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Teacher-Based Courses Versus Internet-Driven Courses in EFL Milieux: A Contrastive Proposal

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Abstract
In a world more advanced than ever, where the digital whiteboard classroom and electronic books are replacing the chalkboard classroom and printed textbooks of yesterday, the teacher seems to remain the source of knowledge who performs the noble task which calls for boosting the best in people to bring out their greatest fortes. This research espouses this belief and its basic significance is to show that a teacher imparting knowledge to a group of learners will remain an integral ingredient in formal teaching despite the unprecedented impact of technology on the sphere of education. The major research question in this work intends to contrast two different English as foreign language (EFL) learning situations in Licence/ Master/ Doctorate (LMD) environment: one based on the internet and the other on a learning assisted by a teacher. This digest looks at the implications of both learning models and pores over the changes that teachers may encounter within their classes as digital technology penetrates every area of the nation's life. To comprehensively examine the predicted effects of both learning cases, the data have been amassed both quantitatively and qualitatively through a triangular approach using a questionnaire administered to students, interviews conducted with learners, classroom observation procedures, and evaluation of the learners' exams. Based on the analysis of the gathered information and answers, the results highlighted remarkable distinctness in both learning methods. Still, there are specific facets of each learning modality.
Keywords: Algerian Higher Education Institutions, English as foreign language milieux, Licence/ Master/ Doctorate students, internet-based learning, teacher-based learning

Introduction

With the wide prevalence of internet-based learning and advancement in technologies, profuse Algerian Higher Education Institutions have integrated modern and technological methods into their educational curricula to catch up with scientific, technological, and global growth. Since the advent of technology, numerous changes in the teaching/learning process have affected the interaction between teachers and learners. Consequently, there has been a shift from teacher-centred learning to autonomous learning. Being an integral constituent of individuals, the complex and multifarious concept of learning polishes a person's mind and strengthens one's thoughts. Learning is a process that aids human beings to acquire necessary skills and valuable knowledge. Despite the many merits of the inclusion of technology in education, the role of the teacher will always remain irreplaceable. This study seeks to answer the following research question:

– How can teacher-led courses be distinctive from technology-based learning?

It is hypothesized that:

– Learning assisted by a qualified teacher can positively affect students' performance and encourage them to invest their potential in learning to develop their academic expertise, in contrast to web-based courses which seem to be dry-focused on the instruction of assessable abilities.

In this respect, this paper aims to analyze the learner's views and perceptions of technology-driven instruction in EFL contexts, to contrast and find out the differences between web-based courses and teacher-led courses in EFL classrooms, and to highlight the undeniable role of the teacher. Its chief objective is to accentuate two teaching modalities, one ensured by an instructor and the other covered through the internet.

This paper is split up into three fundamental sections. The first one offers a review of the literature about the teaching profession, the key roles of the teachers and learners, and the importance of integrating technology into academic contexts. The second part comprises the practical side that deals with the research design, the utilized data gathering instruments, the setting, and the participants. The last section concerns the obtained findings, their analysis, and their interpretation.

Literature Review

Teaching: a purely human activity

Teaching is an art and science grounded on strategies, principles, and practices to attain a practical accomplishment of goals; it is not only providing minds with knowledge, but it is also, above all a system of actions and a creation of appropriate conditions that aid learning to take place. Regarded as an equivalent to learning facilitation, teaching is an enterprise that produces successful learners equipped with the needed skills of interpretation, criticism, and argument. In its broader sense, education is a process of knowledge production, one that substitutes surmises and presumptions by scientific evidence, logical thinking, and knowledge (Irzik & Nola, 2005, p. 51).

The Role of the Teacher

Teaching remains one of the intellectual jobs that demands systematic thought and reflection to deliver a potentially fruitful instruction. It requires a sound grasp of content and pedagogy to be able of developing a spirit of criticism and improving the curriculum.

In teaching, it is elemental to realize that the principal focus is on the teacher's role. Their prime task is to influence learning and to remain up to date. This is akin to the view of the humanitarian Eugen P. Bertin who declares "Teaching is leaving a vestige of oneself in the development of another. And surely the student is a bank where you can deposit your most precious treasures" (in Cooper & Ryan, 2010, p. 471). To mark one's trace calls for a qualified teacher who can create novel, unique, relevant, and creative opportunities for learners to build a brighter future.

It is argued that teachers have special needs at different times throughout their careers, and the requirements of their learners also are not stable over time. The chief role of teachers is to prepare their students for the present-day scheme when they have to clash and work vigorously. To complete such a task, instructors should be extremely aware of the fundamental aims of education, as emphasized by Rogers (1969):

> The goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning. The only person who is educated is the person who has learned how to learn; the person who has learned how to adapt and change; the person who has realised that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. Changingness, a reliance on process rather than on static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education (p. 152).

