

# **The Implementation of E-learning in Algeria during the COVID-19 Time: Case Study of Relizane Second-Year English Department Students of Master Degree**

**Cherifa Benkaddour**

PhD, University of Ahmed Zabana (Relizane, Algeria)  
cherifa.benkaddour@univ-relizane.dz

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the use of e-learning, primarily focusing on the Moodle platform, at the University of Relizane in Algeria during the three years of the pandemic. The participants in this study were second-year master's students of English in the Department of English at Relizane University. Forty second-year master's students were invited to answer a questionnaire of three open questions and one open-ended question. The responses were analyzed quantitatively. One of the most interesting findings of this study is that the unexpected and surprising lockdown that imposed this electronic type of learning has been difficult for both students and the governing body to cope with. One conclusion of this study is that the Algerian University and its students are still unready to embrace the use of e-learning, preferring the old traditional type of learning.

**KEYWORDS:** e-learning, COVID-19, traditional classroom learning

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## **Introduction**

E-learning is defined as the use of information and communication technologies to enable access to online learning/teaching resources. A narrow definition of

e-learning may be that of any internet-based or web-based learning (LaRose et al. 1998; Keller and Cernerud, 2002). Abbad et al. (2009) defined e-learning as any learning that is enabled electronically. According to OECD (2005), is defined as the use of information and communication technologies in diverse processes of education to support and enhance learning in institutions of higher education, including the usage of information and communication technology as a complement to traditional classrooms, online learning or mixing the two modes. According to Tao et al. (2006), this new kind of learning environment has enabled learners in universities to receive support at an individual level and gave them access also to more suitable learning schedules as well as separate from other learners. This also led to facilitating a higher interaction between teachers and peers than those in traditional environments of learning. E-learning in academic settings made the process of learning more interesting, active, and enjoyable (Liaw et al. 2007). According to Hammer and Champy (2001) and Liaw et al. (2007), the main features that have made e-learning promising in education include service, cost, quality, and speed. It is apparent that e-learning can empower students at higher educational levels to acquire their education while at the same time pursuing their personal objectives and maintaining their own careers, with no need to adhere to a rigid schedule (Borstorff and Lowe 2007). Kartha (2006), in support of this thought, reported that the number of courses online has vividly increased as a result of the attained benefits for both learners and universities.

However, all the above-mentioned examples of the success of electronic learning have been done mostly in the Western world, where technology is a very significant trait of a welfare society and where people generally do have access to all sorts of highly developed equipments and devices. In this respect, one would inquire about if this can give the same results in the third world countries. So the question that should be asked is: if we make a projection of these findings on the under-developed world and, more specifically Algeria, then would e-learning be the right choice for Algeria especially in its current situation? Another question that must be asked is: to what extent has e-learning been (during COVID-19) beneficial to our students in general and to our department students in specific? This study is going to focus on the usefulness of distance learning during the pandemic, where the government was obliged to impose a total lockdown, especially for the students who lived in the situation in Algeria.

This study is organized as follows. The first chapter focuses on the theoretical side and previous literature. The second chapter covers the study and its findings. The last chapter concludes all that was done in the study.

### **Literature review**

The development in social theorisation that led to the appearance of some perspectives like constructivism and socio-cultural theory has proved the necessity of society for the creation of healthy social individuals. One of the most important and current facts that the individual is living in is the online learning tools provided by technology. This made it necessary for today's individuals to be integrated into this new technological world. The use of social networks, collaborative learning and social integration are the logical results that all today's individuals are witnessing. It is argued that children show better learning results in a social environment, and are able to create meaning using engagement with others. Collaboration, direction and support have been proven to help a child make better performances and solve more complicated problems. This type of teaching and learning environment allows children and students to independently and inductively provide conclusions, develop more intellectual abilities, and increase the quality of durability and knowledge.

