

## Unveiling the Effectiveness of Massive Open Online Courses at AbdelhamidIbnBadis University, Algeria

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### Abstract

Moving from the “Classical System” to the LMD one (Licence Master Doctorat), the Algerian University is facing several hurdles in teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) which prevent it to fulfil the demands of higher education and globalization. One key element which can foster knowledge and raise the quality education is the advent of MOOCs. Massive open online courses (MOOCs), which are a set of courses that take place online and are open for every single person who seeks the best teaching quality of leading prestigious universities for free, are a new educational phenomenon that have rapidly immersed into higher education. This paper aims to investigate the potential of MOOCs at AbdelhamidIbn badis University Algeria , which can be brought to the Algerian University, as well as to scrutinize the students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards their integration- offline, in teaching and learning EFL. This research allows us to explore a new facet of learning and teaching EFL in the Algerian context. In this prospect, our main issue concerns the MOOCs’ implementation in the Algerian university. The study is conducted with 42 EFL students to get as much data as possible to validate or invalidate our main hypothesis. Accordingly, we have used a mixed method research using an experiment conducted in three stages to allow learners to self-direct their learning process. The findings show that MOOCs make students more productive and make teachers less centred. However, we recommend that teachers would promote for a good understanding of MOOCs.

**Key words:** Algerian University, EFL, MOOCs, Students’ and teachers’ attitudes

## 1. Introduction

Learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Algeria have attested an overwhelming number of limitations since the implementation of the Licence Master Doctorate (LMD) system in 2003. Many universities struggle to meet the students' needs and respond to the LMD system requirements. Moreover, students' learning process is far from fulfilling its demanding objectives such as autonomy, self-directed learning, the mastery of the macro skills, etc. Accordingly, many scholars and language experts consider that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a supportive tool to teaching and learning EFL can bridge the gap between deficiencies and brilliancy as it can promote significant changes in EFL classrooms for the benefits of both teachers and learners. ICT is regarded as being a catalyst for innovation and novelty in teaching and learning EFL. Moreover, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as being part of the umbrella term 'ICT' highly contribute to the change which education, especially higher education, has witnessed across the world today. Although MOOC is gaining popularity among European and American universities, it is still unfamiliar by an overwhelming number of students and teachers in Algeria.

Referring to the Algerian University, few EFL students and teachers are accustomed with this current educational trend which is shaping the learning and teaching processes of million individuals across the world. The Algerian university still struggles to meet the demanding goals of the LMD system such as the integration of ICT in EFL classrooms, allowing learners to become active and lifelong learners, the macro skills are not mastered effectively and so on. In this regard, we should accustom teachers and students with MOOCs to apply them at universities and cater for the expectations of new reforms in Algeria and adapt ourselves to exigencies of the globalized world.

Hence, we have raised three main issues to be investigated during our experiment. They are cited as follows:

- How can we take benefits of MOOCs once using them offline in the classroom?
- What are the students' attitudes towards the incorporation of MOOCs in learning process at the department of English, Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University?
- What are the teachers' attitudes towards the incorporation of MOOCs in teaching process at the department of English, Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University?

Before answering these main issues, we speculate that massive open online courses can be of a great benefit for both EFL teachers and students; they allow teachers to be less centred and involve more students in learning. Also, we hypothesize that EFL students can show interest towards the integration of MOOCs in the learning process though teachers may demonstrate reluctance to use them during their teaching due to lack of time and information about the way MOOCs should be applied, offline, while teaching.

Thus, the purpose of our study is to disclose the potential of MOOCs to the Algerian EFL students and teachers within a time where many universities, notably Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University hardly overcome their hurdles. In addition to that, this research aims at raising consciousness of EFL students and teachers about the importance of MOOCs and collecting their attitudes towards their integration in teaching and learning EFL.

We estimate, this study will also contribute to re-think the future of education in the Algerian university. In other words, it will contribute meaningfully and effectively to improve education and the quality of both learning and teaching EFL in many universities- in our case, the university of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem-. The research work will also determine if the agents of universities are ready enough to welcome a new horizon of teaching and learning EFL in workplaces. In what follows, we will provide our readers with a brief overview of MOOCs in order to introduce them to this key concept.