Teachers are the candid picture of whatever an educational system desire to install in students, and it is the educational institution that offers an essential source for further professional progress. To be an effective teacher does not only entail having a thorough content knowledge, but also being responsible for establishing a comfortable and engaging classroom climate, for sustaining enthusiasm, and for encouraging teacher-learner rapport. It is said that good teachers can make decisions about practices by adjusting their teaching methods to help learners achieve the intended outcomes. Teachers bear the burden in their classes; they play diverse roles and can be:

- Monitors: teachers are in complete charge of the entire activity in the class, they control the social and learning behavior of learners.
- Evaluators: teachers assess the performance of their students and provide corrections and feedback.
- Supporters: teachers who can encourage, bring assistance to their students and motivate them when necessary.
- Managers: teachers organize and manage all the components included in the teaching/learning process.
- Reliable Resources: teachers who can bring credible information to their learners.
- Partners: teachers who are involved and participate in some activities, and who can establish a solid rapport with their students.
- Facilitators: teachers who create a conducive learning atmosphere, and who promote comprehension.

To maintain students' focus on learning and a well-run classroom, teachers need to be capable of switching over from one role to another.

The Role of the Learner

Being convinced that the teacher is the primary impetus for change in education does not preclude the call to the learner's autonomy. Autonomy is a multidimensional notion and a significant educational goal. Stevens (2007), in explaining the meaning of autonomy, writes that:

> Autonomous does not mean isolated or 'by oneself' – an autonomous learner is one who self-starts him/herself in the direction of a learning strategy in which, these days, a learning community might figure highly. Therefore, learning strategies leading to community and network building might be productive in producing autonomous learners (p. 28).

Thus, learners should see their learning process as a personal discovery and responsibility to reflect and make independent choices. At university, instructors aim to allow students not just to gain knowledge but also to become avid, confident, and accomplished. It should be acknowledged that rewarding instruction takes place when we have learners who are:

- Motivated and engage actively in their learning.
- Risk-takers and willing to face challenges.
- Determined to be successful.
- Ready to learn from their mistakes and develop critical thinking skills.
- Aware of the role of the internet and technology as instruments that allow access to a mass number of data and not as the only resource of credible information.
- Conscious that the teacher will always remain the real source of knowledge.

Incorporation of Technology in the Domain of Education

With the fast expansion of globalization as a powerful force around the globe, recent developments in modern technologies continue to increase at a rapid pace for the removal of information barriers. Technology promotes opportunities for heightening and reinforcing international relations and social acts; it also polishes the ways human beings operate both in the virtual and actual world. Further, technology is used widely to integrate formal and informal education in the context of L2 learning and teaching (Khabir et al., 2022).

In the area of EFL, teachers adapt technological systems to allow their students to gain easy access to limitless resources despite their location or cultural identities. Defenders of technology see it as a complementary means that can improve the learning experience, augment self-knowledge and self-confidence, and better monitor the students' progress. They view its use in ensuring language courses as a crucial and vital part of education and learning experience (Altun & Khurshid Ahmad, 2021).

They also argue that digital learning formats are flexible in terms of time and space, save time to travel to the learning location, provide easy access to learning materials, and make them useful for a longer time (Hameed et al., 2008; Jefferson & Arnold, 2009; Hill & Wouters, 2010; Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2013; Becker et al., 2013). Additionally, online learning modes allow a free exchange of information, and access to lectures and presentations at conferences that used to involve considerable travel cost (Kamarianos et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2020). On the other side, learners may encounter hindrances while using the internet such as lack of reliable sources, loss of network connections, limited or no communication opportunities and interactive capacities with peers, escalation in social isolation, and absence of computers or other technological devices

because of socio-economic situations. Detractors, moreover, view that learning via the internet can be ineffective because of many distractions, no adequate learning environment, or contact with the teacher (Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020).

It should be noted that despite the unprecedented role of technology in providing learners with helpful knowledge, the profession of teaching will always be considered as purely human; that is technology can gradually refine the traditional methods of teaching and learning but it can never replace the human touch. Moreover, in spite of the barriers encountered by some teachers when using technology in the domain of language education, the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the technology merging process (Aghaei et al., 2022).

Methodology and Context
Questionnaires are helpful data gathering instruments used to elicit information about distinct kinds of opinions and issues. Brace (2018) opines that "in the questionnaire, the researcher articulates the questions to which he or she wants to know the answers" (p. 5).

