

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
Abd Elhafid Boussof University - Mila



Institute of Literature and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages
Branch: English

EFL Sophomores' Preparedness for Distance Learning at Mila University Centre

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of the Master Degree in
Didactics of Foreign Languages

Presented by

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Examiner: Dr. Fouzia BENNACER

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Dedication

Thanks to almighty ALLAH for giving me strength and ability to study and complete this dissertation.

My humble research is dedicated to my sweet and loving

father “Tahar” and mother “Sersoub Dalila”

whose affection, love, support and prayers of day and night make me able to get such success and honor.

This work is also dedicated to all hard working and respectful teachers, especially Dr.

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I am also thankful to my brother “Bidjed” and sisters “Kenza, Rahma, Safa and Rania” for everything they have done for me.

My thanks go also to every single person who ever supported me,

namely my friends: Kerdali Khawla, Gessoum Zahiya, Belkhir Mofida, Menad

Samah, Tebib Dounia, and Benzaoui Roumaissa for their

encouragement in moments of difficulty and stress. Lastly I dedicate my work,

my effort, and my heart to every forlorn person who manages to smile in spite of his/her pain.

Nadjet

Dedication

In the name of Allah, The entirely merciful

I dedicate this work:

to my beloved mother, who provided me with motivation and encouragement throughout my whole life. Her limitless affection will never be forgotten;

to my dear father, I would like to state that your understanding and wisdom pushed me to chase even daydreams;

to my sweet sisters: Souad and Dounia, thank you for being there for me, in good and bad moments;

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate English as a Foreign Language (henceforth, EFL) sophomores' preparedness for distance learning. In this research study we explored the extent to which second year English students at Mila University are prepared for web based learning. The sample of this study consisted of forty student out of 219 which form the whole population. In order to find out the students' perception of the use of technology in learning, this descriptive exploratory study used two questionnaires: one for the teachers and another for the learners. The results demonstrated the students' unwillingness to receive courses online. The gained data clearly defined that the absence of teacher, lack of equipment and poor internet connection are among the obstacles which prevented the majority of learners to complete their courses virtually. Besides, the teachers' questionnaire analysis showed that the minority of the sample like to deliver online courses. However, most of the teachers were against this new form of learning because it is distracting and time consuming. Finally, the implications and limitations of the study were discussed and suggestions for further research were volunteered.

Keywords: online learning, students' preparedness, EFL learners

List of Abbreviation

ARPA: Advanced Research Projects Agency Networks

BEM: Brevet d'Etudes Moyennes

CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning

CD: Compact Disc

DL: Distance Learning

DVD: Digital Versatile Disc

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ICT: Information Communication

IT: Information Technology

ISTE: International Society for Technology in Education Technologies

MOOCS: Massive Open Online Courses

MP3: MPEG-1 Audio Layer III

PDF: Portable Document Format

Q: Question

SRL: Self-Regulated Learning

WWW: World Wide Web

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General Introduction

1. Background to the Study

With the turn of the 21st century, education has been altered tremendously by the introduction of new unprecedented technological tools like the internet networks and the mobile phones. However, the use of the internet in education has modified the relationship between teachers and learners in the sense that the latter can access and share information without the physical contact with the former, who have always been a key element in the teaching learning process. Yet, both can interact using various tools such as e-mails, software, online applications, social media sites, and the like. In reality, this type of learning is called distance education. With the spread of corona virus at the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020, the educational institutions were obliged to drop old methods of learning that consisted of scheduled classes all week and replace them by distance learning. Therefore, distance learning was the ultimate solution to face the pandemic. In this new form of learning, all the key actors in the educational field have met challenges, especially the students who appeared not to be able to cope.

2. Statement of the Problem

Different circumstances such as economic, social, political and other different conditions direct teachers to adopt various methods and tools of teaching. During the pandemic period, we have been obliged to move from physical attendance in classroom to virtual presence. This took place thanks to the technological revolution that the human being is witnessing. We think that with such an alternation comes big responsibility especially for teachers and learners. Nowadays, EFL students in Algeria like the rest of the world are facing a new situation in which they need to handle their learning in the digital world. In this

dissertation, we want to investigate whether EFL learners are prepared for distance learning in the current situation i.e. during covid-19 pandemic.

3. Aims of the Study

This research focuses on describing the nature of the relation between distance learning tool and the learner's preparedness to study in these new circumstances. This exploratory descriptive study tries to identify the problems, if any, that the instruction of EFL sophomores may face in adopting this new way of learning. It seeks also to explain the extent to which EFL sophomores know how to use the technological tools whether they own them or not, and how effective they do so.

4. Research Questions

In this study, we aim to find answers to the following research questions:

- i. Are EFL sophomores provided with the necessary materials to learn English during covid-19?
- ii. How do EFL sophomores perceive distance learning?
- iii. What are the obstacles they face?

5. Research Means

In order to collect data in this study, a questionnaire was conducted with second year EFL students at the Department of Foreign Languages, Mila University Centre, and a second questionnaire was designed for teachers to examine their perceptions of distance learning.

6. Structure of the Study

The present dissertation consists of two chapters. The first chapter includes the literature review while the second chapter is devoted to the research study. To begin with, the first chapter is divided into two sections. The first section; explains the historical evolution of distance learning; it gives an overview of the definition of online learning alongside with its

significance and the reasons behind the adoption of such a type of education at Mila University Centre. Concerning the second section, it tackles the EFL students' preparedness for distance learning. In particular, this section explains the main challenges of virtual learning. Further, it aims to explain the relationship between distance learning and learners' preparedness. Chapter two, then, sketches the design of this descriptive study and the research tools used in it: two questionnaires for teachers and students. Besides, it presents the data analysis, the findings of the study, the discussion of its results and its implications and limitations.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Introduction

With the advanced technology and its way and its spread all over the world, the opportunities for distance learning became high. Especially when coronavirus arrived, many universities had to close down to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and the only alternative to use the traditional classroom teaching was adopting distance learning to finish the programs. Nowadays, teachers employ Information Technologies (IT), phones, e-learning platforms and multiple social media sites to enable university students to acquire knowledge without the need to be present. However, many students in many places in the world, including Algeria, lack the necessary computer skills that would help them cope with the new circumstances. We aim in this chapter to account for distance learning. It is divided into two sections. The first section provides an overview of the historical development of distance learning, its definition and its significance in the teaching learning process and the reasons behind its use in education. This part discusses also the types of distance learning along with its advantages, and implementations. Moreover, the second section of the current chapter deals with the challenges EFL learners and their attitudes toward virtual learning.

1.1. Distance Learning

1.1.1. Historical Development of Distance Learning

The distance learning process is unprecedented to the educational system. It is difficult to confirm when it began exactly (Picciano, 2001). Gallogly (2005, p.19) stated that: “distance education is neither a new method of educational design and delivery nor a new idea or concept.” Distance learning has been around for a long time in many different guises. Every era takes an advantage of the technology of the time to make learning more and more accessible. People often associate distance learning with modern technology such as computers and the internet. However, as earlier as 1782 in Boston Gazette, Caleb Phillips

advertised short hand lessons weekly through the mail madding after a cruel version of correspondence course (The Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2001). After that, Sir Pitman Isaac in 1843 discovered what is known as *pitman short hand* which is a postcard with his new form of short hand that would be mailed to the students who in turn would transcribe them, then send them back for criticism. According to Jay Roe (1998), distance learning was developed in the beginning of the 18th century as a postal-delivered correspondence. It is a method of providing education for non-resident students, primarily adults who receive lessons and exercises through mail, or some other device, then return them for analysis and correction. Three years later, Pitman founded the phonographic correspondence society which would later be known as *Isaac Pitman correspondence colleges* (Simoson et al., 2015). Valentine (n. d), mentioned that in 1858, London University was the first to apply distance learning in its higher education. So far, correspondence lessons provided education to thousands of people who otherwise would not be able to obtain one due to economic, geographical or family reasons. As a consequence, correspondence education was the first technology that facilitated communication to both teachers and learners; therefore, Sumner (2000, p.273) said: “distance learning did not really begin until the rise of industrial society [...] by the end of the 19th century. It was established in the form of correspondence study.”

In fact, the industrial revolution, which took place from the 18th to 19th centuries, played an important role in overgeneralizing the technological knowledge and its efficiency. Apparently, education was getting flexible amid the European citizens at that time. Henceforth, in 1873 Anna Ticknor founded the *Boston based society* which encouraged studies at home, and most women had the opportunity to take care about the children and access to learning simultaneously.

On the other hand, in 1892, William Rainy Harper who was the president of Chicago University, proposed satellite campuses to extend education further into the community. Consequently, those who were not able to travel to large main campuses could go to a smaller school locally. Yet, they were able to obtain education and degree.

In the next era, distance learning was possible by the development of radio and later television. In 1922, PennState was the first University to offer courses taught over the radio; about 200 colleges were granted broadcasting licenses for distance learning. In 1930, television technology was experimented by these three major universities: *Kansas State University, Purdue University and University of Iowa*. After the arrival of the TV technology, most homes did not have this invention and that of the radio for a couple of decades. Besides, people were not able to buy such audio-visual tools because of the limited personal income and low manufacturing capacity. In 1948, the University of Lewis Ville along with the National Broadcasting Co-operation created the college by radio in which the entire program was taught completely over their waves. Sixteen years later, the University of Wisconsin – Madison offered the Articulated Instructional Media Project which utilized the latest technology, and within a year they offered courses over the phone. Thirty years later, the tele-courses were offered by Stanford University which created a Stanford Instructional Television Network that used to broadcast engineering lessons. Surprisingly, that network innovation is still in use today (Zawacki & Qayyum, 2018).

Concerning the last portion of distance learning history, it highlights some of the more recent advancements in the field. To start with, in 1969 the network was created and computers would not directly connect to one another, but through ARPA net (the basis of the internet that all people nowadays depend on). Additionally, the World Wide Web (www) was created in 1989, and it changed everything from schools to work places to everything in between especially when the internet in 1990 was made available to the general public out of

service providers such as America Online, Prodigy and Compu Serve. At the time, institutions of higher education started to take advantage of this new technology and began to offer courses online (Kentnor, 2015). We shift now to the most recent development of distance learning which is the invention of MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses) in 2012. The purpose behind this idea is to output interaction, feedback and communication.

In general, without regard for geography or time; internet and telecommunication technology gave teachers around the world the opportunity to get in touch and benefit from each other's expertise. Furthermore, learners become more educationally and socially involved; thus, they learn interactively rather than just being taught passively (Davidson, 2013). Allen and Seamen (2003) maintained that online and distance education was growing rapidly and was perceived positively. Distance learning could be through the use of technologies, as it could be traditional. This study focuses on only distance learning through the use of technologies. Figure 1.1 below sketches out the four main stages of the development of distance learning which have been already explained.



Figure 1.1: Development of Distance Learning Generation Depending on the used Technologies.

1.1.2. Distance Learning Definitions and Significance

In Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary (2021), distance learning is defined as a way of learning that takes advantage of video, audio and written materials designed for a person to use in studying a subject at home. It can also refer to instruction and learning that take place remotely either for a whole course or for portions of it.

Popular electronic learning technologies include voice-centered technology like CD or MP3 recordings or webcasts, video technology such as instructional videos, DVDs, and interactive video conferencing. As well as computer-centered teaching delivered over the internet or corporate intra-net (FAO e-learning Academy, 2021). Technology permits distance learning to happen either synchronously, in which a group of participants is engaged in learning at the same time to realize the whole interaction, or asynchronously, in which the teachers and learners are not engaged in the learning process at the same time. In this last type, the material is available and students can have access to it at any time. According to Moore et al. (2010), any process of acquiring knowledge and skills delivered via electronic media is called distance learning even if it does not involve formal instruction between teachers and learners. However, there are terms that describe types of learning in which technology may be used. E-learning, online learning, distance learning and blended learning are concepts which have been heavily used during the academic year 2020/2021 as response to covid-19 outbreak.

