, it is convenient to provide a discussion about the results obtained from both the questionnaire and the interview, which were addressed for English teachers at Tahri Mohammed University. As regards the questionnaire, the two initial questions were about their specialty and their experience in teaching English and supervision. The aim of these questions is to compare between male and female teachers, and between novice and experienced teachers in the way they managed the supervision process during Covid 19 and the techniques they used in order to assist their English students.

The results obtained show that most of the teachers have experience in didactics, and their experience in teaching English ranges from six to more than ten years and in supervision half of them have an experience of more than eight years, and only 10% of the teachers involved in this questionnaire have one year of experience in supervision, which means that most of them have experience in the supervision of master students.

According to their answers, the findings show that teachers in the English department at the University of Tahri Mohammed of Bechar have used a variety of technology tools. Most of them used the e-learning platform to follow the supervision process. These findings indicate that they used e-learning as a remote device because it was required and this was due to Covid 19 pandemic. Furthermore, they opted for emails to send sources and PDFs.

However, some teachers used Google applications such as Google Meet since they are familiar with them. Despite the fact that teachers utilized this virtual way to pursue their professions, it is assumed that they did not use numerous methods and techniques. Therefore, it is noticed that they are required to have extensive training in order to use e-learning platforms. Indeed, e-learning platforms have

played a significant role in terms of saving the academic year from suspension. However, without internet connection and effective e-learning, supervision would be inefficient.

As regards teachers' interview analysis, generally the data collected revealed that according to the participants Corona Virus had a great impact on supervision process. Furthermore, they significantly stated their desire and preference to increase the quality of the e-learning platform, which means that they were not satisfied with how the university managed studying and supervision during the pandemic.

In fact the findings of the teachers' interview reported that when the teacher is trained, well prepared, uses different online teaching methods and strategies, and adequate technological materials, students will be motivated, get better understanding and assimilation of the new knowledge, and will be more interactive and interested in e-learning. Consequently, e-learning provided by the department of English will be effective, promoted and better prepared for further phenomenon.

Eventually, the Corona Virus crisis supplied teachers with a vision about the true challenges that can be faced through online supervision and its implementation. Thus, it can be said that despite these obstacles and hardships, most supervisors did their duty and performed their task effectively, as a result the academic year and graduations have been achieved and the academic year has been secured from suspension.

Indeed, despite the fact that e-learning is a significant tool and a crucial means to carry on teaching and supervision processes; yet the findings of the current study entailed that English teachers at Tahri Mohammed University prefer face-to face supervision and learning through which effective communication, interesting debate and good understanding will be provided.

### **Conclusion**

Corona Virus phenomenon has completely changed the education sector. Due to the dangerous pandemic, a large number of educational institutions and universities were closed. Hence, as an urged solution and in order to carry on the teaching, learning and teachers' supervision processes, various technological means and ways have been implemented such as Zoom, Google meet, Face book, messenger and so on. In the same context, the Algerian lecturers and students in higher education were obliged to adopt a new technology-based on e-learning. The latter has played a significant role particularly during the pandemic period.

The purpose of the research was to investigate the methods and techniques adopted by supervisors to follow up their supervision process during the pandemic period. The study also attempted to find out the impact of COVID 19 on the use of e-learning platforms. The study also targeted to localize areas of problems and the adequate solutions suggested by the informants for a better online teaching, learning and supervision processes.

The undertaken research was based on a qualitative and quantitative method. The former is used to explain the supervisors' insights and their perceptions towards the use of e-learning platform through their responses, and the latter is

used to measure the value of the use of e-learning. To collect data, a questionnaire and an interview were designed for English teachers at Tahri Mohammed University in order to gather available information and detain evidences about the issues and the benefits obtained while using e-learning during the sanitary crisis.

The data analysis of the current study revealed that Corona Virus had a great impact on teachers' supervision for English master students and the supervisors encountered many obstacles and difficulties during the pandemic. In fact, the use of e-learning platform was helpful for them to follow up their supervision process during the pandemic. But despite its significance, the results have indicated that supervisors faced various obstacles and barriers such as technical problems, lack of interactivity and training as well as access to internet, and most of them have preferred face-to face supervision and learning.

Indeed, Corona Virus has not only affected negatively the higher educational sector, but it has also provided a significant opportunity for the educational staff, including supervisors to discover areas of weaknesses and strengths during that period. Exploring the suggestions and solutions lead to the effectiveness of not only the e-learning platform; but rather the quality of education at Tahri Mohammed University as well. Thus, it is worth saying that Corona Virus has brought a great change in the methods of teaching, learning and supervision processes.

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