Being a way to assemble facts as well as to obtain knowledge from individuals, interviewing is seen as a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience (Seidman, 2019).

Observation as a research process provides the opportunity to capture the quality of teaching and to collect live data from naturally occurring contexts. Classroom observation has emerged as a pivotal tool for measuring, assuring and improving the professional skills and knowledge base of teachers and lecturers in schools, colleges and universities (O'Leary, 2020).

The assessment of the learners' exams is a form of evaluation that can reveal critical elements that permit teachers to determine some weaknesses, better address their instruction, and adjust the delivery of their courses in the future. They offer aid to the teachers so that they can:
- Emphasize the basic demands of the learners.
- Identify some difficulties faced by the students in terms of misspelling, structure, etc.
- Determine whether or not the course objectives are being met.

This study was undertaken at the University of Oran 2 in the department of English. It targeted 57 students (1st year Master's students). The students were divided into two groups:
- The 1st Group: 28 students were given articles at the end of each course. They attended the discussion, the explanation, and the debates in the classroom assisted by their teacher.
- The 2nd Group: 29 students whose unique source of learning was the internet and related websites; they did not attend any of these classes.

This research seeks to explore the learners' opinions about the utilization of technology in EFL milieux, to stress the dissimilarities between an instruction ensured by a skilled teacher and a learning based on the internet, and to accentuate the valuable role of the teacher. Data were amassed by administering a questionnaire to students, pre- and post-interviews were conducted with the participants, in addition to the process of classroom observation, and the assessment of the learners' exams.

Major Findings
Students' Questionnaire
The questionnaire seeks to get a profound overview of the students' perceptions of the use of the internet for academic purposes, their opinions regarding the crucial role of the teachers, and their attitudes towards online instruction modes and teacher-based classes.
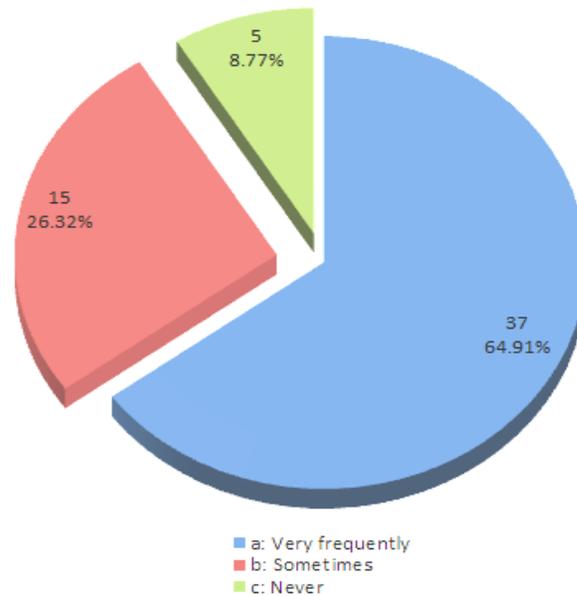

Figure 1. Frequency of the use of the internet for learning purposes

As indicated by the results, the great majority of the learners (64, 91 %) declared that they use the internet in their studies regularly. Whereas, 26, 32 % claimed that they utilize the internet on rare occasions.
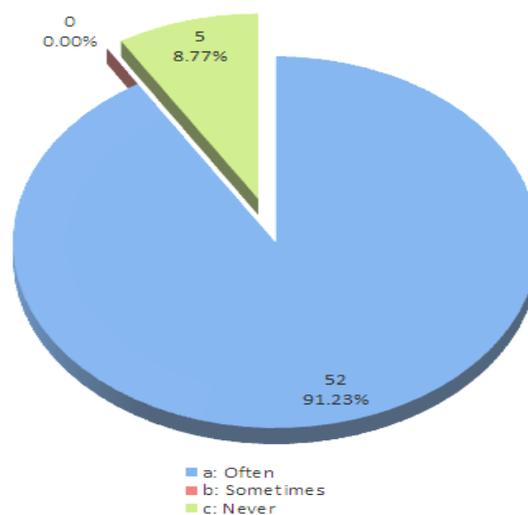

