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Investigating the EFL Courses Shift into Moodle during the Pandemic of COVID-19: The case of MA Language and Communication at Mostaganem University

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Abstract
The ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 has affected all countries worldwide in all sectors, mainly in the education sector. Schools and Universities were closed. Teaching and learning were transformed from face to face environments to online platforms. In light of the latter, a pivotal query in this study was to investigate the shift of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and teaching into Moodle online learning platform and how the delivery of online EFL courses was (un-)beneficial for students to end up the academic year. This research paper sets out to deconstruct recent calls for integrating several E-learning platforms or apps into the Algerian university. To carry out this study, we used an interview with six Algerian university teachers as a first research tool to cover all issues that arose regarding the use of MOODLE e-learning platform imposed by the Ministry of Higher Education. Another target in this paper is to uncover the main difficulties our colleagues have faced during the confinement. The second research tool we used in this survey was an online class observation followed by six questions on Moodle, the Google Meet app, and a closed Facebook group. We chose 24 MA Language and communication students from the English language department of Mostaganem University to reveal the obstacles they faced throughout the Covid- 19 Pandemic. The results showed that both teachers and students are ready to access various online platforms or apps as alternatives such as Zoom, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups to continue teaching and learning English.

Keywords: Algerian University, Covid-19, EFL courses, MOODLE, Online platforms.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused drastic changes worldwide at various levels, and the sector of education was/is at the heart of these alterations. The latter has been subject to sudden adjustments that were imposed by the long period of quarantine. To confront the unexpected conditions born due to a total or partial confinement, most countries of the world have found out that online platforms and e-meetings were the best way to carry on the academic year with the least deficiencies for educational institutions, teachers and students alike.

In less technologically developed countries, this transition was difficult and precarious for most teachers and students at either level: the basic and higher education. For instance, in Algeria, Baccalaureate pupils of 2019-2020 class had to watch YouTube videos where teachers, selected by the ministry of education, gave lessons on the parts of the program that remained after schools were closed. As they were not familiar with this new teaching method, most pupils around the national territory did not follow these lessons on TV or YouTube, and if they did, they often were distracted by entertainment videos, Facebook notifications or Instagram new posts. Also, most of them preferred to attend private courses. As for higher education, all Algerian universities had to create official online learning platforms, which were MOODLE, to oblige teachers to upload the remaining lectures from the second-semester. However, Algerian university students have found that downloading lectures in PDF or/and PPT format was/is similar to searching the lectures on GOOGLE or other research engines. On the one hand, they have found themselves lost in following their teachers' courses and always missing the point while reading the downloaded lectures. On the other hand, the interaction between teachers and students was absent throughout this experience. Therefore, most students were unable to develop their cognitive skills.

For English as a foreign language (EFL) students, the issue was not only related to the above-mentioned points but also to the necessity of developing the four macro skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Students could not practice their listening or speaking skills, in particular, through reading lectures on the university MOODLE. Moreover, teachers could not enhance their students' writing and reading skills this way as there is no interaction. Moreover, they could not find effective ways to assess and evaluate their students via this platform.

To solve the above-listed issues, many university teachers have considered using other alternatives to obtain a successful continuation of the teaching and learning process with their students while realizing a synchronous and asynchronous student-teacher interaction. Therefore, online meetings on ZOOM or GOOGLE MEET, Facebook closed groups were created to deliver courses, alternative. In this context, the present research study aims to reveal the obstacles encountered by teachers and MA language and communication students on MOODLE during confinement. Also, it calls for integrating several E-learning platforms into the Algerian university to encourage and develop online teaching and learning.

The current study, therefore, sought to investigate what was going on among teachers and student during confinement by asking the following research questions:
1.To what extent has the official university MOODLE online learning platform helped EFL MA students Language and communication students to follow and understand their courses at home, during confinement?

2. Are Facebook closed groups, Google Meet app as alternatives more effective for MA language and communication teachers from the English department at Abdelhamid IBN Badis University, Mostaganem, to deliver EFL courses?

3.What are the obstacles and challenges teachers and students of MA language and communication in the English language department at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University have faced when using online learning platforms?

Based on these research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Because EFL MA students of Language and Communication could not understand most lectures after downloading them from the university's MOODLE, they have used Facebook closed group and Google Meet to follow their studies with their teachers and mates.

2. Facebook closed groups; Google Meet app could be more effective alternative tools to help MA language and communication teachers to deliver their courses and create interaction with their students.