To start with, distance learning is a type of e-learning which takes place at home through the use of various technologies without physical attendance in classrooms. Negash and Wilcox (2008) differentiated four types of e-learning: e-learning without presence and communication, occasional e-learning without presence but with communication, combined e-learning with occasional presence, and e-learning used as a tool in classroom teaching. Many researchers like Tom Worthington declared that both of distance learning and electronic

learning are two different words for one meaning. For Marques (2006), e-learning is distance education through remote resources. It is the use of technology to deliver learning and training programs (E-learning portal, 2009). Although e-learning and distance education share some points of similarities, Etter (2018) showed a clear distinctive difference between the two concepts. He said that:

E-learning generally involves completing a course of instruction on the internet. Distance learning generally refers to a variety of programs that are away from the main campus. It can be satellite campuses in another town, remote broadcasts, and correspondence courses, seminars given for college credit at non-campus remote locations or any other alternative way of presenting the course material. The key point in both types of learning is access to a quality, accredited education to a population of student that for reasons of time, convenience, work, or distance cannot attend traditional main campus based classes.

Another point which people do not understand is that online learning and e-learning are not two faces for one coin. It is of salient importance to recognize the variation among them. Bates (2005) stated that e-learning can cover any form of telecommunication and computer based-learning that back the teaching learning process on campus while online learning requires the internet and the web.

Jordan et al. (2008, p. 228) said that: “hybrid learning represents a compromise, combining a face to face component with computer-based distance learning where teacher and learner interact dynamically.” Hybrid or blended learning is also a new educational term, which means the strategic integration of in-person learning with technology to enable real time data use and personalized instructions. Blended learning is likewise a mechanism for giving educators, students and parents the resources they need to take advantage of a highly effective and equitable educational experience.

Aladwan et al., (2018) defined distance learning as a form of education in which learners are bodily passive and receive lectures and lessons through internet. Schedule's flexibility is one of the most known characteristics of distant learning that organizes the study time for some students. Sometimes, when there are special courses that require online participation in limited hours or spaces, the schedule becomes fixed. To provide a networks environment, we need the information and communication technologies (ICT) which is another feature of learning through distances. This last gives equal opportunities for the individual and to independently attain knowledge.

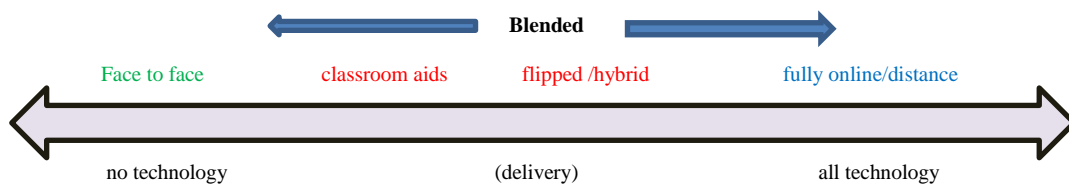


Figure1.2: Types of Teaching /Learning Systems.

At Mila University Centre, distance learning involves mainly *Mila e- learning platform* that was created for the first time in 2012. It was heavily used as a response to Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Last year, as EFL students at the Foreign Languages Department, we have witnessed changes in the educational process from conventional teaching classrooms to uploading/downloading lessons from the electronic platform. In fact, teachers of some modules like Linguistics, grammar and Inter-culturalism and Multiculturality tried to use Google Meet application to get in touch with their students and explain some lessons but what was noticed is the low attendance rate on the part of the students. Accordingly, the experience of distance learning for us was not good solution to the situation we were witnessing. However, this year is somehow different than the previous one.

1.1.3. Reasons behind using Distance Learning

Multiple reasons stand behind the urgency to turn to distance learning; some of them are: health, economic, political, technological and/or cultural. They are tackled below.

1.1.3.1. Health Factors. According to Chelgoum and Chelgoum (2020), the COVID-19 has influenced education by taking teachers/students from face to face interaction towards online interaction. It is obvious that the covid-19 outbreak brought about deep changes to societies. Algeria faced this epidemic by a general lockdown. That included several institutions like schools and universities. This is to prevent close contact for the sake of stopping the spread of the virus among the citizens. Education, as a consequence, was stopped for weeks and to recompensate what was lost, distance learning was the only alternative. Teaching materials (handouts, articles, videos, etc.) were uploaded to digital platforms and various sites. According to Li and Lalani (2020), distance teaching is very operative in enhancing knowledge retention and gaining time. Because of Covid-19 pandemic, schools and universities were forced to jump from the old system which requires in-person attendance in classrooms to distant setting using different tools.

1.1.3.2. Economic Factors. Since December 2019, the Algerian government has been facing a period of political uncertainty and social unrest leading to the deceleration of economic activity. Consumption and investment were getting down because of the oil price decrease which cuts into fiscal and export revenues. As a result, austerity policy was the only selected solution by the parliament members in order to avoid borrowing from the international monetary fund. Hence, all ministries were forced to reduce their expenditures. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research followed the lead to do so, it started to replace face to face teaching/learning by digital learning, among others. Consequently, introducing distance learning to education was a beneficial decision taken by the higher authorities which cuts the budgets of transportation, canteen and campuses.

Furthermore, the world's economy has shifted from agriculture to industry then to information technology throughout its history. In fact, moving into a society of informatics makes a quick transformation on the business market. Thus, the old way of teaching is no more able to cope with the technological epoch. As a consequence, employing distance learning helps universities, to some extent, find a place in the digital space and permit graduates from being equipped with the computer skills required in the market (Bournane, 2020).

1.1.3.3. Political Factors. Politically, the total shut down due to covid-19 pandemic forced Algerian officials to attend conferences and organize meetings virtually. They were the only solution to be able to deal with diplomatic relations, military matters, and the country affairs. Locally, in March 2020, the president of Algeria *Abd al Majid Tabbun* conducted the first online video conference with all the ministers to discuss the government's latest achievement.

1.1.3.4. The Technological Factors. Nowadays, globalization has touched all human activity increased interdependence of countries and boosted mutual relations. One of the results of globalization is the availability of modern information and communication technologies for almost everybody. The fast development of computer technology and electronic devices of communication like cell phones and smart phones gives every single person access to various types of knowledge that have been reached by specialists. The pedagogical and scientific revolution has provided chances for those who have been deprived from studying because of their social, practical and geographical conditions (Regan, 2008). Therefore, in order to give learners access, and freedom to choose from among various specialties, the educational institutions need to be associated with online learning. Thus, this specific learning environment and information technologies permit to host huge amounts of students in competitive prices (Baddi, 2005).

1.1.3.5. Cultural Factors. Culture can be defined as a set of beliefs, traditions, values and customs which a speech community shares and transmits from generation to generation. In the same respect, cultural impacts on distance learning are worth mentioning. According to Barton et al. (2007), students use different sources as well as multiple social media sites like Facebook, Instagram and virtual chat rooms to interact with other people from different cultures, races and religions. In other words, one of the cultural reasons behind the implementation of distance education is that it breaks the language barriers and permits students communicate using multiple languages, even if the participants do not understand the native language that they are corresponding with, they can use translations to follow up with the conversation. In short, distance learning can destroy cross-cultural geographical barriers.

1.1.4. Types of Distance Learning

Despite the variety of methods used in distance education; students and teachers are well aware of the diversity of tools, materials and types which web-based instruction has. According to Murphy et al. (2011), distance learning is divided into: Synchronous and asynchronous online learning and teaching.

1.1.4.1. Synchronic Online Learning/Teaching. In a synchronous learning process, teachers and learners interact virtually on a particular e-learning platform where they discuss the content of a lesson (Amiti, 2020). It appears that synchronic distance education requires teachers and students to prepare a fixed schedule because they “are temporally dependent, which means that they must schedule their presence to coincide” (Murphy, et al. 2011.p. 584). Most significantly, the benefits of synched learning include good time management in order to save time; because in open fixed classes, there are no geographical restrictions. Basically, the learning experience takes place in a live and real environment where teachers are able to give immediate feedback and work cooperatively with their learners (Shahabadia & Uplaneb, 2014 as cited in Clark et al., 2007). However, clocked online learning might not be suitable

for the majority of participants due to the none availability of some tools and IT knowledge required by online courses. Therefore, the synchronous learning is supported by a bunch of online tools such as virtual classrooms and video conferencing, which allow sending and receiving information between members, text based chat that require sending instant messages, cell phones, voice chats, and online applications and softwares (Niehues, 2004).

1.1.4.2. Asynchronic Online Learning Teaching. According to Perveen (2016), “Asynchronous environment provides students with readily available materials in the form of audio/video lectures, handouts, articles and power point presentations. This material is accessible anytime, anywhere.”(p. 22). It can be seen that asynchronous learning is more flexible than synchronous in terms of geography and time management where students can work in a comfortable way without interruptions; as a result, they demonstrate a degree of independence and diversity. Moreover, asynchronous learning uses various tools to enhance peer to peer communication which is necessary for the effectiveness of asynchronous teaching/learning; which include tools that depend on written materials for example: e-mails, fax machines, discussion forums, and social media like blogs and sites (Niehues, 2004; Murphy, et al. 2011). The two types of online learning are described in figure1.3.

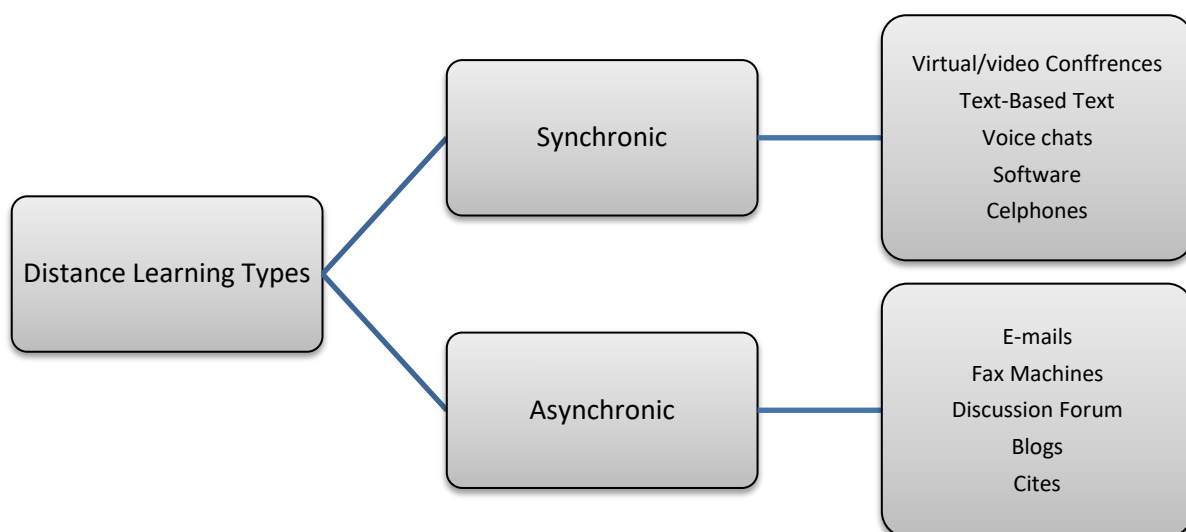


Figure1.3: Types of Distance Learning.

1.1.5. Advantages of Distance Learning

Distance learning has several advantages in education, especially for learners and instructors who have turned to it recently.

1.1.5.1. Time. Everybody is busy with their lives, and they do not seem to show any sign of slowing down because to them time is money. Distance education offers the benefit and luxury of saving time. There is no time to waste in queues or in waiting rooms; therefore, virtual learning gives the opportunity for EFL learners and teachers alike to complete their tasks on the go or from their homes (Sadeghi, 2019 as cited in Bijeesh, 2017).

1.1.5.2. Place. In distance learning, time and place are irrelevant; all what matters is the learning process. In other words; students can use online programs anywhere in the world and access the lessons, online courses and platforms at any time they want. Sadeghi (2019, as cited in Nagral, 2013) mentioned that “even if your courses are afforded by an international school, you could easily get access to course materials if you are a citizen in a different country” (p. 83).