### **Electronic learning**

E-learning is a new technological tool that is used to offer instructional programs to distant learners (Arkorful and Abaidoo 2015). It is an online learning platform (such as the one in Algeria named Moodle) that emerges in a more formal context, making use of a variety of multimedia technologies. Hardware and software electronics support this system, whether online or offline. It is made via personal computers that are usually used for delivering training or computer-enhanced learning related to e-learning. Other communicative technologies furnish learning based on learning support systems, tutorials, and online lectures (Kattoua, Al-Lozi and Alrowwad 2016). Classroom engagement is improved here by technological tools that provide positive environments where students can deliberately engage in online tutorials to complete tasks assigned to them.

In e-learning, the learning process takes place through texts, videos, interactive graphics and collaborative sharing in which students are involved.

This would normally lead to an enhancement of teaching and learning quality. Also, it reports the need for higher institutions for the maintenance of competitive advantage as well as access to education and training. This led to the reduction of student's costs pertaining to their studies while improving the quality of learning and teaching (Songkram 2015). This can prove that electronic learning can be economical for students as they can do other useful activities in their spare time (Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira 2016). In addition to being economical, e-learning is also flexible. This is due to the fact that it provides its users the possibility of using it and having classes anytime and anywhere. Also, it gives a variety of learning approaches by making use of much interactive content available on the internet (Songkram et al. 2015). Distance learning is an increasingly expanding midst, enabling its users the possibility of operating outside the barriers of time and place. In university education, Gilbert (2015) says that online learning is defined as that kind of learning taking place completely or partially over the internet.

### **Advantages of e-learning**

Previous studies have shown a number of advantages pertaining to the implementation of electronic learning technologies into university education (Raspopovic et al. 2017). E-learning is more likely to be learner-centered because it can effectively deliver knowledge if compared to traditional educational institutions (Huang and Chiu 2015). This fact is so because objectives can be achieved in a shorter time and with the least effort. The effects of e-learning on education are found to provide equal access to information regardless of the users' locations, ethnicity, race, age, etc. The electronic learning environment helps students rely more on themselves in knowledge and this makes instructors serve as guides and advisors (Joshua et al. 2016).

A variety of studies have shown the advantages of e-learning from the perspectives of learners (Gautam and Tiwari, 2016; Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro and Cepeda-Carrión, 2015; Chang, 2016). For example, electronic learning reduces the need for travelling as classes can be taken online. Interactive videos facilitate the way for learners in the sense of giving them opportunities to get deeper insights of the information (Ibid). This allows online learners to respond instantly to the activities.

Also, one of the benefits of e-learning is that it enhances communication between students and instructors. E-learning allows part-time students, as

well as full-time ones, to participate in online degree courses from any location (Radu, Radu and Croitoru 2015). Not only that, but e-learning enables even disabled people to pursue their education from any place in the world. The most common types of e-learning are: Learning Content Management System (LCMS), Learning Support System (LSS), Learning Design System (LDS), and Learning Management System (LMS).

For instance, LMS has been adopted by many educational institutions. In general, LMS has the ability to perform three common functions. These functions include presentation and systematization of training content. The second is the creation of assignments for the sake of testing knowledge. The third is that of evaluation progress. Furthermore, the LMS software can be used to publish, plan, and deliver online courses. So as to see the effectiveness of this software system in education, Muruthy and Yamin (2017) outlined a number of advantages. The first is flexibility in relation to an increased collaboration between students and faculty members. In addition to this, it has been determined as very useful in enhancing the institutional practices that need learner involvement. According to Muruthy & Yamin (2017), LMS has also been found to be effective in promoting centralized learning in relation to simplified learning process and low cost.

Al-Handhali et al. (2020) highlighted many other benefits of this software system. They claimed it as user-friendly, time managing, and course managing. Furthermore, it has the ability to provide reminders to users, including delivery dates, test dates, and answering questions.

In addition to LMS, Moodle has also been determined as one of the most effective platforms of e-learning. Aydin & Tirkes (2010) aligned this with its flexibility in showing the modules employed and its help in using any teaching style or environment mode. In considering the learning environment, Moodle has been determined as easy to use because it offers a variety of options.