## 2. MOOCs: An overview

The creation of MOOCs has not emerged coincidentally. Several reasons encouraged scholars and researchers to create distinct online courses for everyone for free. (Schulze, 2014); the reasons for creating MOOCs are that many students across the world are looking for continuity in learning after finishing classes, to better understand a topic or a concept of a given subject matter and perform well in tasks, and this can be done through MOOCs. Likewise, the LMD system stimulates learners to behave autonomously and be fully engaged in the various educational opportunities and through individual work. Also, learners of the world are looking for access to reputable universities to benefit from a unique learning experience and a high quality of education; however, these students are not able to concretise such wishful thinking due to some substantial barriers as financial resources, accommodations, timetable, etc. In this prospect, MOOCs can be a powerful tool which universities can use to spread quality education throughout the world in order to allow learners develop and foster different skills, expand intellectual imagination, and mainly build a strong learning network (Pappano, 2012).

Originally, the term MOOC dates back to 2008 where two Canadian researchers – Siemens and Downes –developed a high quality of online delivery courses based on openness, massiveness, and free for every single individual who seeks the best teaching quality of some of leading prestigious universities. Initially, 25 students of their respective university enrolled and paid for their online course, but when the university made it open and free for everyone, another 2.300 students from different parts of the world enrolled to embark upon this online course for a couple of weeks (Schulze, 2014). The purpose of this experiment was to allow learners to self-direct their learning process as well as to connect with each other to develop new knowledge.

Afterwards, several educational platforms have mushroomed online over the past five years as Coursera, edX, FutureLearn , and others. After the success of the Canadian researchers, American universities have started to create online courses for free and for everyone, these courses include lessons, assessments, tests, etc via Coursera platform. In 2012, Coursera has acknowledged that two million enrollees registered to various online courses (Pappano, 2012). Also in 2012, FutureLearn, a British company launched by the Open University, England, is providing a set of free online courses in various areas of studies such as literature, education, science, etc. Participants study and complete the requirements of the course and can also obtain statements of participation or even have specialized degrees from these prestigious British universities.

### 3. Method

Our research is a tentative attempt to enquire into the effectiveness of massive open online courses and the perceptions of students and teachers towards their implementations in learning and teaching EFL. We have used both of qualitative and quantitative paradigms to transform individual's responses into numerical form and obtain accurate results from individuals' opinions and beliefs towards a given phenomenon. The qualitative method is used to seek individuals' assumptions and attitudes about a particular matter which is unknown or unstudied as our present enquiry about MOOCs (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010), (cited in Sarnou, H et al, 2012). On another hand, the quantitative method deals with the collection and analysis of information in numeric form derived from a large-scale of representatives; the data are organized and transformed into numbers in order to test one's hypothesis –or hypotheses. Burns and Grove (1999) believe that quantitative method to research encompasses many key components as formality and objectivity. Hence, the quantitative paradigm helps the researcher to translate informants' information into numeric one and thus analyzed statistically. (Polit & Hungler, 1995).

However, both of qualitative and quantitative methods are useful tools in this experiment. (Bryman, 1988) argues, "...both of qualitative and quantitative approaches should be combined." As cited in Hughes (2006, p. 1). Creswell (2006) embodies these two research methods into mixed methods. He states, "Mixed methods research provides more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative research alone" (2006, p.9); the researchers are allowed to use all the tools of data collection of both methods rather than being limited to one single type of data collection associated with either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell, 2006).

In this prospect, a questionnaire to students and teachers which includes both of open-ended questions and closed questions is distributed to our informants. Open-ended questions, which are a category of questions that enable respondents to answer questions in their own words, are being asked to collect the necessary data and written narratives. Such pieces of written words help to unveil a person's belief, an assumption and what he/she wishes to convey. As for closed questions, they limit respondents with series of options to be chosen according to their perceptions; the informants can either tick one single response or many. Then, an unstructured interview was also used to reinforce the quality of our investigation. In addition to that, the sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling which is suitable for qualitative method. According to (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010), (cited in Sarnou, H et al, 2012) state, "Researchers who engage in some form of qualitative research are likely to select a purposive sample, that is, they select a sample they feel will yield the best understanding of what they are studying" (p. 431).

### 4. Context

The experimentation took place at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University- English department, Mostaganem. This location was selected because it fitted the criteria of our experiment: the availability of equipments such as projectors and lecture-rooms, familiarity with the policy of the university and the staff. Thus it could provide us with significant data which would contribute to answer the study's research questions.