1.1.5.3. Saving Money. In distance learning, there would be no need for spending money on transportation like buses and cars. Since distance learning requires virtual attendance; the learner will be more comfortable using less physical effort. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of open-access resources available online which are more convenient for students who want to save money. Sadeghi (2019), asserted that almost all online programs and software do not require learning fees.

1.1.5.4. Flexibility. Distance education provides learners not only with flexibility in place and time managements, but also with the ability to use the online materials any time and everywhere. In addition, it increases the opportunities for choosing the online courses they think they are convenient for them, i.e. they choose the lessons they need without constraints (Sadeghi, 2019, as cited in Brown, 2017).

1.1.5.5. Autonomy. One of the distance learning advantages is autonomy. Zullkepli et al. (2018) claimed that there are two aspects for the learner to become an autonomous one. The first is one's capacity of self-adjustment of his learning; the second is the desire of coordinating the learning process. It means that the learner is able to use the necessary means to accomplish his self-learning. As a result, it would boost up student's confidence, self-esteem as well as their motivation to learn independently without relying on the teachers for acquiring the knowledge.

1.1.5.6. Working and Learning at the Same Time. Earning money is one of the necessities of life. Web-based learning gives the opportunity not only to the students who are busy working, and those who want to balance their professional life and academic life (sadeghi, 2019 as cited in Brown, 2017).

1.1.6. Implementation of Distance Learning

The purpose behind current use of distance learning in higher education is to support the teaching/learning process.

The implementation of Web-based learning model request intensive observation of instructive educational regulations to modify the methods used in learning; moreover, this type of learning requires from the instructors and administrators of the university to make efforts in order to provide the electronic information across the web. Hani (2020) stated that a variety of organizations took the decision of applying distance education in their infrastructure such as the International Society for Technology in Education (henceforth, ISTE) which emphasized how to use the distance model as the foundation of electronic communication tools. Besides, the costs of the internet, planning lessons, typing them, must all be taking into consideration when adopting distance learning. Teachers need to get trained on how to deliver online courses and EFL learners as well. The latter will also need to get accustomed to virtual lessons instead of face to face interaction. In this regard, Khoo and

Cowie (2010, p.48) confirmed that: “understanding how learning occurs require a focus [on the way participants react in specific] activities and practices, how they appropriate available tools, artifacts and social networks into their local settings.”

In 2020, in order to finish the academic year, the government, and the ministry of Higher Education and scientific research in Algeria worked together to implement distance learning by creating e-platforms and special supporting programs, which were delivered through television networks all over the country to prevent primary, middle and high school students from falling behind in their studies, so that they could sit for the third-term exams and receive their academic degrees i.e. primary education certificate, BEM, and Baccalaureate. These online programs allowed pupils, students, teachers and administrators to communicate in a better way. Google Meet, Zoom, Skype and Google classrooms were among the tools employed to ensure communication between stockholders. Nevertheless, Algeria is still in the developmental process of web-based learning (Houssam Adin, 2020; Hamoudi, 2020).

1.2. EFL Students’ Preparedness for Distance Learning

1.2.1. EFL Students’ Challenges amid the Online Learning Process

Distance learning has been widely implemented in schools and universities as it was required in the government protocols during the Corona virus period. Students as well as teachers have had difficulties in this new modality of education. The challenges of digital teaching and learning are complicated when the know-how is limited and internet infrastructure is inadequate. Updated learning to the online version has become more difficult for nowadays students.

According to Greville (2001), one of the problems that learners faced when learning distantly is having all documents stored in computers and online drives which resulted in the loss of important files because of electronic viruses. It is true that being familiar with gadgets

and internet is a requisite, but learning how to repair any breakdown is not easy. Covid-19 allowed learners to set to study at home far from the usual classroom environment. As a consequence, the existing barriers such as power cuts, slow broadband, the surrounding noise and the unending household chores create distraction for learners (Klawitter, 2020). On the other hand, for some, this new way of learning is an advantage because they could save time and money. Yet, they still have to pay expenses from home like electricity and internet bills. Moreover, Mandel (2020) informed us that remote learning is harmful to those who cannot read from the screen for a long time. We should not forget that most of learners' time is being wasted during waiting for the connection.

Teachers usually face interactional problems when delivering instructional content. Corporal distance obstructs the students from interrupting the teacher to ask questions and the latter cannot attend to cues of body language and facial expressions. Moreover, the occasions of interaction that occur in direct class setting do not appear in distance learning classes. Hence, teachers cannot guarantee that learning is taking place in e-classes (Vierstra, n. d).

Individual differences and learning styles are necessary to consider during the teaching /learning process. Hardly surprising, physical gestures and direct interaction that the teacher uses while explaining the lesson can greatly catch the learner's attention as well as contribute to the comprehension of the lesson. However, the absence of the latter, during the whole session, negatively affects the learners' knowledge reception and production (Annu-v, 2021).

Herselman (2003) explained that thousands of students were unable to continue their online education due to lack of access to internet and electronic devices. Lack of high-speed connectivity was a huge problem, especially in rural areas. The isolation of rural houses from urban megacities makes them out of reach of resources and facilities. As a consequence, learners are obliged to boycott virtual learning and demand the traditional one.

1.2.2. EFL Students' Attitudes towards Virtual Learning

Because of the procedures undertaken by the World Health Organization to prevent the spread of coronavirus, EFL learners were obliged to stay at home. As a result, they continued their learning through online materials. Moreover, EFL students show a mixture of a positive and negative attitude toward the use of online learning and Information and Communication technologies (ICT).

Many research studies uncovered reasons for the students' negative attitudes towards distance learning. Firstly, some research papers come to an agreement that the psychological state of the learners influenced their performance negatively in distance learning. As they show feelings like anxiety, stress, pressure, isolation, and confusion; due to the lack of proper guidance on the part of their instructors. Besides, teachers cannot work well because of learners' indifference vis-à-vis their learning as they are far from their educational institutions. This amount of distractions (receiving notifications, chatting with friend, etc.) that technological devices have caused during the teaching and learning process led to the passivity of a minority of learners (Norziani, et al. 2011 as cited in Hara & Kling, 2001). Distance learning technologies for instance computers and mobile phones for many reasons include entertainment, business and mostly education purposes. According to Abakumova et al. (2020), EFL learners are not so much interested in using the internet and social media for learning and educational purposes; rather, they prefer to use them in amiable communication. Hence, they manifested their unwillingness to complete their studies remotely and emphasized using full-time education. This study revealed that the majority of students in higher education have negative points of view to utilizing distance learning.

By contrast, a number of EFL students react totally different; they view remote learning as an effective way for gaining more knowledge. Students also have the tendency to exchange the teachers' questions or activities and answers via online tools like messenger

(Cohen & Cowen, 2007). In the same line of thought, El Battioui, (2016) said the opposite; EFL learners show a tendency to using Google websites to improve their skills. One of the most known advantages of virtual learning is autonomy (see1.1.5.5.). In research studies exploring the significance of distance education, it was revealed that:

Learners with higher intrinsic motivation and SRL [Self-Regulated learning] skills tended to have more positive beliefs in the effectiveness of DL ... Motivated by the curiosity and demand for knowledge rather than by external reinforcements, learners could be involved in DL more deeply, hence experience and enjoy the knowledge acquisition processes to a greater extent. Also, with higher SRL abilities, learners could structure and manage their learning more effectively and gain higher confidence in accomplishing DL tasks (Zhang, et al.2001, para.2).

The authors speculated that respondents from all around the world accept this new substitution of classical way of learning because of its ability to enhance self-efficiency in second language acquisition. Thus, the perceptions of students regarding learning virtually depend on their personal attitudes. Over and above, this means that as long as learners use virtual learning, their satisfaction depends on their desire to learn independently and to be self-directed, self-motivated showing increased confidence and positivity.

All in all, EFL learners show individual and different perspectives which range from optimistic to pessimistic views about distance learning.

Conclusion

We bring this chapter to a close now. This literature review started with preliminary descriptive changes of how ordinary classes transferred from face to face interaction to online learning. It was followed by an over view of the history and developments of distant learning with the purpose of informing the reader that the use of technology in learning is not new in the educational process. After that, multiple definitions for distance learning were delineated;

the dissimilarities that are found between e-learning, blended learning, online learning and distance learning were clarified as well. In this chapter we also discussed the main factors behind adopting technology as a substitute to traditional teaching. Health, socio-cultural and technological conditions as well as the economic and political situation that we are going through nowadays, motivated the development of online materials and the shift toward blended learning. Besides, we shed light on the benefits of learning from home on both teachers and learners. Then, we finished the first section with the measures taken to put electronic learning on practice. Section two in this chapter, expounded EFL students' preparedness for distance learning. It dealt with the main challenges which hinder students' studies when using technology for distance learning. Finally, the chapter ended with EFL learners' attitudes towards virtual learning.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology

Introduction

It seems that distance education has been enhanced during COVID-19 as it started to be used widely. However, many face challenges in its implementation. The present dissertation tries to probe this issue by investigating EFL students' preparedness for distance learning. This research is conducted with the aim to answer the research questions set forth at the beginning. The current chapter presents: the sample, research means, data analysis and results, discussion of the results, the limitations and the recommendations for future research. Like all academic studies, this chapter ends up with a general conclusion.

2.1. Sample

In order to carry out our study, a sample of forty students was chosen randomly out of the whole population of 219 second year students enrolled at the Department of Foreign Languages at Mila University Centre. Besides, a representative sample of 10 teachers at the same Department took part in this dissertation by responding to the teachers' questionnaire. We opted for second year students because they are the classes which used distance learning during the corona virus period since it started in their second semester at the University and continued with them.

2.2. Research Means

In this dissertation there is only one research tool "the questionnaire". The questionnaire is an important instrument that researchers employ to search for information. For this reason, we distributed the questionnaire to learners and another one for teachers. The questionnaire was logically structured, kept short and simple to avoid respondent's exhaustion. To keep up with data collection, teacher's questionnaire was used with different English teachers of the Department of Foreign Languages at university of Mila.

2.3. Administration of the Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire was constructed mainly to know whether students of English at Mila University are prepared for distance learning mode after having gone through experience during second semester of the last year (2019/2020) and first semester of this year (2020/2021).

2.4. Description of the Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire included opened-ended questions for the purpose of letting the students feel free to explain their ideas. We also opted for closed-ended questions, whereby students were obliged to select one of the different choices that were given. This questionnaire was printed and delivered by hand to 40 learners out of the entire population of 219 of second year English students at Mila University centre. the Students' questionnaire is divided into five sections; each section assembles a specific type of information that we need in our research. The five sections are: background information, technical preparedness for learning, preparedness for distance learning process, preparedness for online assessment and future considerations.

Section One: Background Information

The purpose of this section is to collect background information about the respondents' age and gender (Q-1/Q-2). At the start, these two questions within regard for the students so that they feel at ease when responding the rest of the questionnaire.

Section Two: Technical Preparedness for learning

This section addresses the learners' technical preparedness for learning. It consists of four questions. They aim at eliciting information about whether or not the students are equipped with the necessary materials and knowledge to cope with the demands of distance learning.

Section Three: Preparedness for Distance Learning Process

Section three in the questionnaire, contains only two questions (Q-7/ Q-8). Question seven deals with EFL sophomores' preferences for the mode of learning: distant learning or face to face learning. Additionally, question eight requires the participants to express their perceptions visa-a-vis the effectiveness of each of distance learning and classroom learning.

Section Four: Preparedness for Online Assessment

The forth section in the questionnaire is about virtual assessment. Its purpose is to know the kind of the students' problems, if any, when taking online examinations.

Section Five: Future Considerations

This section offers an opportunity for second EFL students to express their needs and whether the integration of distance learning in their education will be promising or not.