3. Teachers and students have faced many obstacles and challenges on online learning platforms such as slow internet connection, inappropriate timing, and some students' unwillingness to study online.

Accordingly, a theoretical survey will be presented in the following section to cover the main concepts and key points related to the main research area on which this research paper is based, namely the rise and growing need for teaching / online learning strategies in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and the long period of quarantine.

2. Literature review

During the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, various sectors of society were affected; all countries had to take many decisions to confront this multilayered crisis, and Algeria is no exception. In this section, we address our concerns and interests in the education sector. The latter has been deeply affected by the coronavirus epidemic. More particularly, "the Covid-19 pandemic has forced schools and universities to shut down, and inevitably disrupts the traditional forms of face-to-face learning." (Syahrin &Salih 2020, p. 48).

Azzi-Huck &Shmis mentioned that "in the meantime, fourteen days after the fact, 120 countries have closed schools impacting almost a billion students across the world that have experience closures of their schools for the period."(as cited in Shahzad, Hassan, Aremu *et al.,* 2020, p. 2) In this circle of fear-provoking, universities transformed face-to-face education to online. Therefore, the higher education system started operating through E-learning (Azzi-Huck &Shmis 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020 a, b); and the delivery of learning has become through technology and the internet (Gros et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2017; Aljawarneh, 2020).

In Algeria, as in many countries, the prime ministry closed schools and universities and supported online learning platforms to allow for more social distancing. "The transition to online learning was the only option during the situation's gravity because of the COVID-19 outbreak." (Mahyoob, 2020, p. 352) Also, the Algerian state decided to continue distance teaching to avoid academic year failure on February the 18th 2020. To facilitate this sudden transition to distance learning and teaching and make it successful, "the Ministry of Higher Education has recently

trained, mainly novice teachers on how to work with platforms like Moodle and Blackboard." (Ghouane, 2020, p.22).

Accordingly, the current research study focuses on the benefits of various E-learning interactive platforms in education. The latter are becoming widespread worldwide; they are considered as a generator for 21st-century students. They create a more significant impact on all students' types, much as the part-time and Full-time or distance learning student in the higher education institution (Azhari & Ming, 2015).

At present, in higher education and during the confinement period and Covid-19 pandemic, with several e-learning platforms or apps, teachers have been empowered to deliver their courses through online platforms, such as MOODLE. The latter stands for Modular Object-Oriented Term Developmental Learning Environment, which is also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)." (Lopes, 2014, P. 5361). Martin Dougiamas developed it in 2004 to facilitate working in collaborative communities and to create appropriate options for the program. MOODLE has become well known worldwide to conduct courses online to support blended learning and then group content or similar activities, instructors continue their teaching by technologizing their teaching methods. Recently, in Algerian higher education, MOODLE e-learning platform has unexpectedly been integrated to substitute the traditional teaching method in all universities to reinforce and enrich the quality of programs as it requires self-regulated students and modern teachers. Thus, this investigation focuses on MOODLE's sudden integration into Algerian higher education, and the obstacles teachers and students have faced. To this end, on the one hand, our research study aims to investigate whether incorporating MOODLE to pursue higher studies at university during quarantine since March 2020 was successful or not. On the other hand, we attempt to examine a number of other e-learning tools adopted among university teachers, such as Facebook closed groups and Google Meet.

France-Presse reported in the Jakarta Post that about six million organizations use Google Meet. As for the latter, it is upgrading its platform. Javier Soltaro, G Suite vice president, said that this platform would be available to all users worldwide, enabling people to build communication, make collaboration and keep in touch as long as a pandemic is still going on. When users have experience in Google Meet using, they find the ease and usefulness" (as cited in Purwanto&Tannady, 2020, p. 2835)

In this regard, and because many   Algerian university teachers are aware of the opportunities that various online platforms offer, many instructors have challenged themselves to overcome the difficulties they have faced during the COVID-19 pandemics. For instance, to keep in touch with MA students as long as a pandemic is still going on, authors of the present research preferred to move from MOODLE to Google- Meet and Facebook closed groups as alternatives to continue teaching e-learning, Human Resources Management (HRM) and Applied linguistics courses.

3. Research methodology

This research study is descriptive and exploratory. We used an interview method to assess teachers' perceptions of integrating the university MOODLE e-learning platform and other

virtual spaces such as Google- Meet and Facebook closed groups to continue the teaching process and avoid an academic year failure. Additionally, we used online observation followed by six   questions while being through e-learning platforms, MOODLE, Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups to assess students' satisfaction when using other virtual learning spaces to continue their learning process.