**a. Participant**

For this study, 42 participants who are from the department of English at Abdelhamid IbnBadis University have contributed to the achievement of our investigation. These participants, who are third year licence (L3) EFL students, are not acquainted with MOOCs because of its newness, so they were selected intentionally. The reasons of their contribution in this research were to check if they support the use of MOOCs inside and outside the classroom to reinforce their learning process.

Moreover, we have also selected five EFL teachers from the department of English at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University. These selected teachers are accustomed with the concept of MOOC and its different application.

**b. Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection instruments used in this study is an experiment conducted in three stages and two questionnaires given to students and teachers to collect their responses regarding MOOCs' incorporation in EFL classrooms.

**c. Data Collection Procedure**

For the procedure of our research, we have conducted an experiment with our case study- third year third year students of English at Abdelhamid IbnBadis University, Mostaganem- with whom we experimented a three-week offline course which is entitled "*Developing Your Research Project*". It is taken from [www.FutureLearn.com](http://www.FutureLearn.com) and has been applied during research methodology classes once a week from February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 until March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016. We have shortened the course duration due to time constraints we faced. The questionnaire has been handed out to students and teachers once the experiment was done.

**5. Data Analysis**

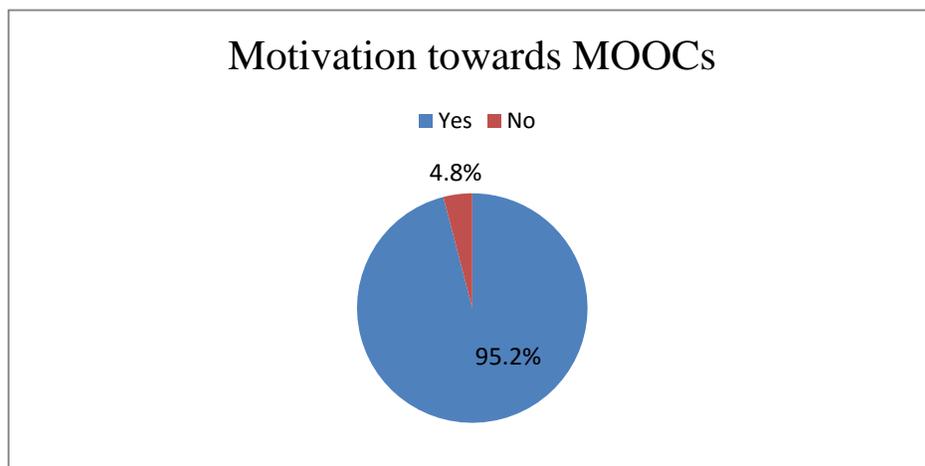
After collecting the responses of both students and teachers, we start off analyzing their main responses towards integration of MOOCs in EFL classrooms.

**a. Students' Responses**

Among the questions we have asked our participants, we have chosen to analyse four main questions which seem primordial and significant to be analyzed and discussed. They are as follows:

- Do MOOCs motivate you? Why?
- Would you like MOOCs to be integrated in teaching? Comment?
- What is the skill(s) which MOOCs enhance?
- What are your suggestions to teachers vis-à-vis MOOCs implementation in classrooms?

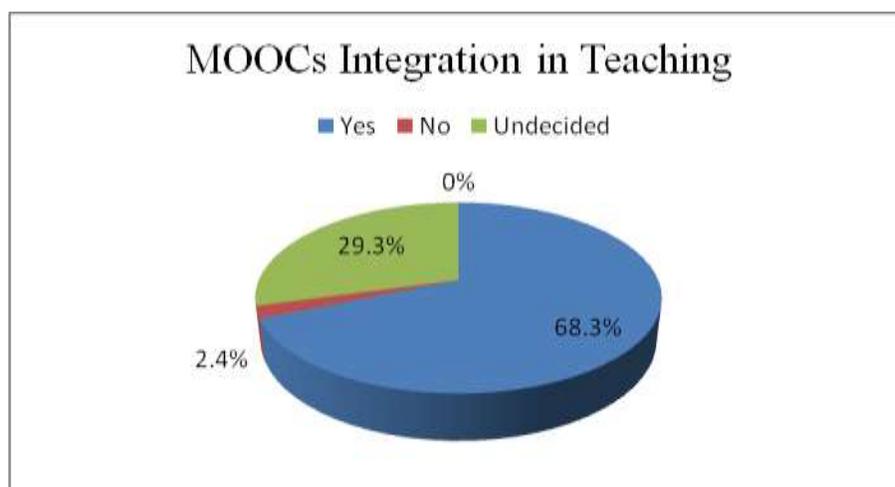
The following figure pinpoints the students' motivation towards the use of MOOCs.