2.5. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

Q1: Age

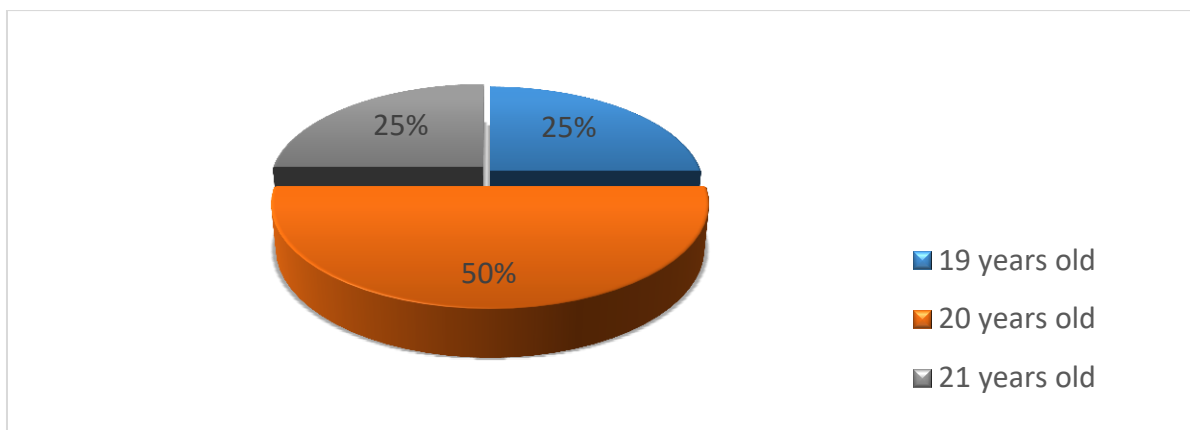


Figure 2.1: Students' Age.

In the questionnaire, the first question was about the student's age. The results ranged from the age of 19 to 21. Precisely, 25% of the students were 19 years old. Students who were 20 years old consisted 50% of the whole participants. Another 25% of them said that they were 21 years old. These results revealed that all the participants belong to the same generation

which indicates that they respond to the issue of distance learning, in approximately the same way and show more or less similar perceptions and perspectives.

Q2: Gender

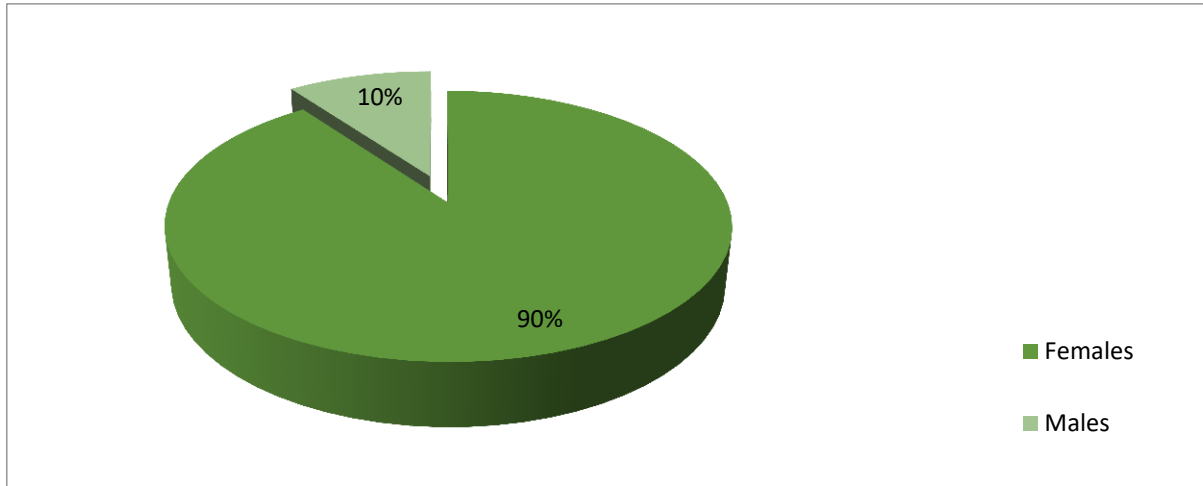


Figure 2.2: Students' Gender.

Figure 2.2 shows the learners' gender. The outcomes revealed that only 10% of our participants were boys and 90% were girls. This question was posed in order to see if the sample is representative in terms of gender. After finding out that it is not, we call for further research that considers gender differences in the use of online learning. Perhaps, males are prepared to engage in this mode of learning in different ways in comparison to females.

Q3: What does distance learning mean for you?

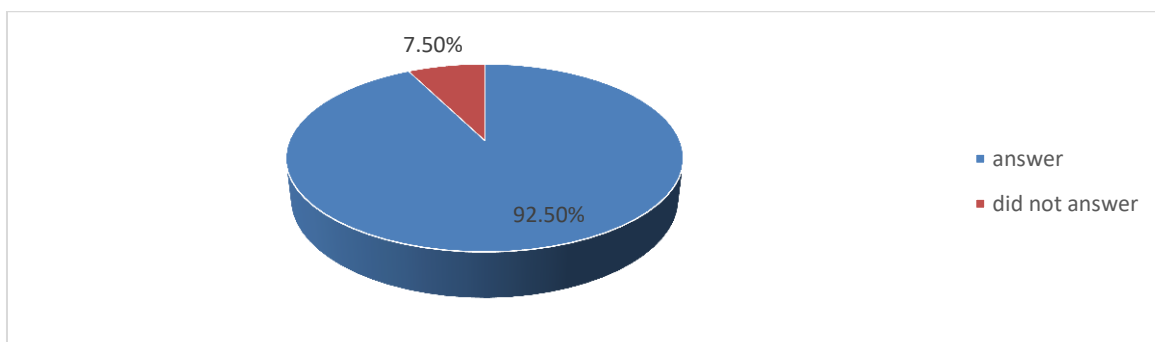


Figure 2.3.1: Students' Answers.

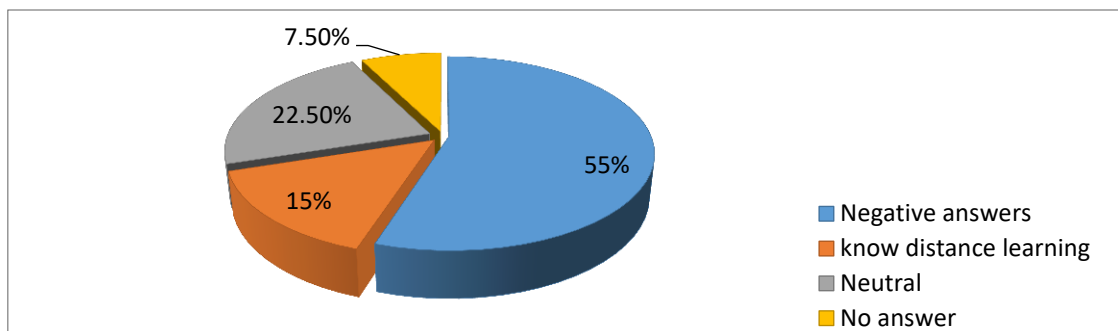


Figure2.3.2.: Distance Learning Meanings for Students

Figure 2.3.1 indicates that the students' answers to this question are varied. The majority of the learners answered this question (92.5%); however, 7.5% did not supply any answer.

Figure2.3.2 showed that out of the 92.5%, only 15% of the responses showed that they had an idea about distance learning while 85% did not. One of them mentioned that this new way of learning helps him/her look for information easily. Other participants maintained that learning via internet helps them promote their proficiency level in English and that distance learning is better than ordinary classes. On the other hand, 55% of the participants' answers to this question revealed their negative answers towards distance learning. These statistics show a high level of learners' disappointment. The majority of the learners (50%) who had a negative attitude provided justifications for their answers. They argued that this way of learning is not applicable in our country because they do not have internet or materials; besides, they spend most of their time and efforts waiting for the poor network connection. In addition, few participants (5%) of this category declared that dealing with the screen for a long time was harmful to their eyes. Besides, reading information on the screen makes them confused as they are accustomed to the papers. One student said that: "I get bored whenever I found the e-platform inaccessible; so I go directly to YouTube and Facebook for entertainment." Of note, 22.5% of the recipients were neutral in their answers; they merely provided a general definition to distance learning.

Q4: Do you have any technological tool like digital phones, laptops and desktop computers that helps you learn online?

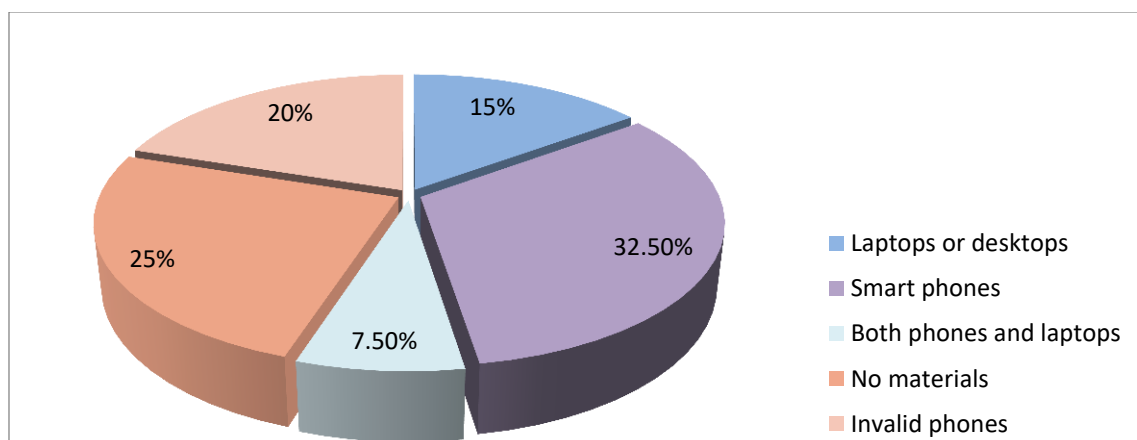


Figure 2.4: Students' Technological Tools Possession.

As shown in figure 2.4, we noticed that the majority of the sample (55%) had the technological tools that enabled them to get involved in online learning. The results revealed that: 32.5% of students had smart phones; 15% of them had either laptops or desktop computers at home; and 7.5% of them had both smart phones and laptops. On the other hand, 45% of learners did not have any of the above technological tools because they were used to deal with face to face learning and the teacher's handout. Precisely, the students belonging to this category are divided into two groups: the first group is composed of 20%, they are the ones who have simple phones and the second group is comprised of 25% and it is the one which do not have any other digital tools. It was difficult for them to afford for a digital phone especially that during the coronavirus period the purchase capacity has declined all over Algeria. One of the respondents contended that: "We used to have digital phones but they are broken now." Another student said: "I have a digital phone, but I have storage issues." Another one stated that: "My phone turned off whenever I turned the data on."

Q5: a. Do you have internet sources at home or at university? Explain?

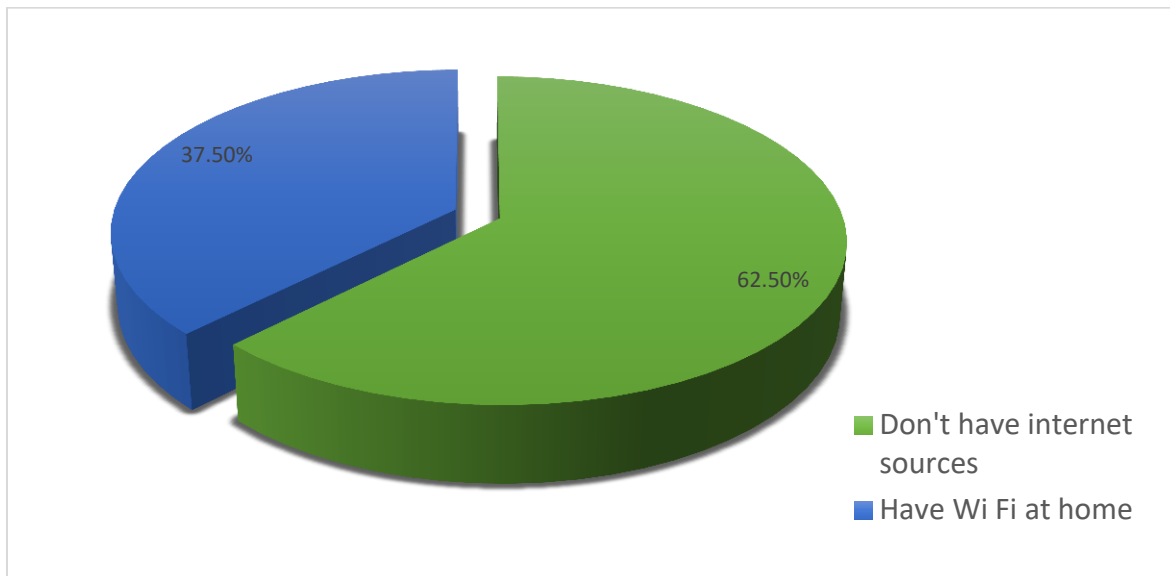


Figure 2.5.a: Students' Access to the Internet Sources at Home.

