

Investigating the Challenges of the Implementation of E-Learning in the Algerian EFL Context

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ABSTRACT: *As technology continues to reshape various aspects of life, education has also witnessed a significant transformation. E-Learning has appeared as an alternative to traditional face-to-face classroom. In the last few years, a frame of education was implemented at Algerian universities. Accordingly, E-Learning has newly been adopted in many Algerian universities. This study endeavours to highlight the concept of E-Learning. It also seeks to find out the barriers and challenges facing EFL students in learning English as a foreign language with E-Learning system. This study is significant in that it attempts to explore the effects of E-learning on the EFL learning process. In order to attain these objectives, an exploratory research design is carried out. 40 students at the Department of English at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University of Setif participated in the investigation by responding to a semi-structured questionnaire. Results obtained revealed that despite the fact that EFL students at the University of Setif have access to many technological devices, they find difficulty in coping with E-Learning framework. In that, they encounter various challenges and barriers associated with the newly implemented E-Learning practice.*

KEYWORDS: Algerian Universities, challenges E-Learning, EFL, , traditional face-to-face classroom

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Introduction

Recent developments in the fields of science and technology have impacted many fields and disciplines; the field of education is no exception. As a result to the rapid technological progress, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) become widely incorporated in education to facilitate the teaching / learning process and to assist learners to achieve their learning objectives as well (Naveed, et al., 2017; Chatti and Hadoussa, 2021; Almaiah, et al., 2020; Mahyoob, 2020). Accordingly, the adoption of E-learning is one the main challenges of Algerian universities particularly after Covid19 pandemic era.

E- Learning becomes an integral part in any educational system as it plays a significant role during the previously mentioned pandemic. E- Learning brought radical changes in teachers' as well as students' roles, assessment and evaluation techniques, and teaching /learning styles. It also assists in the delivery and management of the teaching/learning process. Yet, since the implementation of E-learning practice in higher education is still in its infancy at Algerian Universities, it is faced by some barriers and challenges which to some extents hinder the attainment of educational objectives. This study therefore tends to explore the challenges and barriers associated with the implementation of E- learning in EFL context at Algerian Universities. This study seeks to answer the following question: What are the challenges and obstacles facing Algerian EFL learners with the implementation of E-Learning? That is, the study aims mainly to identify the challenges and obstacles faced by EFL learners when E-learning is adopted as a new educational system.

Literature Review

The Concept of E-Learning

The concept of E-Learning is composed of two main themes; learning and technology. Conceptually, E-Learning has been defined in various ways reflecting different interests and orientations of different researchers. According to Fry (2001) as quoted in Arkorful and Abeido (2015), E-Learning “encompasses the use of the internet and other important technologies to produce materials for learning, teach learners, and also regulate courses in an organization”. Apparently, any integration of technological tool is, in the view of Fry, sufficient to constitute E-Learning. Additionally, Welsh, et al. (2003) refer to E-Learning as the “use of computer’ network technology, primarily over an internet or through the internet to deliver information and instruction to individuals” (p. 246). This definition incorporates the availability of the internet as an important component of E-learning.

Another definition is set by Garrison (2011) in which E-Learning is considered as “electronically mediated asynchronous and synchronous communication for the purpose of constructing and confirming knowledge” (p. 2011). Within the same vein, Al-Atabi and Al-Noori (2020) state that E-Learning is “an interactive learning system that provides the learner with the use of communication and information technology and depends on an integrated digital electronic environment that displays courses across electronic networks, provides guidance, organizes tests as well as managing and evaluating resources and processes”. Furthermore, Chitra and Raj (2018) state that various terms are used to refer to this form of learning including: online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, network and web-based learning.

So, what is noteworthy is that the incorporation of media in a learning scene constitutes E-Learning. The latter is hence the broad umbrella concept used to refer to all kinds of electronic and software-supported learning and teaching.

Advantages of E-Learning

DelVecchio and Loughney (2006), state that E-Learning is advantageous to education corporations and to all types of learners. They support their view by arguing that E-Learning is affordable, saves time, and produces

measurable results. When compared to traditional face-to-face learning, E-Learning is more cost effective in that less time and money are spent. Significantly, E-Learning can be processed in any geographical location with less or no travel expenses. Another advantage of E-Learning lies in its flexibility. That is, Courses are delivered anytime and anywhere in addition to their availability whenever they are in need. Additionally, E-Learning accommodates different types of learning styles. In this regard, students have the advantage to learn at their own pace. Moreover, as learners take the full responsibility of their own learning, E-Learning fosters students' autonomy.