Figure 2. Frequency of the use of the internet for personal purposes

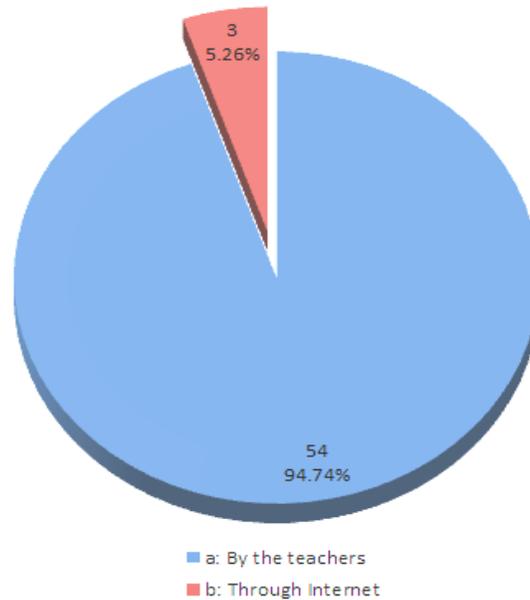According to the participants' answers, almost all of them 91, 23 % do use the internet for personal purposes.

Figure 3. The way courses should be covered

As indicated by the findings, approximately all the informants (94, 74 %) strongly believe that instruction should be ensured by the teacher.
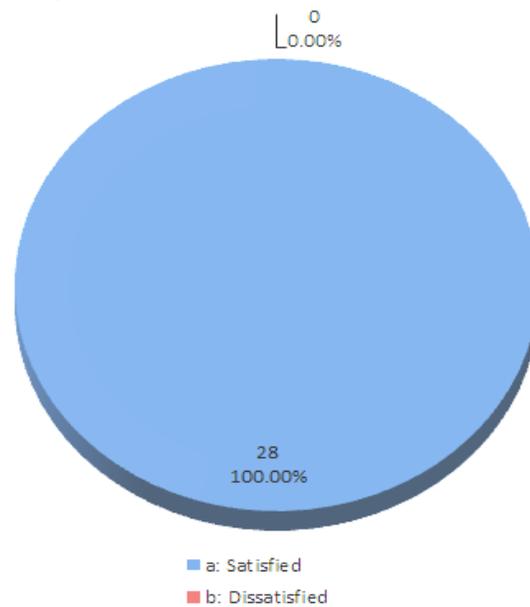

Figure 4. Students' satisfaction from the learning experience (teacher-based courses**)**

The obtained results revealed that all the respondents (100 %) express their total satisfaction of the courses covered by the teacher.
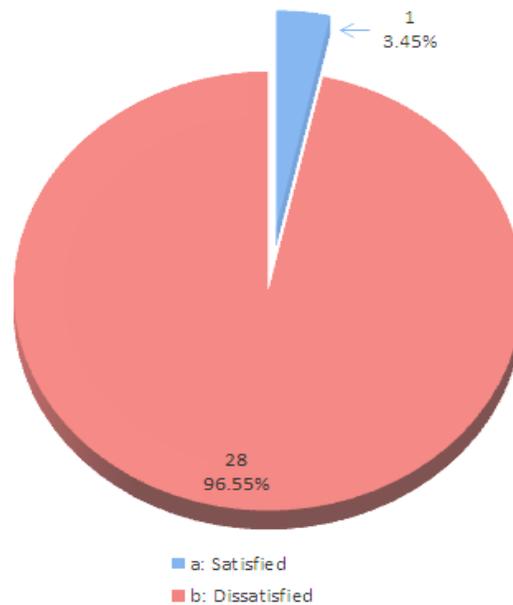

Figure 5. Students' satisfaction from the learning experience (web-based courses)

As it is demonstrated, nearly all the students (96, 55 %) give a negative response regarding the internet-led courses
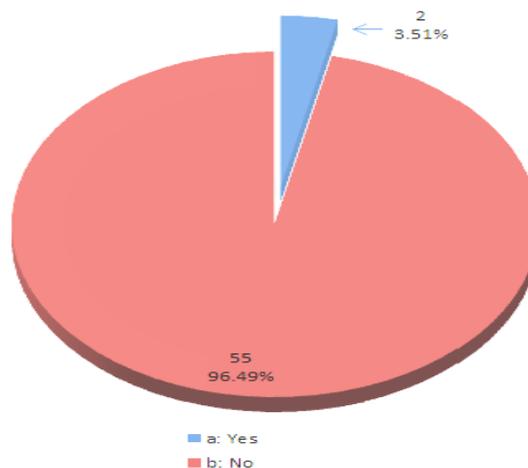

Figure 6. The possibility of replacing the teachers by technology

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Pretty near, a massive number of learners (96, 49 %) asserted that technology can serve and improve the field of education but it can never replace the teacher.

The Learners' Interviews
On both occasions, the students expressed their views concerning the two learning formats. It was agreed upon by the entire participants that despite the tremendous development in the area of technology, the process of teaching seems to remain better performed by a high-profile instructor who combines remarkable content knowledge with effective communication and interaction with their learners.