**Figure 1. Students' Motivation towards MOOCs**

Figure one shows that 40 students (95.2%) acknowledge that they are highly motivated when being taught with MOOCs- their knowledge is reinforced and the courses are credible and reliable since they are adopted from prestigious leading universities. Nevertheless, 02 informants (4.8%) believe that MOOCs are not motivated because they assert that not all students are equipped with internet connection to access to the various online opportunities

The following analysis has to do with the learners' attitude towards the incorporation of MOOCs in teaching. So, the next figure clarifies the results:

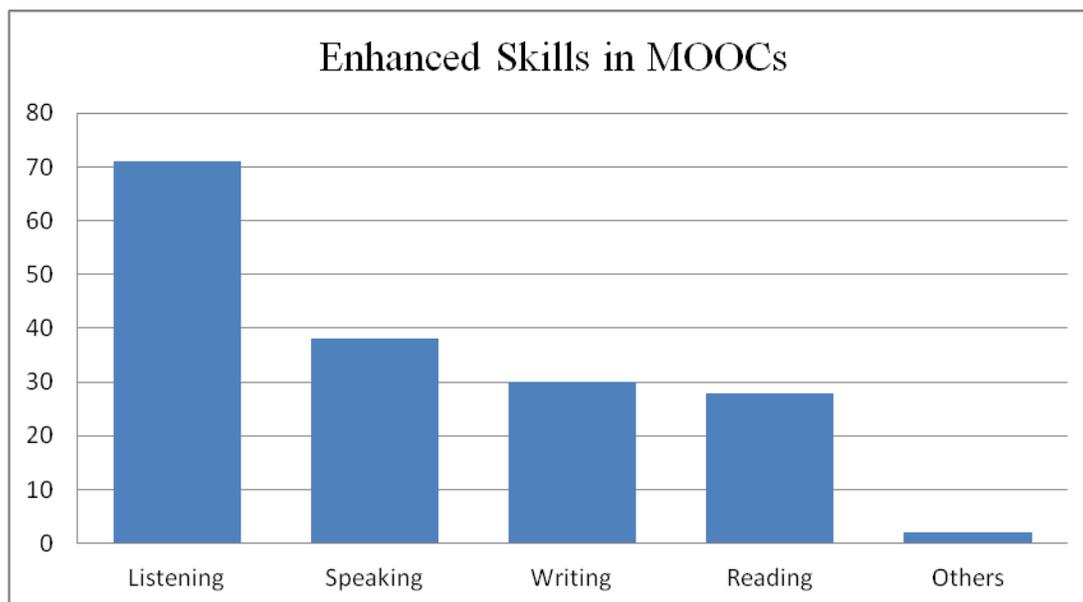


**Figure 2. Students' Attitude towards MOOCs Integration in Teaching**

As it is noticed, 28 informants (68.3%) think that it is high time MOOCs were integrated in the teaching process. Their comments disclose that MOOCs play a great role in shaping the way students learn because the course contents deliver a high quality of information and sources. Moreover, the informants acknowledge that MOOCs do develop and foster the study skills as well as they make learning process enjoyable and engaging. However, 12 of them (29.3%) could not decide upon the future of MOOCs in teaching EFL in higher education and 01 of them which

represents 2.4% rejects the fact of integrating the current educational trend in teaching because it is stated that students are lazy and will not bother themselves to learn online.

We will present now the analysis of the skills enhanced by MOOCs from our respondents' point of view. Thus, we have come up with the following results:



**Figure 3. Enhanced Skills in MOOCs**

Twenty eight respondents (71.8%) reckon that listening is primarily enhanced in MOOCs, followed by speaking, writing then reading. Only 01 informant (2.6%) states that critical thinking is also a skill which is developed through these online courses.

The following analysis is concerned with the students' suggestions to teachers vis-à-vis MOOCs' use in their classrooms. From their comments, we have taken some relevant ones. They are as follows:

"I really encourage teachers to use MOOC because it will help students to enhance their ability in listening and speaking as well as get great benefits from the courses delivered."