Similarly, Arkful and Abaido (2015) account a number of benefits of E-Learning considering it among the best methods of education. Accordingly, E-Learning is thought to address the needs of individual learners. It is resilient when issues of time and place are considered. E-Learning also enhances the efficacy of knowledge and qualifications via easily accessing to a huge amount of information. Further, E-Learning offers opportunities for relations between learners by the use of discussion forums. What is more, E-Learning allows self-pacing in that each student studies on his or her own pace. In that sense, individual learner differences are encountered.

Within the same line of inquiry, Chitra and Raj (2018) note that E-Learning is a way to boost students learning outcomes. The implementation of E-Learning allows students to become risk-takers. Significantly, learners develop a sense of autonomy wherein they become more independent and responsible for their own learning.

Challenges of Implementing E-Learning

Research studies investigating the experience of E-Learning state many challenges. Donnley and McAvinia (2012) as cited in Ja'ashan (2020) argue that there are many academics who lack training in the use of ICTs and educational tools. Besides Tarus, et al. (2015) investigate the challenges that hinder the application of E-Learning in Kenyan universities pointing at the inconvenience between ICT and E-Learning, lack of technical skills, inadequate ICT infrastructure, in addition to financial constraints.

Following the same line of inquiry, Abed (2019) states the obstacles impeding the E-Learning implementation are as follow:

- Lack of support to ensure efficient education,
- Lack of standards for the development and operation of an independent and effective programme,
- Lack of incentives to develop the programme.

Quite similarly, Al-Maiah (2020) identifies numerous challenges related to the adoption of electronic learning system. These challenges are classified into four categories:

- Technological challenges.
- Individual challenges.
- Cultural challenges.
- Course challenges.

He further posits that these challenges differ from one country to another due to different cultures and contexts. He adds, readiness, lack of ICT knowledge, poor of network infrastructure and weakness of content development constitute the main challenges of E-Learning system adoption within developing countries.

Another study conducted by Kanwal and Rehman (2017) revealed that system characteristics, internet experience, and computer self-efficacy were the main issues that impede the successful adoption of E-Learning system (cited in Al-Maiah, 2020).

Al-Maiah (2020) claims that despite these efforts, none of the previously mentioned studies investigated the actual challenge that face users during the use of E-Learning system. In that, Al-adwan and Smedly (2012); Bhowmik et al. (2013); Aldowah et al. (2015); Goka (2015); and Islam et al. (2015), as cited in Hammad and Zohry (2020) challenges hindering E-Learning are likely to include:

- a. The awareness challenge: That is the lack of electronic awareness among individuals, regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of E-Learning. People who are inured to traditional learning still believe that traditional learning methods are more effective than E-Learning.
- b. The learning style challenge: That is to understand the different learning techniques of different students for attaining better learning outcomes.
- c. The technical training challenge: That is training is required to enable academics to have E-Learning features and functions and use them adequately.
- d. The pedagogical E-Learning challenge: E-learning requires a differentiated approach to pedagogy, particularly in individual and group interaction as well as the online assessment.
- e. The low adoption challenge: That is the low adoption rate of E-Learning resulting from the shortage of electronic content and inadequate E-Learning infrastructure may lead to pitfalls in the effective implementation of E-Learning.
- f. The practice challenge: E-Learning may not be adequate for certain categories of learners. Science students, for instance, need extensive physical science laboratories.
- g. The ICT challenge: Inadequate skills of ICT; Information and Communication Technology, is a serious challenges facing E-Learning.
- h. The technological challenge: The Downloading procedure of the electronic content can be slow, due to the internet problems. This can negatively influence E-Learning practice.
- i. The difficulty in engaging students online: This implies the lack of self-motivation among students who may find it hard to shift from traditional face-to-face learning to E-learning system.

Mahyoob (2020) reveals that challenges have been reduced because both learners and teachers have been undertaking the experience of knowing and interacting with educational technology tools such as mobile-based learning, computer-based learning, and web-based learning.

Methodology

Research Design, Participants, and Data Collection Instruments

Since the ultimate aim of this study is to investigate the challenges and barriers facing EFL learners associated with E-Learning practice, this work opts for an exploratory research design. McNabb (2002, p. 96) describes exploratory studies as “small-sample designs used primarily for gaining insights and ideas about research problems and the variables and issues associated with those problems” (qtd in Haddaoui, 2019). The purpose behind conducting exploratory research designs is to gain deeper views about the problem under investigation. In order to realize this objective, forty (40) students at the Department English at Mohamed Lamine Debagine University volunteered to participate in this study. As far as data collection instrument is concerned, a semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect the main data for the study.

Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire contains three main sections. The first section is concerned with background information questions about the learners’ age, gender, level as well as their access and manipulation of technological tools. The second section is devoted to E-Learning notably how it is perceived by students. Lastly, section three is designed for the sake of exploring challenges and obstacles facing the implementation of E-Learning.