### **Disadvantages of e-learning**

Although e-learning has been highlighted as very useful along with the advantages that it has in education, it has also been found to show a lot of disadvantages (Collins et al. 1997; Klein and Ware 2003; Hameed et al. 2008; Almosa 2002; Akkoyuklu and Soylu 2006; Lewis 2000; Scott et al. 1999; Marc 2002; Dowling et al. 2003; Mayes 2002). For example, Dowling et al.

(2003) argue that access to learning materials online improves learning only for specific forms of collective assessment. Not only that, but Mayes (2002) questions the usability of e-learning and inquires whether it is only a support device for existing methods of learning. The most noticeable drawback of e-learning is isolation and the complete absence of real personal interactions. This is not only at the level of that between learners and instructors, but also at the level of colleague learners (Young, 1997; Burdman, 1998). Also, the e-learning method in education might be regarded as less effective than the traditional method of learning. It is shown that the process of learning is much easier in comparison with the use of face-to-face interaction with instructors.

It is claimed e-learning has a negative effect when it comes to improving the communicative skills of learners. The learners might acquire excellent knowledge in academics, but they may not be able to share it with others.

Also, it is impossible for some fields of study to rely on e-learning such as those which need practical courses. For instance, medical sciences, pharmacy, technical sciences, etc., cannot employ e-learning. Researchers have argued that e-learning can prove its effectiveness in social science and humanities rather than those fields where there is the need to develop practical skills.

A number of other related problems exist, such as the difficulty, if not impossibility, of controlling cheating. This is in addition to facts like piracy and plagiarism as well as the ease of copy and paste. E-learning may also lead to overcrowding or heavy use of some websites. This may bring about unexpected and unanticipated costs both in time and money disadvantages (Collins et al. 1997; Klein and Ware 2003; Hameed et al. 2008; Almosa 2002; Akkoyuklu & Soylyu 2006; Lewis 2000; Scott et al. 1999; Marc 2002).

## **Methods and materials**

### **Population and Sampling**

University students in Algeria have been considered as the population for this study, and thus, students enrolled in Relizane University during the three academic years of COVID-19 were included in the study population. Based on the sample size calculation and number of students studying in the second semester, 40 students were randomly selected as a sample for this study, with an equal male and female ratio.

## Procedure

Before the data collection, permission was required from the University of Relizane. After obtaining permission from the university staff, consent from students who wish to participate in the study was also required. All the students were ensured that their participation and personal information will be kept confidential. A close-ended structured questionnaire was constructed to collect data from students.

## Instrument

The questionnaire comprised two sections; the first section presents information about name, age and gender. The second part comprised open questions. The first question was to what extent they have used e-learning in studying for their exam. The second question was about the differences between e-learning and traditional classroom learning and if e-learning was more enjoyable to them. The third question was about the obstacles they have found during the use of e-learning. The fourth question was to cite some advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. The fifth question was if they thought they could rely completely on e-electronic learning and if not they were asked to choose between 100%, 50% and 25%. The questionnaire was in the English language.

## Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire was evaluated by experts from the English department academics who specialized in didactics before using it for data collection. This led to some corrections in the questionnaire and interviews, considering the suggestions of experts to ensure its validity and reliability.

## Results and discussion

A total of 40 students participated in the questionnaire. The first question, which was on the extent to which my students relied on the e-learning platform provided by the Ministry for studying for their exams, was answered by saying *almost always*. Most of the students in question said they relied on studying from the platform approximately with a rate of 90%; the remaining 10% said they *sometimes* used it. The second question was about giving some differences between traditional classroom learning and e-learning and whether they found