"Using MOOC is very important in order to motivate students."

"Teachers have to implement MOOC in order to help students listen to an authentic language."

"I endorse using MOOCs or teaching with the use of ICTs. They make students more engaged and interested in certain subject matters."

"The MOOCs' implementation in the Algerian university's classrooms will be a revolution in our educational system and a jump to another level of creativity and self-reliability among students."

Students have revealed that MOOCs make them discover a new facet of learning; this current educational phenomenon allowed them to be involved, improve their learning skills as well as

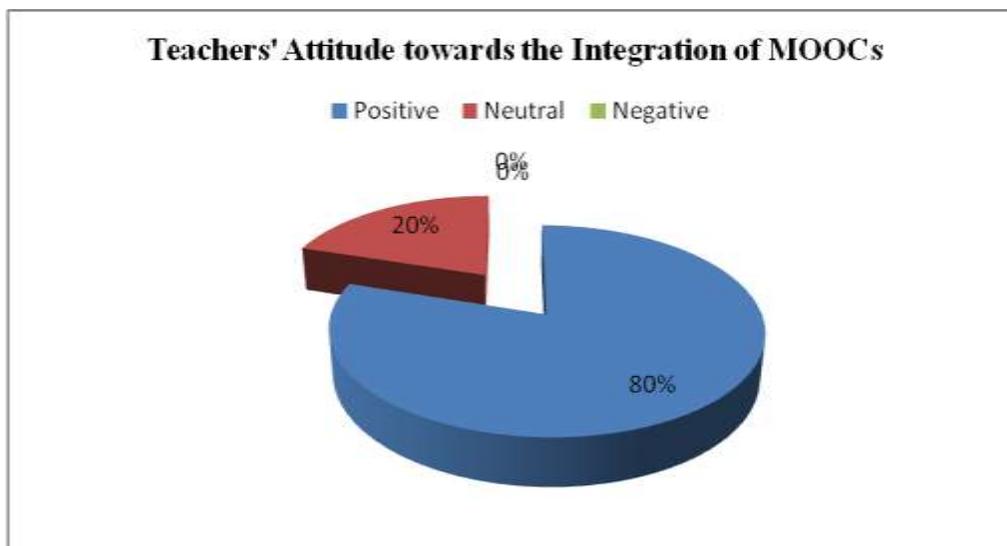
they can benefit from the course contents of reputable worldwide universities. All these forces come together to encourage teachers to use MOOCs whilst teaching any subject matter.

### *b. Teachers' Responses*

From the teachers' questionnaire, we have followed the same procedure as students' survey. In other words, we have chosen the most relevant responses to be analyzed. Therefore, four questions appear noteworthy to display their results. They are cited as follows:

- How would you rate your attitude towards the integration of MOOCs in higher education? Justify
- How would you rate your learners' attitude towards the integration of MOOCs in higher education? Justify
- What are your recommendations vis-à-vis MOOCs implementation in EFL classes?

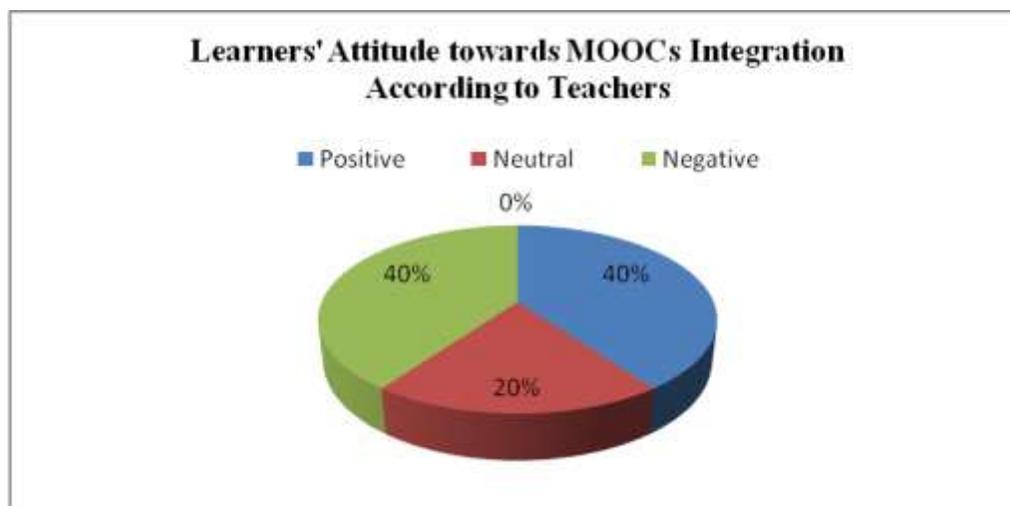
Firstly, knowing the attitude of the teachers towards MOOCs' use in lecturing is one of the major concerns of our investigation. Figure four demonstrates the results obtained:



**Figure4. Teachers' Attitude towards the Integration of MOOCs**

In figure four, it is perceived that the majority of teachers support the idea of introducing MOOCs while teaching/learning EFL. Their comments reveal that MOOCs get students engaged, encourage them to deal with different technological devices and mainly create a network which includes native speakers and other speakers of English based on collaboration and sharing information. Moreover, MOOC is a new way of learning which especially attracts students' attention since they are high-tech addicts. It also aids them become more autonomous as they have to concentrate, listen, understand and conclude. However, 01 teacher is neutral vis-à-vis MOOCs incorporation because it is mentioned that the Algerian university is not technologically mature enough to adapt such novelties. The negative attitude has not been selected.

The following analysis helps us to understand students' attitude towards the use of MOOCs from the teachers' perspective. The following statistics unveil that:



**Figure 5. Learners' Attitudes towards MOOCs Integration According to Teachers**

We can notice that teachers could not make a common response towards our question since the positive and the negative responses are equal. 02 teachers (40%) believe that students will demonstrate a positive attitude towards the use of MOOCs in the classroom since the majority of students are accustomed with ICTs and can literally show interest and engagement if they are applied meaningfully. The other 02 teachers (40%) assert that students will refute the idea of MOOCs because they are not familiar with the full virtualization of their learning.

For our final analysis, we have selected the main teachers' recommendations on how educationalists and pedagogues benefit from MOOCs to help EFL students improve learning. Their comments are cited as follows:

“Integrate MOOCs in traditional classrooms to make courses more constructed and varied, - Provide learning materials to assure online content availability in EFL classrooms, - Expose students to different ways of teaching, - Expose students to different types of learning materials.”

“Using budgets for having equipped classrooms with computers and Internet. This is not difficult to have. Some faculties at the University of Mostaganem have these kinds of rooms for their students such as INES Faculty, Mostaganem. Also having real trained teachers for the courses of computing and making training to use technology in class compulsorily for all teachers.”

“The MOOCs would be such an interesting and effective tool in our university. However, teachers should be really skillful in performing a lesson with such a new tool. The use of such a course entails assessment to make sure students have understood thus they're following up.”

“As a future educational reform, MOOCs can work only with the one condition of equipping universities, faculties, departments and their libraries with full access to high speed internet.”

We have deduced that many teachers do encourage the incorporation of MOOCs, but with an intensive training to master their use in classrooms. Moreover, efforts have to be made to equip

classrooms and libraries with technological devices to permit both students and teachers look at some of the best universities' course contents via massive open online courses.

## 6. Results and Discussion

Nowadays, many universities are moving away from a traditional teaching to relatively a modern one. Throughout our questionnaires, we have discovered that views are balanced regarding the integration of ICTs, and more particularly MOOCs in EFL classrooms as the core of learning and teaching.

Students believe that MOOC is a motivational tool for them. In fact, in a modern classroom where ICTs is the forefront of teaching/learning EFL, students experience a new facet of learning through exposing them through an authentic language, learning with accurate materials of prestigious leading universities, be it British or Americans, and overcoming the difficulties of learning a foreign language. In this prospect, the students support the integration of MOOCs during their lectures and tutorials to enhance a multitude of skills such as listening skill which is noticeably neglected at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University; as part of the LMD system, training the aural skill is regarded as a vital requirement while aiming to master a foreign language, but no phonetic laboratories are established to cover such aspect of the language, thus the use of MOOCs can train students and expose them to real English. Moreover, speaking is also enhanced through discussion, reflections and feedback; the teacher plays the role of a mediator and facilitator and students, themselves, contribute to a wide extent in making learning process successful. As for reading and writing, it is required to create an online learning community where the teacher creates a group in a social media network such as Facebook and invites students to participate, respond to questions, learn and prepare lessons to be done once in the classroom; the learning process, in this case, will have a continuity and thus can highly be beneficial and advantageous for students and positively influence the quality of their learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, there is a minority who reckons that the integration of MOOCs will not probably match the demanding goals of students, teachers and even the university's system and this is due to several reasons; laziness and lack of interest may be obvious factors which will prevent teachers and authorities to implement MOOCs in the university. Moreover, although the world has become globalized and digitized, many students and teachers are still technologically ignorant and thus they do not master such skills which are tremendously needed nowadays.