Results and Discussion

This section displays students’ responses of the questionnaire. The results obtained demonstrated the following:

Section one

The first section of the questionnaire provided information regarding students’ background information in which age, gender, and geographical belonging are identified. Besides, this section provided information about the extent to which students have access to technological tools, and how do they evaluate their manipulation of these tools.

More importantly, section one of the questionnaire served in identifying three categories of students on the basis of their technology dependence and usage. The first category represents technological devices extravagant users with rate of 65% (26 students). The second category represents moderate users with rate of 32.5% (14 students). The last category represents non-users with rate of 2.5% (1 student). The following table and figure illustrates the categories identified above:

Number of Students	N	%
Extravagant users	26	65%
Moderate users	13	32%
Non-users	1	2.5

Table 01. Learners’ Use of Technological Devices

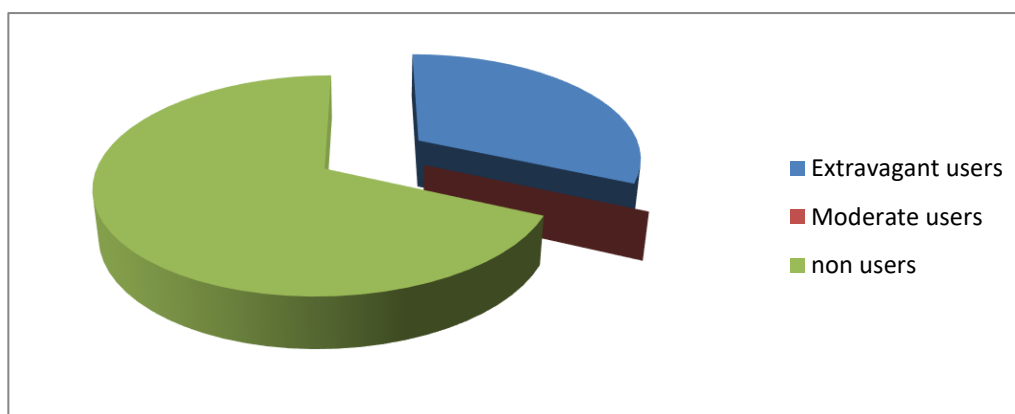


Figure 01: Learners’ Use of Technological Devices

Section two

The second section of the questionnaire is devoted to investigate students’ awareness and knowledge of this study main theme namely E-Learning. The participants’ responses demonstrated that students seem to be mixing between these concepts: E-Learning, online learning and blended learning. This section also indicated students’ attitudes towards E-Learning as a newly implemented system through rating their satisfaction. Finally, the section demonstrated student’s preferences in terms traditional all-time face-to-face learning and E-Learning.

The table and figure bellow shows students preferences wherein (24) students opted for traditional face-to-face learning with a rate of 60%, whereas 16 students’ choices were oriented to E-Learning rating 40%.

Students’ Preferences	N	%
Traditional Learning	24	60%
Face to Face Learning	16	40%

Table 02: Students’ Preferences

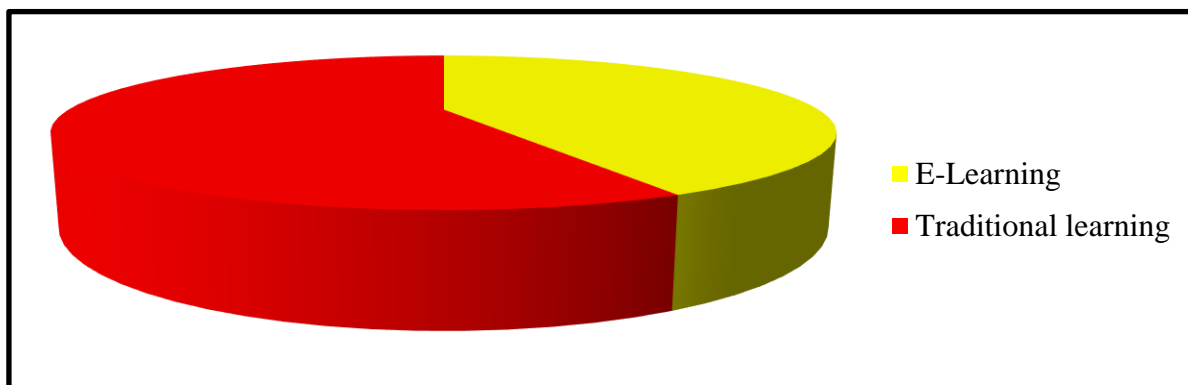


Figure 2. Students' Preferences

Section Three

The last section of the questionnaire main focus was identifying the main challenges facing EFL students at the University of Setif with E-Learning. The information obtained from this section revealed that most of students' responses are attributed to technological challenges which are typically caused by internet problems particularly in rural regions. These regions are characterised by the low internet flow when compared to other urban regions. In addition, financial challenges are also mentioned in this section. Another challenge which is mentioned by students is attributed to awareness challenge and to lack of motivation to engage in E-Learning. These challenges with their rates will be demonstrated in the table and figure below:

Challenges	N	%
Internet Problems	7	17.5%
Electronic Awareness	5	12.5%
Lack of Motivation	10	25%
Content Comprehension	10	25%
Others	8	20%

Table 03. Challenges of E-Learning

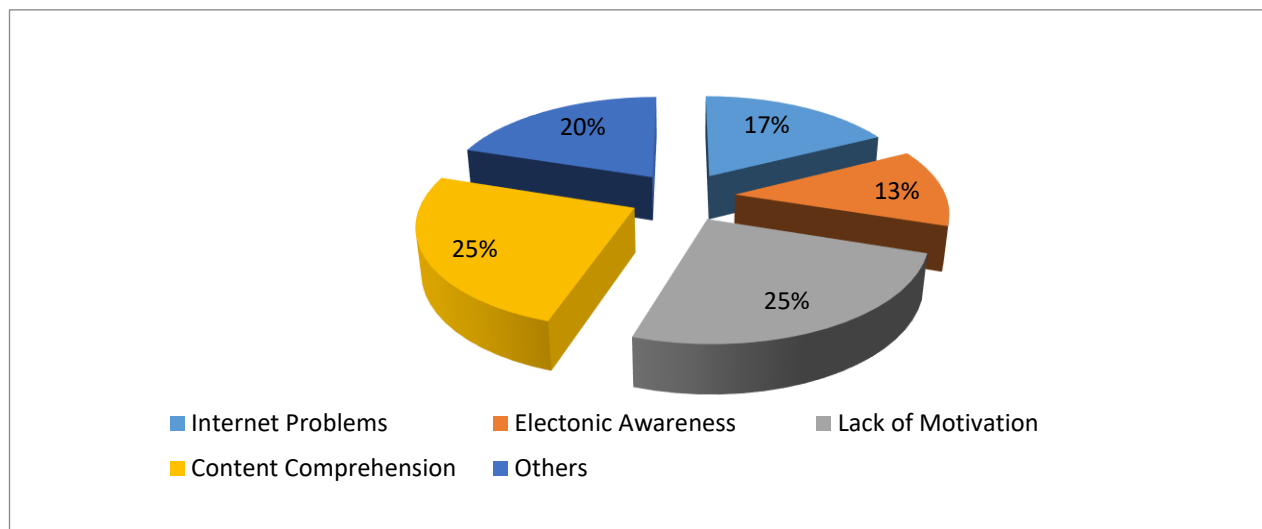


Figure 03: Challenges Facing EFL students associated with E-Learning

In summary, students' responses in this section encountered other challenges differing from one participant to another. What is noteworthy is that despite that the majority of students are already familiar with technology and technological devices, E-Learning as a new adopted frame of education is not fully welcome by EFL students. Additionally, although the majority of students have access to at least one technological device and represent mostly the excessive users category, their technological uses are restricted to youtube, facebook, instagram and other entertainment and chat application regardless education. For these reasons, EFL students are still keen on traditional learning highlighting the role their teachers play in sustaining their educational motivation.

Further, despite the advantages of E-Learning mentioned earlier, results of the study figured that E-Learning platforms need to address the potential barriers in order to ensure effective and satisfactory learning outcomes.

Among the major challenges highlighted in students' responses is the internet problem. E-Learning heavily relies on high speed and stable internet connection to enable students to easily access to learning materials, submit their assignments and as well as engage in online discussions. However, in many regions particularly rural regions, internet may not be accessible. This fact lies behind students' ability to fully engage E-Learning activities, and therefore it may result in frustration and lack of motivation and loss of interest.

Another noteworthy finding is students' preference of the traditional face-to-face learning over E-Learning. Despite the increasing popularity of E-Learning, students are still keen on face-to-face interactions and the physical presence of the instructor. Therefore, E-Learning is likely to be more effective when these challenges are addressed and considered by educational institutions in order to reach a more inclusive and effective learning environment that leads to better learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in attempt to investigate the challenges and barriers facing EFL students associated with E-Learning. In order to carry out this investigation, a questionnaire was administered to 40 EFL students at Setif University. Results obtained encountered various challenges which lie behind students' willingness to shift back to traditional learning. Students encounter other challenges namely technological and internet problems. These challenges negatively influence students' learning outcomes and performance the fact that make learners not fully supporting the continuity of E-Learning implementation in Algerian context.

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