This question is divided into two parts: part (a) and part (b). For the first part, we asked students if they had internet connection at home or not. The results show that 37.5% of the respondents do have wireless Wi-Fi and the connection is fast whereas, 62.5% of the sample had no internet connection at home because it is not affordable. A number of students said that they live in a very isolated village where network connection is constantly absent. Furthermore, this percentage of 62.5% includes also the students who had already said that they had neither smart phones nor computers. This means that they do not worry about such tools because they know well that the network connection is slow.

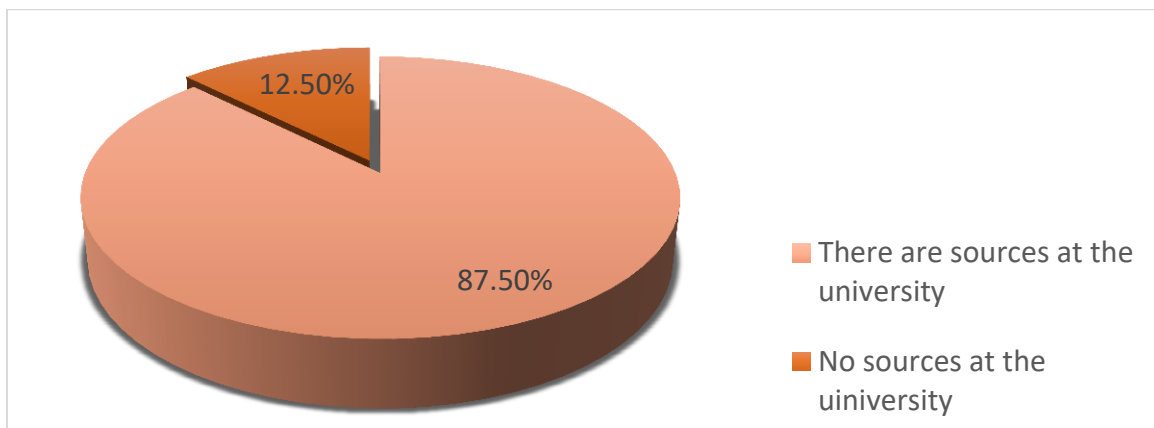


Figure 2.5.b: Students' Access of the Internet Sources at University.

Concerning part two of question 5, we found that 87.5% of our respondents confessed that there is an internet room in the library of Letters and Foreign Languages at the university. However, the majority of them affirmed that the low internet flow, the limited number of computers, the large number of the students who came from department of the Arabic Language and the institute of economy make the process of downloading lessons from Mila e-Learning platform just impossible. There were students who mentioned that there are two cyber clubs in the university residence but the demand on Wi Fi is too high.

Surprisingly, 12.5% of our informants wrote “No” as an answer to this question. Probably, the reason behind their response is that they may have never heard about such internet spaces in the university and that they rarely visit the library if at all.

In general, we noticed that most of the participants complained from the slow internet at the university. In addition, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the students could not use the university internet sources at all due to the quarantine. Thus, only 15 students out of 40 could carry on their learning from home.

Q6: Do you find any difficulties in using the digital tools in your online learning this year? Explain?

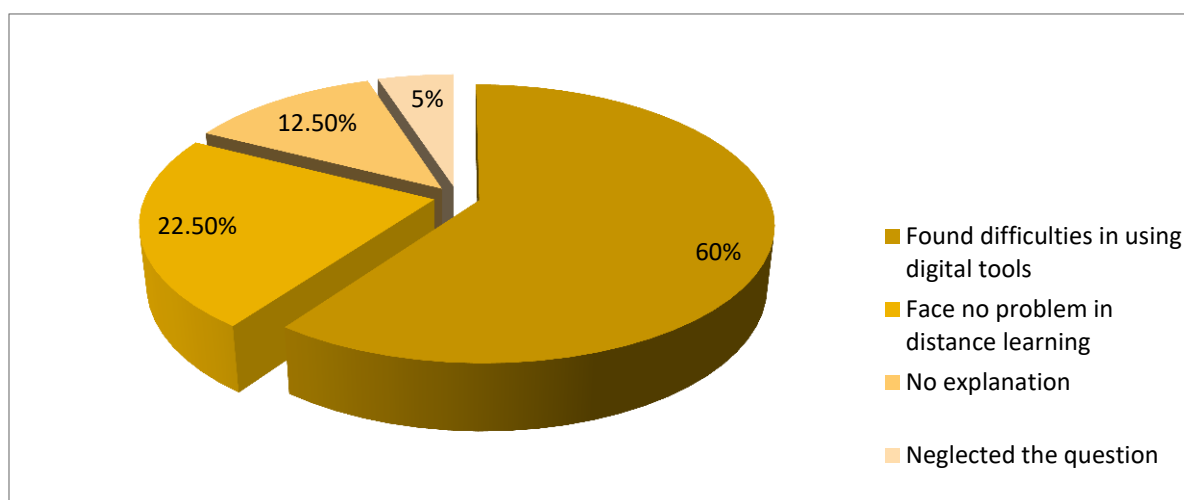


Figure 2.6: Students' distance learning use problems.

Question six was about the struggles that second year students face when engaged in distance learning, if any. It was noticed that most of the subjects (60%) found difficulties in using digital tools. The participants provided the following difficulties: arguments behind those answers were the following:

- Poor internet connection.
- Computer illiteracy.
- Inaccessibility of the platform.
- Unavailability of all the lessons in all the modules.
- Phone storage problems due to the big files given by teachers.
- Sight problems because of the screen.
- Cooperative environments and interaction with classmates are more motivating.
- Notifications of YouTube and play store application are disturbing.
- Teacher explanation is mandatory for understanding.

Only 9 of the informants (22.5%) did not struggle using technology to learn. On the contrary, they argued that this new way of learning was very easy for them chiefly because they had had some private lessons in computer science. It is noteworthy that five students (12.5%) did not put any explanation to their answers and two students (5%) just neglected this question.

Q7. a. Do you prefer distance learning or face to face learning?

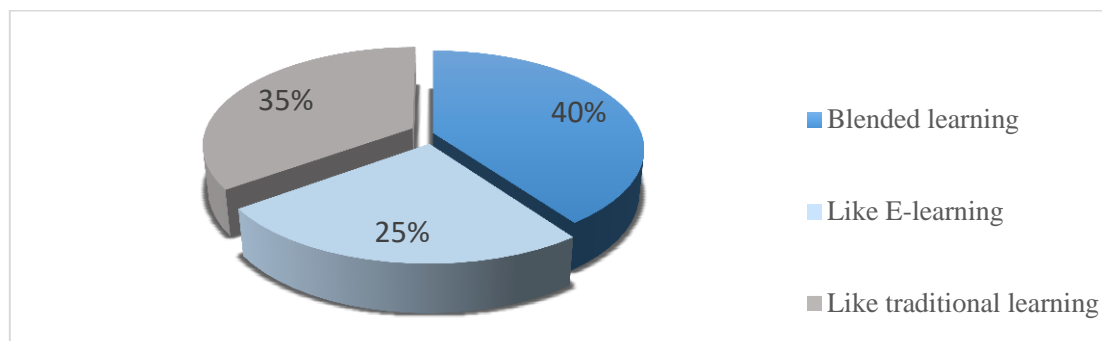


Figure 2.7.a: Students' Preferences for the Way of Learning.

In this question, we investigated the students' preferences for the way of learning they prefer: face to face learning or distance learning. The results showed three types of students: those who opt for traditional learning; those who like distance learning and those who chose both of them. To start with, 35% of the participants' choices were directed toward physical attendance in classrooms. Four students liked it because of teacher/learner interaction. Besides, 6 other students (15%) preferred it because also of interaction along with teacher feedback, body language and cooperative work inside classrooms. One student stated that he/she liked in-person attendance because of teachers' feedback only. In addition, two students (5%) wrote that they preferred the classroom learning because of two reasons: interaction and body language. Finally, teacher's body language was ticked by one student (2.5%).

By contrast, the minority of the sample (25%) indicated that distance learning is their preferences. The figure 2.7.b reveals how the results were. The option "Less time and money spent on transportation" was chosen by 7.5% out of 25% of the students. The learners (5%) indicated that internet-based learning is effective, enjoyable and it is less demanding in terms of money and time. Three recipients preferred the new way of learning because it provides independence. Last but not least, the rest 5% of the students selected both options: less time and money are spent in/on transportation (a) and of the flexibility of accessing to lessons at any time (b). The results of this question suggest that 40% of the students are more inclined towards both e- learning and face to face learning. The rest of the participants are divided between e-learning (25%) and traditional learning (35%). Figure 2.7.b. represents all the students' choices. From their answers, they seemed to be satisfied with all options of both distance learning classroom learning.

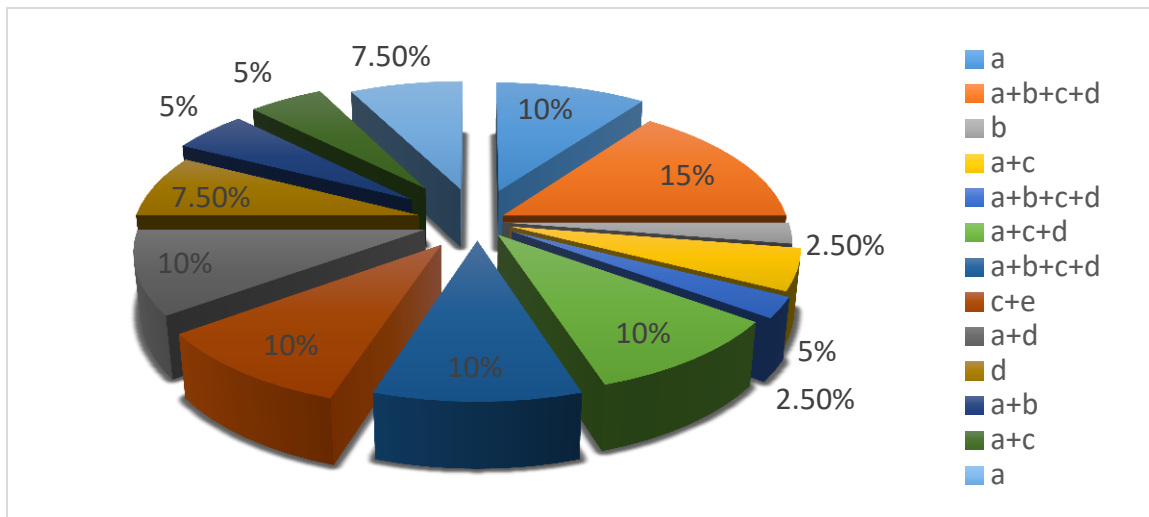


Figure 2.7. b: The Students' Reasons behind their Choices.

Q8: Is distance learning as effective as classroom learning? Why?