e-learning more enjoyable than that taking place in classrooms. The informants, with a percentage of 57%, said *they preferred traditional classroom learning to that of distance learning*. The remaining of the students' opinions were split between those who preferred e-learning with a rate of 17.5%, while the others 25% did not show any preference for any of the modes of learning. Perhaps the most important question in this study is the third one which was about the obstacles that they faced during their learning process while using the platform provided by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. A total of 90% of informants said they faced a problem with internet access and lack of materials. The remaining 10% of them said they sometimes found problems with internet connection. The last question was about the possibility of relying on e-learning in their studies. The question was open-ended with answers of three percentages of (100%, 50%, 25%). The informants with a rate of 90% chose 50%, in the sense they said they would rely on distance learning just partly or they would like only half of their studies to be online. The remaining 10% chose 25%. None of informants, surprisingly enough, choose to rely on e-learning at a 100% of rate.

Table 1: The use of e-learning in exams

	Always	Sometimes
<b>The use of e-learning in exams</b>	90%	10%

Table 2: The difference between traditional learning and e-learning

	Traditional learning	E-learning	No difference
<b>Students' rates</b>	57.5%	17.5%	25%

Table 3: Obstacles of e-learning

Internet access	Lack of materials	Lack of experience
90%	95%	85%
10%	05%	15%

Table 4: Students' reliance on e-learning

	100%	50%	25%
<b>Students' reliance on e-learning</b>	00%	90%	10%



As mentioned earlier, this study is an elicitation of using e-learning by second-year master students of English at the Algerian University of Relizane. The informants were asked to show the reality of distance learning because they faced it and lived with the situation at full. Concerning the first question, the answers of relying on e-learning to prepare for their exams were legitimately positive in the sense that they really used the platform to revise for their exams. Most, if not all, of the students did use the platform for their studies. This is because they had no other choice but the platform to help them prepare for their examination tests. The second question, which tackled the differences between traditional classroom learning and electronic learning, was simply answered in a way that favored traditional learning (57.5%) to that of e-learning. The students explained this with focusing on the importance of the teacher in their learning process. According to the results, the students in question felt more secure when they were in classrooms and with their teachers in face-to-face. This really has to be considered because it adds to the valuable position of the teacher as a real guidance of the learning process and it is almost impossible to accomplish any kind of study without their presence. The third question, which is almost the most important since it is my motivation to make this study, was answered with a lot of complaints on the part of the students in question. A total of 90% of the students said they had problems with internet connection, lack of materials and electronic devices in the accomplishment of their learning process in general. They complained about the weak and slow flow of internet while using it, and disconnection most of the time. So, most of the students said they sometimes could never get access to the platform when trying to reach it. Not only this, but most of the students said they were not used to such kind of studying and hence failed in using it as a source of learning. Also, others said it was expensive for them to pay for internet connection. The last question was about whether they could rely solely on internet-based studying; all of them did not want to rely on it but rather wanted half of their studies to be online. This might give us a general idea about the consideration of distance learning in Algeria.

## **Conclusion**

The unexpected and surprising turn into distance learning was difficult for students and teachers to cope with. Suddenly, Algeria found itself

in a problem of lockdown where traditional learning could no longer be applied and found itself lost between either stopping studies because of the known reason of COVID-19 or using distance learning as an alternative and accepting the results would not be fruitful because the already known situation of Algeria. Before COVID-19, internet access in Algeria was only used for fun and entertainment for most of the students in the sense it was used mostly for Facebook, gaming, and spending time on Messenger for fun and entertainment. COVID-19, which imposed a total lockdown, can be seen as a collective shock to the Algerian people in general and the university education in special. In an overnight, the government found itself in front of a new situation that had never been dealt with before and had to find quick solutions to cope with the new situation. The Algerian government was lost and found it difficult to implement e-learning in higher education. What can be concluded is that the Algerian government and the students are not yet ready to adopt e-learning in education which means this would take some more time in the future to be accomplished. Perhaps, the government has to spend more expenses on technological equipments such as ICT availability and improve internet flow at the university and elsewhere in isolated parts of the country, in addition to forming both teachers and students to make it easy for them to adapt to this new type of learning.

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