3.1 Methods

This research study seeks to highlight the teachers' and students' challenges, obstacles and perceptions when using some online learning platforms such as MOODLE, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups, for delivering English courses, during confinement since Mars 2020. To deconstruct our experience of teaching online with our students during this time and to present the views and perspectives of our colleagues, we used online observation followed by six questions and interview research tools to obtain relevant data on the perceptions of teachers and students on delivering and attending lectures on university MOODLE and/or on other platforms suggested by some colleagues, including the closed Google-Meet and Facebook groups.

3.2 Context

Our research study took place on Abdelhamid Ibn Badis university Moodle, Google- Meet and Facebook closed groups. These platforms represent three different online contexts. MOODLE is free software, a learning management system that provides a platform for e-learning, i.e. it is an online learning platform; Google- Meet is a video-conferencing application that allows its users to interact via video meetings. As for Facebook closed groups, they are created by Facebook users to create a virtual community in this social networking site.

3.3 Participants

Our respondents were six EFL university teachers and 24 MA one language and communication students.

3.4 Procedure

This research study took four months of observation (March-June)on the MOODLE platform, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups with our students. We have interviewed our colleagues (participants) individually to confirm our insights towards the delivery of online EFL courses failure during confinement. As for our students, we have observed their interaction with us on both Google- Meet and Facebook closed group on the one hand and the university's Moodle on the other hand. Moreover, we have asked them six closed-ended questions regarding their familiarity with online learning platforms and the obstacles they have faced.

4.   Results and Discussion

Based on our experience and the answers we received from our participants, we could confirm our conception of the university MOODLE failure in the department of English. This platform has failed in providing teachers with an effective online tool to deliver their courses during confinement. It also failed to offer the students an interactive platform that allows them to stay connected with their teachers during the quarantine. On the other side, Google Meet and Facebook closed groups are more supporting and supportive pedagogical tools that teachers can use during the quarantine and even after the pandemic is over.

In fact, since March 2020, both students and teachers have been struggling because they could not have access to MOODLE. They have been under pressure from repeated calls from the Ministry of Higher Education to continue uploading lectures to MOODLE. The corollary of this was the rushed and chaotic upload of the university MOODLE lectures. As a result, students got lost while downloading these courses from the platform. In this respect, the next section presents what we have observed and got as answers about the students' perception of the online learning platforms they have used during the quarantine.

4.1 Students' perceptions of Integrating MOODLE Online Learning Platform, Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups
1- Did you find MOODLE as a supportive, helpful and suitable pedagogical tool?
➢ All of our participants did not find MOODLE as a supportive educational tool at first. They believe that it was imposed inexperienced by the Ministry of Higher Education, without being ready for such an experience.

2- How many times have you downloaded lectures from MOODLE?
➢ During the first months (March and April), students revealed that they were unable to access MOODLE to download the lectures.

3- What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access the online learning MOODLE platform?
➢   For our students, many obstacles have handicapped their online learning process on MOODLE. They are many, such as (the slow internet connection, the lack of online learning training, and no MOODLE guide was submitted to students, to know how to use MOODLE, etc.

4- Did you contact your teachers to ask them for help?
➢   The majority of students said they did not contact their teachers to ask for help regarding the use of Moodle, except eight students said that they emailed two of their teachers to get further information and clarifications regarding the MOODLE platform.

5- According to you, is integrating only the MOODLE into the educational system appropriate? If no, what do you suggest?
➢   All students have agreed that using one online learning platforms is not enough. They believe that using other e-learning platforms or apps would help students improve their understanding of courses, such as applied linguistics, e-learning, and HRM. They could have determined and detected the difference between being through the university Moodle and the other two virtual spaces because their teachers taught them the courses listed above on Google Meet and Facebook closed group during the quarantine.

6- On Google Meet and Facebook closed groups, how do you describe this short experience with your teachers?
➢   All students have enjoyed their experience with the Google- Meet and Facebook closed groups. They said they had interacted with their teachers in different ways: speaking, texting and interacting. It has allowed them to enhance their reading, speaking and writing skills. Also,

students have felt that they have been more autonomous in the learning process as they could download lectures and understand the course content.