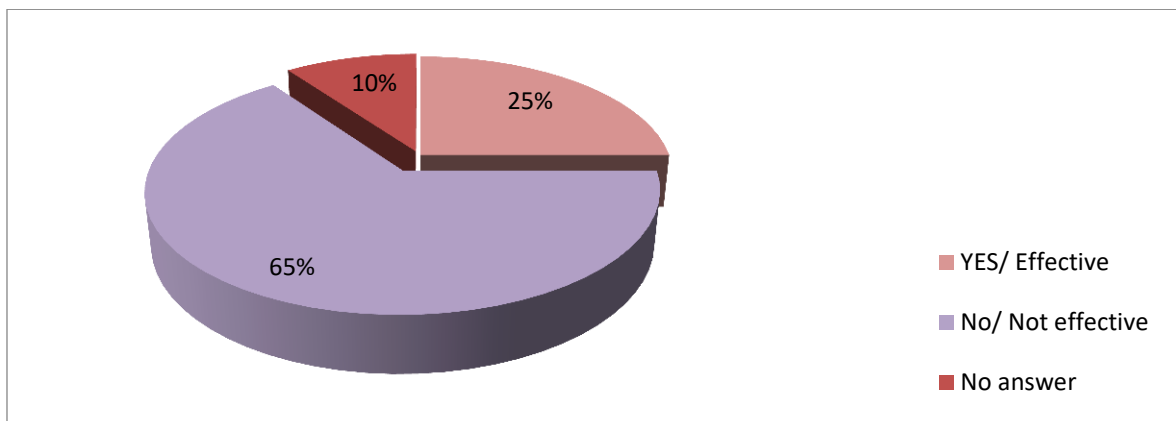


Figure 2.8: Students' Points of View about Distance Learning Efficiency.

The answers to question eight revealed that 25% of the sample considered distance learning as effective as classroom learning. According to them, the lessons in the platform are the same ones presented in the classroom. Besides, technology in learning provides more entertainment and passion through multiple tools like YouTube videos, Google Meet, group chats, etc. The participants contended that the quality of the explanations for lessons on the web is so good and these lessons help us retain the information for long time through media. Others confirmed that listening and watching audiovisual lessons by native speakers helps them learn the foreign language correctly and develop their communicative competence. Yet, 65% of the informants refused the comparison between physical attendance and virtual

learning. They argued that being inside the classroom boosts self-commitment and force us to take into consideration time management, unlike online learning which consumes time and causes distraction. Others valued the pivotal role of teacher's feedback and guidance in building the foreign language acquisition journey. The possibility to ask the teacher for extra-explanation is another advantage for traditional learning, according to them. In addition, e-learning breaks up relationships and connections with classmates. Consequently, learners who used to learn and work in pairs and groups faced difficulties in their studies. Besides, as it was expected, some learners became anxious and depressed due to lack of internet and e-learning platform problems. Last but not least, 10% of the participants left this question unanswered.

Q9: a. Does the Department of Foreign languages/teachers require you to sit for online examinations?

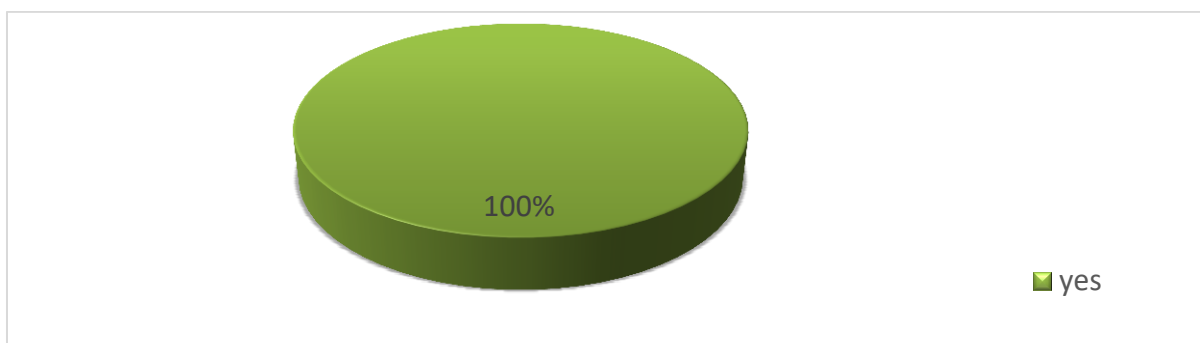


Figure 2.9.a: Students' Sitting for Online Examinations.

When the students answered this question, it was found that 100% of them were asked to sit for online exam.

Q.9. b. If yes, have you faced any problems in that?

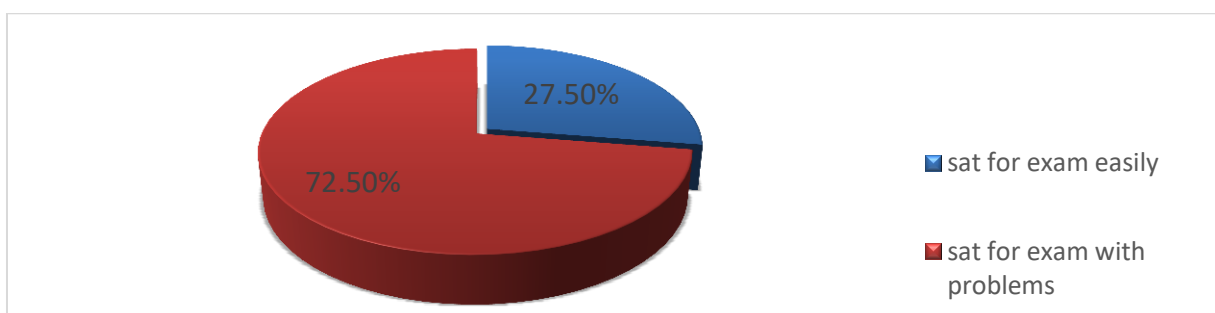


Figure2.9. b: Students' Problems in Online Examinations.

Fortunately, 27.5% said that they took the online exam with no obstacles. By contrast, 72.5% informed us that they faced a variety of problems when they took the online exam.

Q.9. c. If yes, what kind of problems?

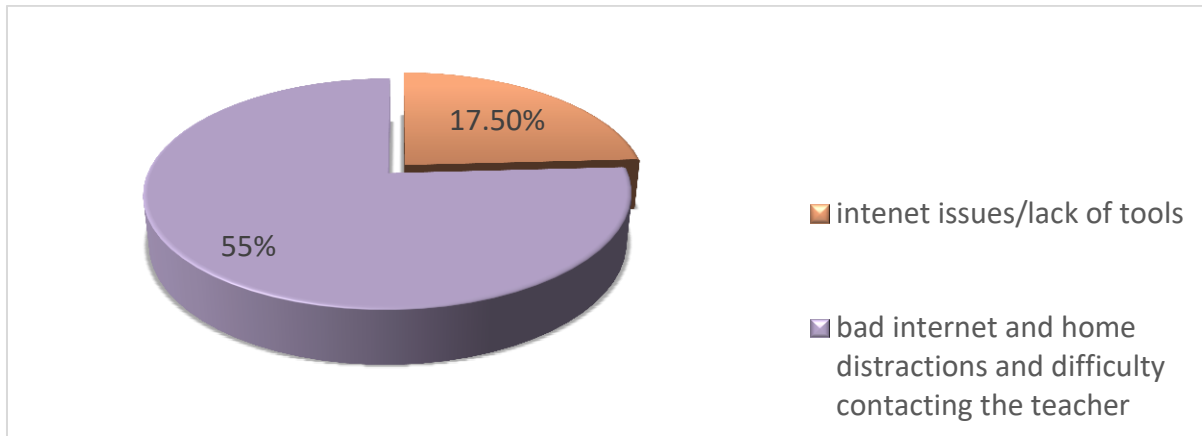


Figure2.9.c: Students' Different Problems when Sitting for Online Examinations.

This question allowed us to probe the problems that the students encountered when taking an online exam. Firstly, 17.5% of the informants could not take the exam at all because of the internet issues and inability to afford for the technological tools. Fortunately for them, the teacher accepted that they submit printed answers later on—which may put at stake the reliability of the exam. The remaining 55% of the sample faced a lot of problems which are summarized as follows:

Firstly, they suffered of bad internet services and home distractions like TV and the noise of children. Secondly, as it is mentioned above, accessing the e-platform to download lectures was impossible most of the time. Thirdly, and paradoxically the teacher uploaded the lessons to the e-learning platform after sitting for the examination. Fourthly, we could not contact the teachers or find their emails. Lastly, the teacher gave some of us the mark zero because our answers did not reach him.

Q.10.a. Are you for or against carrying on with distance teaching/learning at the Algerian universities in the future?

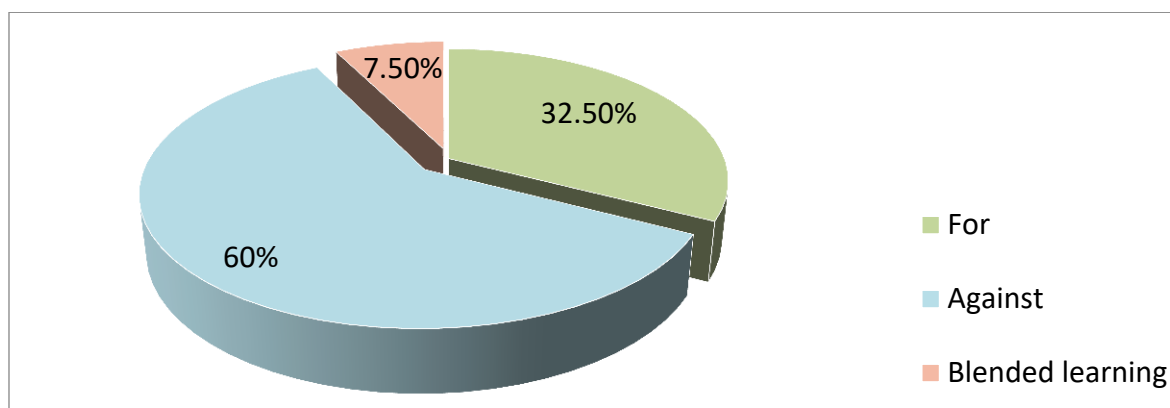


Figure 2.10: Students' Opinions about Carrying on with Online Teaching at Universities.

In this question, we asked the students if they are for or against continuing with the online teaching/learning process in the future even after the end of the Covid-19 period. The answers were varied. Precisely, 32% of the respondent like the idea of adopting distance learning in the future. Perhaps, they think that virtual learning has become necessary nowadays since it is used by the most known universities all over the world. Besides, it is believed that introducing technology to the educational system makes the learning process easier, more enjoyable and interesting. The electronic tools oblige some of the students to learn how to search for information and work independently. However, 60% of our sample had different opinions. For them, introducing internet based learning in education is a totally wrong decision.

Q.10. b. Justify your answer, please.

The students provided the following justifications for the above answers. They said that the explanation and the simplification of the teacher are primordial. For example, they found the linguistics lessons difficult without the teacher's help who can use simple language to deal with difficult notions. Classroom interaction can also help them practice the target language. Also, because not all the students have the necessary instruments and high internet services, some said that: "Algerian universities are not qualified enough to include technology in their

educational system.” Last but not least, 3 students (7.5%) preferred to keep the traditional ways and blend them with technology in order to give all students the opportunity to learn.

Overall, the analysis of the students’ questionnaire enabled us to understand their degree of readiness for learning at distance. Through the statistics and students’ answers, we have comprehended that EFL sophomores at Mila University Centre faced a lot of difficulties during distance learning. The sample showed that it is unfamiliar with the correspondence courses and that they mainly prefer classroom-based learning

2.6. The Teachers’ Questionnaire

2.6.1. Administration of the Teachers’ Questionnaire

The Teachers’ questionnaire is intended to explore their opinions about online learning. This questionnaire was printed and handed to 10 different English teachers.

2.6.2. Description of the Teachers’ Questionnaire

Like the students ‘questionnaire, the teachers’ one is also made up of five sections with an overall number of seven questions. Closed and open ended questions were used in every section.

Section One: Background Information. This section gives an overview of the teachers’ years of English teaching experience (Q-1).

Section Two: Distance Learning. The main reason behind this section is to investigate the teachers’ perceptions of the use of learning as a tool in the Department of Foreign Languages at Mila University Centre during the Coronavirus period. It comprises three questions (Q-2/ Q-3 /Q-4).

Section Three: Technical Issues. In this section, there is only one question (Q-5). We asked from the teachers to enumerate the challenges that they faced when teaching online.