Students are always in a constant need for teachers to provide them with help and guidance; they prefer to seek feedback, pieces of advice and answers from their teacher(s) as they need newness in their learning environment. They report that MOOCs can be the ideal tool to ignite the learning process, so they recommend teachers to consider this current educational fad by familiarizing them with other universities' programmes and contents to widen their educational perspectives and avoid them being restricted to what is being presented and delivered by the university only. According to our learners, the MOOC of "developing your research project" during research methodology classes, has allowed them to comprehend distinct methodology-related concepts, share their opinions, match the new knowledge with the prior one and most importantly gain an in-depth insight concerning how Southampton University, United

Kingdom, deals and tackles with research methodology. Hence, they could have learned and reinforced an overwhelming amount of information and understand better academic research.

Also, through our analyses, we have discovered that teachers did share to some extent their students' point of view regarding the incorporation of massive open online courses within the classroom. Teachers' attitude towards the integration of MOOCs in teaching is mostly positive since MOOC's use is viewed as a motivated and educated tool; students feel more autonomous and teachers are being less centered. Besides, some teachers argue that students are high-tech addicts and integrating MOOCs as an important part in learning can literally attract them and help them to concentrate, listen actively, understand, reflect and conclude. The learners can develop some meta-cognitive skills and be aware of what they already know and do not know, understand what they should need for a given task and have an idea of how to use the acquired skills meaningfully in learning.

We have also asked the teachers' opinion concerning their students' attitudes towards the implementation of MOOCs in learning and teaching. Their answers are indeed balanced; those who are pessimistic think that many students are still technologically illiterate i.e. they do not have a good mastery of computing skills, especially students who come from rural areas, even the courses they take online or offline are still about theory. Yet, the learners are not fully aware of their virtualization of their learning as they do not even possess internet connection at home or do not have computers at all; this is going to be difficult to deal with such type of students.

Unlike the pessimist view towards MOOCs, the supporters assert that MOOCs fit into learners' needs. Students are always excited to try something new and beneficial for them, especially when it is related in all ways with what they have been learning and the use of ICT. They can even catch up what they have been missing in the classroom through consulting the lessons and instructions through online groups. In this regard, teachers encourage the ministry of higher education, the universities and to whom it may concern to adopt this educational phenomenon and include it in teaching and learning to vary the atmosphere during the class; this is going to help student to be engaged and have various insights about different course contents and universities' approaches and methods, using budgets to equip classrooms and lecture-rooms with at least a performing projector, a secured internet connection and a good quality of speakers to expose students to a clear sound of English as well as train teachers so that they become technologically skillful in delivering a successful lesson based on MOOC.

These findings are results of huge efforts made all along the experiment to encourage and help both students and teachers believe in the potential of MOOCs vis-à-vis learning and teaching EFL and apply them meaningfully within a given course.

## 7. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have raised some crucial issues about unveiling the effectiveness of MOOCs and how EFL students and teachers consider them as an important component to foster knowledge about EFL and hone the quality of education. To reach such an aim, we have undertaken an in-depth scrutiny at the level of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, Mostaganem. Thus, we come to acknowledge that the majority of EFL students and teachers support the incorporation of massive open online courses' strategies and approaches into teaching and learning EFL because as it was mentioned in the previous sections, MOOCs, as a

revolutionary concept, spread high quality education delivered by prestigious universities; this is going to contribute meaningfully and significantly to foster students' study skills and widen teachers' pedagogical perspectives.

To sum up, MOOCs are able to afford a unique learning experience to EFL learners; they can help them to deepen and perfect their study skills. As for teachers, they can act as being facilitators and can foster their pedagogical/computing skills, especially in an era where a great deal of individuals are becoming digitized and are seeking novelties in various domains, such as higher education.

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