Classroom Observation
Being a vital data collection tool, classroom observation allowed the researchers to gain tangible data by getting feedback and recording what happens in reality within the classroom. It was used to check the learners' behaviors, determine their needs, verify their understanding, and get a thorough idea about their engagement in the course.

Assessment of the Learners' Exams
The evaluation of the exam sheets constitutes a powerful method that enables the teacher to examine the learners' grasp, analysis, and criticism of the information they gained during their in-person courses and the internet. Through these exam papers, we could identify the learners' strong and weak points in terms of language mechanics, their capacity to express their thoughts, and their ability to provide constructive feedback as graduates.

Discussion
Students' Questionnaire
It can be concluded from the learners' questionnaire that the most significant number of informants affirmed that they prefer receiving their knowledge directly from their teacher because they believe that attending classes, listening to the explanation, posing queries, receiving feedback, and interacting with their peers will contribute efficiently in helping them getting fully involved in their learning process. On the negative side, it was stated that surfing the internet and picking up articles from different websites without being sure about the credibility of the information, and without any guidance from the teacher will lead them to an unsuccessful learning experience.

Pre- and Post-Interviews
The learners were interviewed on two occasions:
a) The first occasion: Before dividing them into two groups and asking some of them to learn through the internet and the others to further their learning in the classroom under the supervision of their teacher.
b) The second occasion: By the end of the year, after obtaining all the required data.
The students' pre- and post-interviews revealed the following points:
- Internet is a helpful learning tool but not a reliable one.
- Some scientific competencies, such as critical thinking, the art of leading a debate, analyzing, criticizing, building bounds between the teachers and their students, etc., can be offered and reinforced by a qualified teacher.
- Learning through the internet fails to build up and strengthen the learners' curiosity, desire to deepen their knowledge, and capacity to innovate.

- The learners who pursued their courses with the assistance of their teachers have noticed that their creativity emerged as they became absorbed in actively exploring new ideas and opinions. All of these interviewees rated the learning experience as positive and indicated that they recommend such a situation to others. Conversely, students whose courses were web-based asserted that they faced severe difficulties in being involved with their peers, who were the key actors within the classroom. Many of the students complained that they came across some technical words that were not understood even if they were checked on the Internet due to the non-availability of some online specialized dictionaries as well as the non-availability of reliable online translations.

Classroom Observation Sessions

When observing the learners in their natural setting, as their teacher, I felt that each student was absorbed and engaged in the learning process. Most of these students seemed to have the potential to succeed. Moreover, these students appeared to be sure about the answers they provided. They did not show any avoidance behavior, and were eager to take part in their debates and enrich the discussion.

Evaluation of the Learners' Exams

a. Students who learned through the internet: when analyzing the learners' exam papers, the following aspects were noticed:
− Poor achievement in terms of coherence of ideas and relevant information.
− Superficial thoughts.
− Lack of references because the students were not sure about the sources.
− Some information were untrue because the students picked some passages from the forums and some articles written by non-specialists.
b. Students who attended the courses assisted by their teacher:
− They demonstrated a deep knowledge of the topic under study, rather than simply knowledge of isolated facts.
− They focused on central ideas and were not apart from the topic.
− They have shown good achievement in their written productivity and better fulfillment.

It is important to note that due to the status of English in Algeria as a foreign language (FL), our students do not have enough exposure to FL outside the classroom (Ziashahabi et al., 2020; Jamali et al., 2021). Therefore, it is recommended that these learners get more engaged in widening their knowledge and enriching their vocabulary by attending their in-person classes.

From the analysis of the data, it was concluded that the obtained results confirm the hypothesis that efficient and beneficial learning is the one provided by a skilled teacher and not through the use of technology.

Conclusion

It was deduced that for the learners whose courses were teacher-led ones, this has served their communicative and writing ambitions, and has helped them satisfy their needs. This has been expressed through a high degree of involvement and rapport in their participation. Through their conversational interactions and exam sheets, they negotiated a shared line of discussion and argumentation, and engaged in honest debates. In the matter of Web-based courses, the students explained that they deviated from their assignments. For these students, the internet was a tool that

did not help them accomplish their authentic tasks and appropriately meet their needs. It is worth noting that effective teaching, whether carried out by a teacher or technology-based, is the one that should be standards-based and help enhance learners' proficiency in the target language through interactive, engaging learning experiences, taking into account the cognitive as well as the affective sides of learners, supported and facilitated by a qualified teacher who masters the manipulation of technological devices. To recapitulate, technology has its limitations and is not a real panacea for the learners, whereas a competent teacher without technology cannot be described as being limited.

About the Author:

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