Section Four: Online Evaluation. Just like section three, this section contains only one question (Q-6). It looks at teachers’ use of online means for evaluation process.

Section Five: Future Consideration. The last section of the questionnaire aims to explore the teachers' expectations about distance learning in the future (Q-7).

2.7. Analysis of the Teachers' Questionnaire

Q1: How many years have you been teaching English?

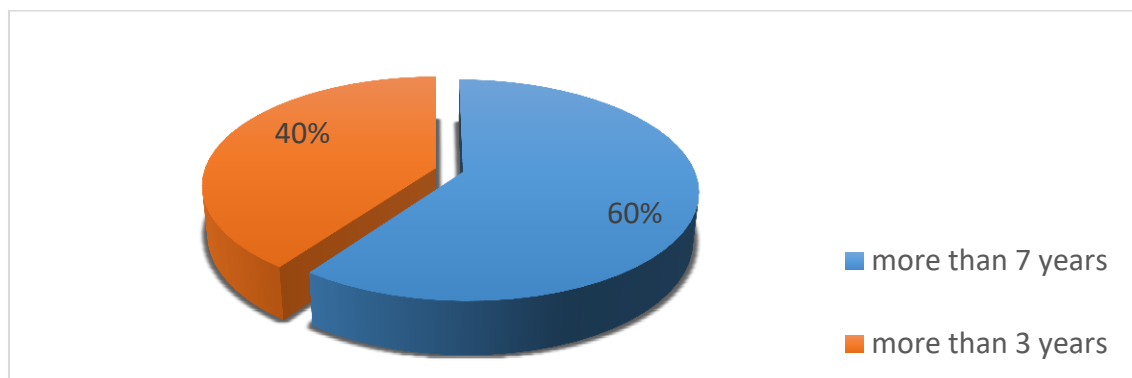


Figure 2.11: Teachers' English Teaching Years.

The first question in the teachers' questionnaire was about English language teaching experiences. Figure 2.11 shows that 60% of the participants are highly experienced in teaching English language with more than 7 years in the domain. Further, the remaining 40% of the teachers have been delivering English language lessons for more than 3 years; which is a relatively long period. That considerable expertise in teaching the English language enables the teachers to express their views about traditional vs distance learning as they experience both.

Q 2: As an instructor, what does distance learning mean for you?

Although each teacher gave his/her specific definition to distance learning, the majority of the answers showed a clear agreement that online learning is new way of teaching without face to face interaction. The following are some of the participants' points of view concerning this concept: "Not attending schools and universities", "Using internet by teachers and students", "It is the absence of teachers and presence of technology."

Other informants' emphasized the importance of constant contact between the teachers and the students as well as the necessity of availability of tools for both the sender and the receiver

for a better electronic communication. One of them said that: “It is a teacher-student communication via technological tools which requires the availability of those three elements.” However, two participants’ negative attitude toward virtual learning was clearly noticed through their responses. One among them declared that: “the atmosphere of distance learning and its requirements differ from traditional one. On this basis, I believe that it should be neglected.” In addition, the second teacher defined distance learning as a “useless way of teaching.”

Q 3: What tools did you use for distance teaching at this Department during the COVID-19 period?

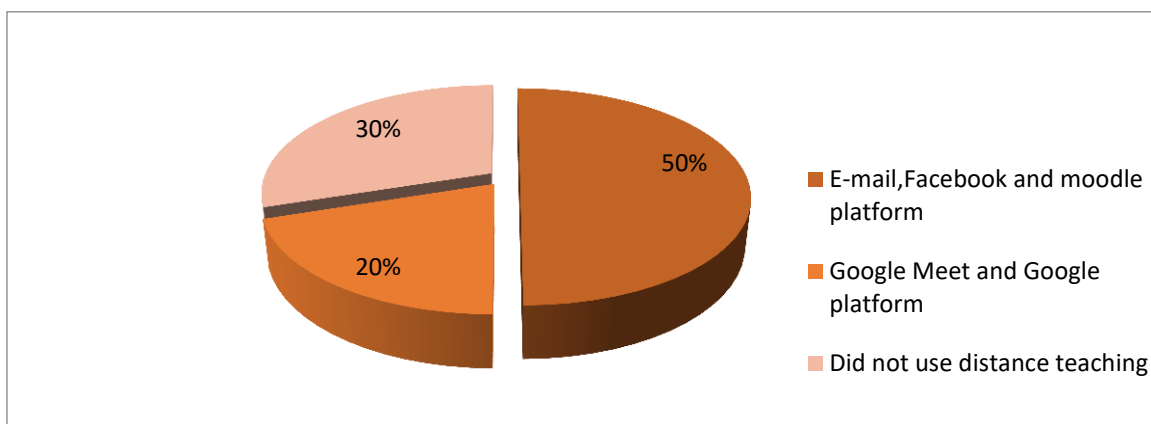


Figure 2.12: Teachers’ Use of Distance Tools.

This question was delivered to find out the tools used in communicating with the students. Half of the teachers (50%) said that they used to upload videos, audio files, pdf files and word documents moodle platform. They also send these materials to their students via e-mails and Facebook. Only 20% of the respondents confirm that they tried Google Meet application but it was not ideal. As a result, moodle platform was the only solution during Covid-19 period. Of note, three teachers (30%) did not use distance teaching at all.

Q 4: Are you for or against online teaching/learning?

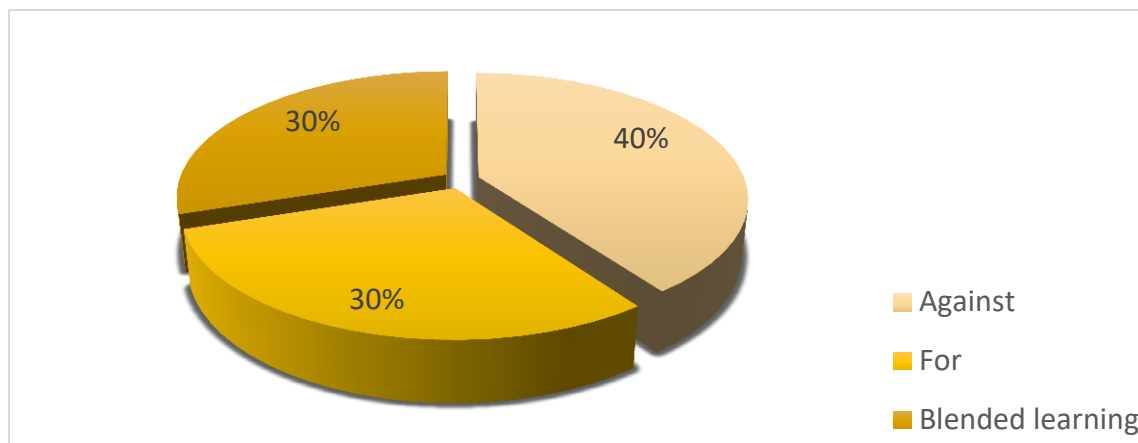


Figure 2.13: Teachers' Preferences towards Online Teaching/Learning.

Question 4 investigated teachers' points of view about whether they supported distance learning or not. From the figure 2.13, we noticed the following:

Many respondents (40%) were against virtual learning. For some teachers, it is totally inappropriate for our learners because they were unable to have full access to e-platform. Further, other teachers declared that a lot of students cannot understand by themselves; thus, teacher's presence can never be overlooked. Another reason behind refusing distance learning by some teachers was the lack of equipment. One teacher said that: "we are not equipped with the necessary tools for this type of learning. Poor internet connection and the students' results were amongst the familiar baffles that have made distance learning a failure." Only three teachers who constitute 30% supported online teaching. For them, internet-based learning is very promising since it facilitates the teaching /learning process and enables both sender and receiver to gain time. Another 30% of the sample did not select any option. They suggested that blended learning where virtual learning should be coupled with face to face teaching/learning is the best solution.

Q 5: What kind of challenges (pedagogical, administrative, logistic, technical, etc.) you, as a teacher, have faced during the period when distance teaching/learning has been advocated because of the COVID-19?

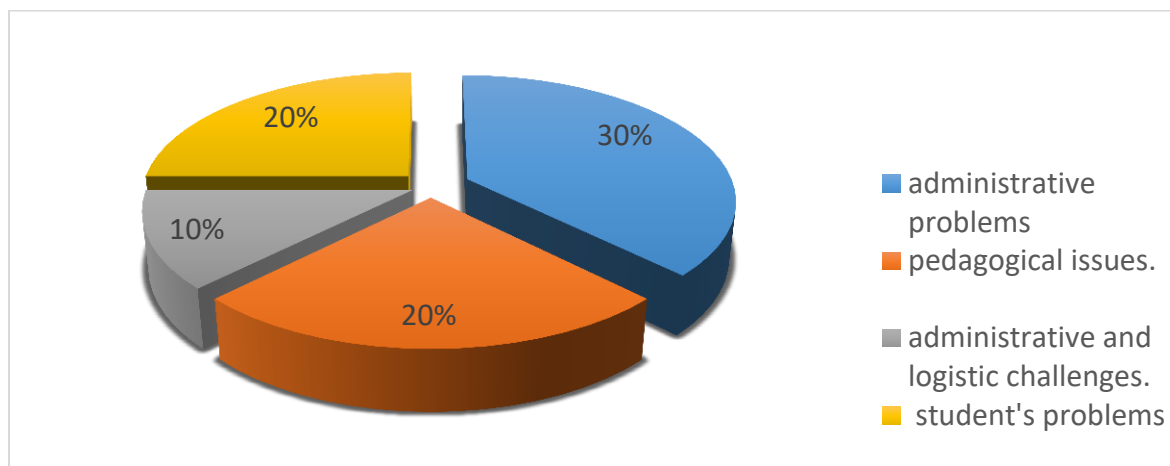


Figure 2.14: Teachers' Challenges when Using Distance Teaching.

According to the answers to this question, all the teachers affirmed that they faced several challenges, be they pedagogical, administrative, logistic, technical as well as students' problems. To start with, 30% of the teachers complained from the administrative problems. One teacher from this category stated that: "as a teacher, I could not get in touch with the administration because the given email address was wrong. Besides, less qualified administrative staff had mixed things for us." Another participant conducted that: "the administrative retard and waggle in announcing the online programmed sessions make all my preparations in vein." Moreover, 20% of the sample mentioned pedagogical issues. They thought that online assessment cannot be valid or reliable. Besides, the preparation of the lessons to be uploaded online was time consuming.

In addition to administrative and pedagogical challenges, computer illiteracy and internet poor quality were among the technical hindrances which 20% of the teachers faced. Only one teacher (10%) put it explicitly; he/she wrote that: «I faced administrative and logistic

challenges.” The remaining 20% of the participants’ referred to students’ unreadiness to receive the content electronically. One teacher literally said that: “Students’ lack of motivation because of internet problems as well as their being declined to virtual learning environment makes this new way of learning useless.”

Q 6. a. Have you tried online assessment so far?

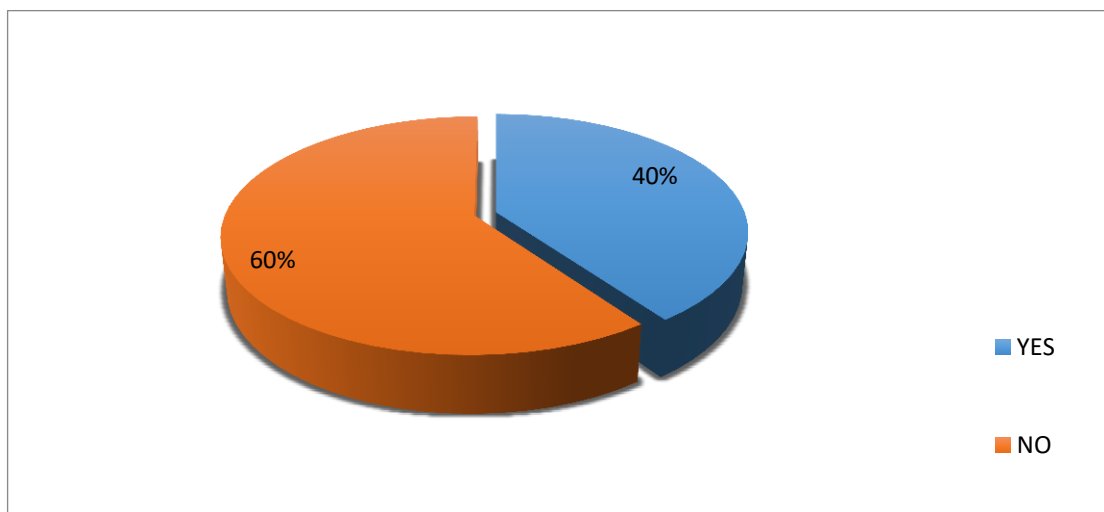


Figure 2.15.a: Teachers’ Online Assessment.