4.2 Teachers' perceptions of MOODLE Online Learning Platform Use
   In our interview, we have asked six of our colleagues about integrating the online learning platform MOODLE at university to deliver their courses.
1- How did you find MOODLE use to deliver courses?
        Our participants argued that they have not found integrating MOODLE appropriate to avoid the academic year failure. They said they needed sufficient training on how to master using MOODLE to develop and continue the teaching process. Besides, they said that uploading lectures, on MOODLE, in PDF or PPT format was/is not possible and convincing. Also, they said that social and economic factors affected the learning process of students. Some students could not complete their learning process online due to poverty as they do not have smartphones or laptops and due to geographical area since some students live in rural areas where there is no access to the internet.

2- Did you appreciate using MOODLE to upload EFL courses?
➢   Our participants have not appreciated teaching on MOODLE because they found themselves alone without students on the Moodle designed by the university. They did not feel they were teaching, and the same was true for students. They told us teaching without students' inclusion was a failure. Moreover, they told us: "there was no synchronous or asynchronous interaction with the students, needless to mention the issue of teachers' autonomy."

3- What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access on MOODLE?
➢   As students, they have faced many obstacles that have handicapped their online teaching process on MOODLE. They are many, such as the slow internet connection, the lack of online teaching training, no MOODLE guide was submitted, at the beginning of the quarantine, to teachers to know how to use MOODLE.

4- Have you used other online learning platforms or apps as alternatives to deliver the courses and solve the academic year failure?
  The teachers' answer to this question was 'yes'; one teacher said she used Google Meet to teach the MA students online to realize good students' interaction and autonomy. As for the remaining teachers, including the first author, they said they used Facebook closed groups, messenger and zoom to help students understand the content courses, increase their autonomy, and at the same time continue their teaching process. Their short experience online was appropriate and beneficial for them and their students. As a result, they encourage colleagues and students to take advantage of various platforms and apps, such as Zoom, Facebook closed groups, Google Meet, Youtube etc.

4.3 Suggestions and Recommendations
        The previous sections presented the main findings of our investigation. From the answers of our participants, students and teachers, we could have confirmed that our hypotheses were valid. Moreover, as teachers in the department of English at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, and since we have gone through the same experience as our participants, the following

suggestions and recommendations are presented to help both teachers and students have a successful online teaching /learning experience:

-Video conferencing applications like zoom and Google Meet are more beneficial than the university's Moodle since the former allows for asynchronous interaction between teachers and their students.

-Facebook closed groups can be more beneficial than the Moodle designed by the university since our students feel more comfortable with the former; they master it better than the Moodle.

- The university's Moodle can be re-designed in a way that allows teachers to create forums and chat rooms to interact synchronously or asynchronously with their students.

- Students must be encouraged to use the various online platforms for an educational purpose instead of using social networking sites for self-entertainment purposes.

-Teachers should be free to use the online learning platforms they find more useful and operative to teach their students through.

- Students must be well trained in using the online platforms before they are required to attend courses via Moodle as our students are not accustomed to these platforms.

5. Conclusion

From our experience of teaching MA students online during quarantine, we could have concluded that uploading courses to faculty MOODLE in PDF or PPT format was/is not effective or beneficial for teachers and students alike. In the beginning, many students could not access the platform; therefore, they could not download the lectures. In other words, our students were not ready to be autonomous learners to leave them alone on this platform with PDF or PPT files. It was frustrating for most of them as the majority of students prefer to be taught face to face by a teacher rather than going online to download lessons. However, the Google-Meet and Facebook closed groups as alternatives were much more successful than the university's platform. On the former, students could synchronously interact with their teacher and ask questions when texting their teacher. Thus, the ministry and policymakers should rethink the feasibility of integrating the university online learning platform, especially those that do not allow student-teacher interactions.

Declaration of conflict interest: None.

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Appendices A and B
A. Students' six questions after online class observation
  1- Did you find MOODLE as a supportive, helpful and suitable pedagogical tool?
  2- How many times have you downloaded lectures from MOODLE?
  3- What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access the online learning
  MOODLE platform?
  4- Did you contact your teachers to ask them for help?
  5- According to you, is integrating only the MOODLE into the educational system appropriate?
  If no, what do you suggest?
  6- On Google Meet and Facebook closed groups, how do you describe this short experience with
  your teachers?

B. Teachers' questions during the interview
  1- How did you find MOODLE use to deliver courses?
  2- Did you appreciate using MOODLE to upload EFL courses?
  3- What are the obstacles you have faced when attempting to access on MOODLE?
   4- Have you used other online learning platforms or apps as alternatives to deliver the courses
  and solve the academic year failure?