Figure 2.15 shows that 40% of the teachers answered “yes”; they tried the online assessment. However, the majority of them (60%) selected “No” as a response.

Q 6. b. Are you for or against online assessment? Why?

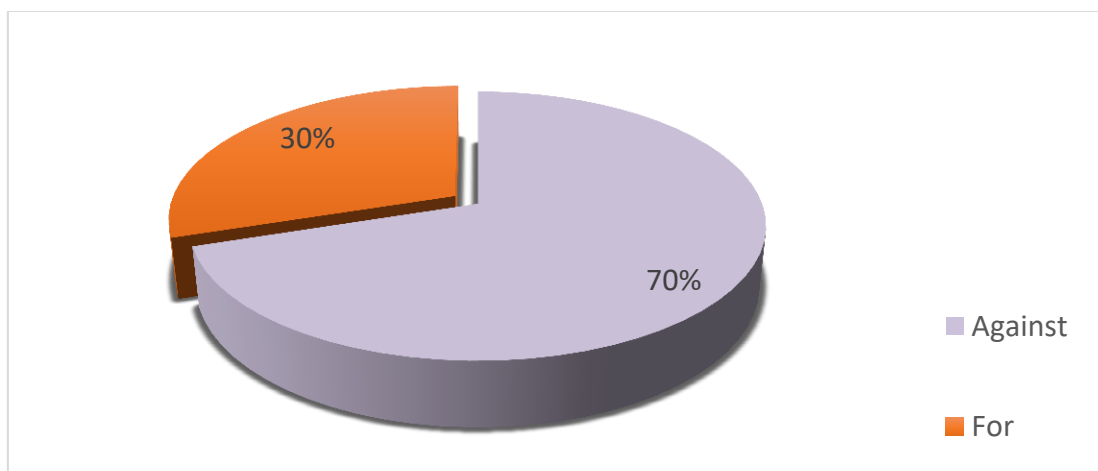


Figure 2.15.b: Teachers’ Perceptions of Online Assessment.

It was found that 70% of the respondents were against online assessment. One of the teachers said that: “online assessment is not as valid and reliable as the normal assessment. Plus, it gives a chance to students to cheat either directly or indirectly.” Another teacher argued that: “online assessment is not reliable because the learners can find the answers easily and they don’t respect it. Also, answering such skills requires face to face interaction to check certain elements.” Two teachers confirmed that both teachers and learners are not qualified enough for this modern methodology as well as we cannot judge the students’ level virtually. On the other hand, just 3 teachers were in favour of distance assessment. Precisely, 20% of them liked it because it demands less time and efforts. One teacher (10%) wrote that: “teaching students online without being able of testing them at distance is only part of the transformations to the digital.”

Q 7: Upon reflecting on your experience of using distance learning in our department, do you think online learning should be maintained, adapted or abandoned in the future? Elaborate, please.

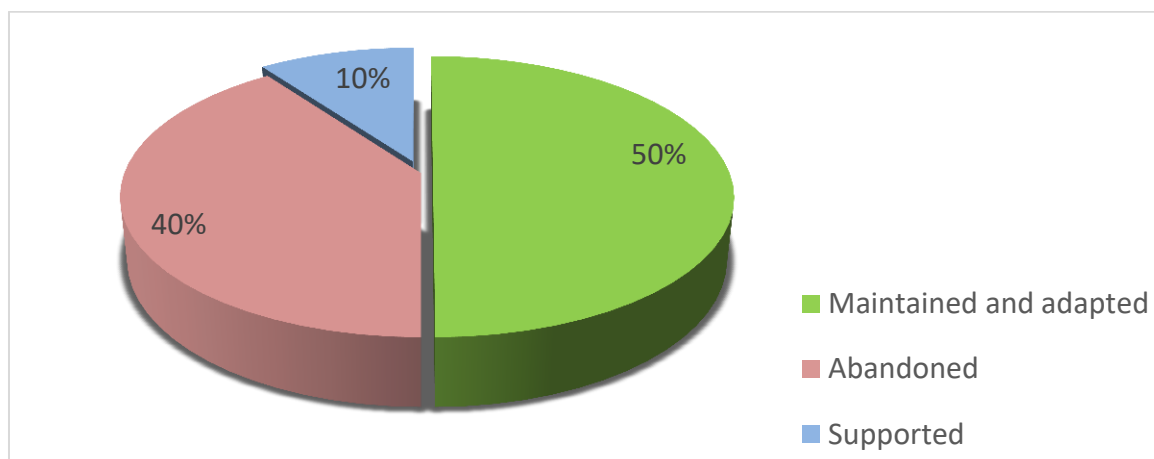


Figure 2.16: Teachers’ Distance Learning Future Considerations.

Half of the sample (50%) thought that distance learning should be maintained at first then adapted. One of the teachers’ responses was that: “including technology in learning is necessary and possible, but it should be adapted by making up for the limitations of the connection”. Another answer by another teacher went as such: “because all over the world

people use technology in everything, we should increase students' awareness of online learning before we adopt it." Some teachers (40%) preferred to abandon learning from home and keep working with traditional teaching. This choice came as a response to their unfruitful experience. The last 10% supported internet based teaching because it was already beneficial for them.

All in all, the teachers' questionnaire aimed to investigate whether or not EFL learners are ready for distance learning at Mila University Centre during the pandemic period. Through the analysis, we concluded that the majority of them prefer coming back to traditional ways of delivering lessons in order to remedy what virtual learning has messed up. That is to say, most of the teachers upon reflecting on their experiences of using electronic learning in our Department found that it is useless and time-consuming. As a result, online learning can be adopted only if all students are equipped with the necessary materials and are made aware of its importance.

2.8. Discussion of the Results

This section discusses the main results of the current study which are obtained from the analysis of both the teachers' and the students' questionnaires.

2.8.1. Discussion of the Results of the Students' Questionnaire

The analysis of the students' questionnaire set out to provide a picture of EFL sophomore's preparedness for distance learning during the coronavirus pandemic. The questionnaire was conducted with 40 EFL students at Mila University Centre; they were selected randomly. The results showed that the majority of the learners have faced a number of problems when they experienced distance learning. Among these difficulties are: accessing Mila e-learning platform, getting in touch with the teachers and administration, lack of experience in using information technology tools, poor internet services, and limited budget to buy technological devices like laptops and cell phones.

As afore-mentioned, the students' questionnaire contains five sections. The first section of the questionnaire showed that the participants' age ranges between 19 and 21 which mean that they belong to the same generation; they go through, more or less, the same experiences and face the same obstacles. As they are still young, they may find new things (online learning) exciting. Thus, all the students' answers do not vary widely from each other. Additionally, the findings also revealed that a huge proportion of the participants are females, which might bias our results. Hence, we call for investigating gender differences, if any, in the use of virtual learning in future projects.

The purpose of the analysis of the second part was to deduce whether or not students possess the required devices, software and IT knowledge to cope with distance learning. The obtained data showed that most of the students suffered from bad internet services, lack of digital tools and limited budget to earn such requirements. Hence, since that the students were not well-equipped with these necessities; we can say that online learning was not the useful solution for them and that they struggled with their learning during the Covid-19 period.

In the third section, we asked EFL sophomores about their preferences and their suitable way of learning. The results uncovered that the majority of them were more inclined towards the traditional mode of learning. On the basis of that, we deduced that the students are aware about the importance of the teachers' role in: managing the classroom, giving feedback, and organizing the cooperative work inside classes. We also realized that perhaps they depend a lot on the teacher in their learning and that their autonomy is limited. Actually, these are not the only possible interpretations. Probably, those results hint to the fact that the sample is not accustomed yet to distance learning and that more time is needed so that it secures grounds in it.

Section four, in the questionnaire, shed light on the obstacles the students faced when taking online exams. In fact, the results ensured that added to the previous problems are

computer illiteracy and the unavailability of the electronic learning platform. This is obvious and more than that it is natural since that this is the first time the sample experiences online testing. It is only after an accumulation of similar experiences that the students will feel confident, comfortable and more prepared for electronic assessment.

Finally, a large number of the participants were against the continuity of virtual learning. From their answers, we confirmed that EFL students rely much more on the teachers as a primary source of knowledge since they help them know their weaknesses and avoid making the same mistakes. In general, from the statistics and the students' answers, we understood that EFL sophomores at Mila University Centre show their unreadiness to learn at distances. Their discontent from the lack of materials was clearly manifested. Only few participants were satisfied with their distance learning because they were autonomous learners. This also means that the students still need more preparation especially in terms of logistics and computer literacy.

2.8.2. Discussion of the Results of the Teachers' Questionnaire

Like the analysis of the students' questionnaire that of the teachers' questionnaire provided an x-ray of the latter's perceptions of EFL sophomores' preparedness for distance learning during the specific circumstances of Covid-19. This questionnaire was carried out with ten randomly selected EFL teachers at Mila University Centre.

As mentioned previously, the teachers' questionnaire contains five parts. The first one aimed at obtaining general background information about teachers' years of English teaching experience. The data illustrated that all of those teachers have enough experience in teaching English. Certainly, they benefitted from this experience in their evaluation of the implementation of a new mode of learning and its comparison with the traditional one.

The second part of the questionnaire is designed to explore how EFL teachers perceive distance learning. The results show that some teachers were ready to teach online

while others did not like it at all because for them students' unpreparedness from all angles hindered the teaching learning process. From this section we realized that to render teaching a successful endeavour, preparedness of both teachers and students is required.

The purpose behind the third part of the teachers' questionnaire was to know what kind of challenges that they faced during electronic teaching. The findings indicated that the majority of the participants struggled with pedagogical, administrative, logistic and technical problems. Thus, we can legitimately conclude that the Department of Foreign Languages at Mila university Centre was neither qualified nor prepared enough to switch from face-to-face instruction to internet-based learning.

Last but not least, section four investigates the teachers' opinions about online evaluation. The results suggested that most teachers were against virtual assessment because it may not reflect the students' exact level and opens room for cheating. On that basis, teachers recommend the return to traditional assessment.

To cut the long story short, the majority of teachers agreed that web-based learning should not be maintained in the future, unless it is adapted. As a result, we call the administration to provide the equipment, fix the e-learning platform and provide some IT training for both teachers and learners on how to handle electronic education. All stakeholders need to go with distance learning slowly but surely.

In their entirety, the findings make it clear that most of the learners have encountered several problems when dealing with online learning. The teachers think that we are not yet prepared for this kind of education and that more work is to be done in this area.

2.9. Implications of the Study

Undoubtedly, the findings of this study are of paramount importance. They have implications at the level of the administration not only of the English Department but also that of the University. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is also involved.

All of them must be aware of the problems delineated in this dissertation; they are the challenges that learners and teachers have faced so far and they need to be addressed in order to provide better conditions for the implementation of electronic education.

2.10. Limitations of the Study

During the current work, we have faced a number of limitations which can be stated as follow. First, due to the unstable situation of the pandemic (Covid-19) and the unpredictability of any probable shut down at any moment, our research was based on only one type of data collection tools, the questionnaire. However, we devised two questionnaires: one for teachers and one for students. Besides, the procedure of recruiting participants was complicated since that the administration decided to organize studies according to the batches system. Thus, we took three weeks to gather 40 responses on the part of students. In addition, the frequent strikes at our university prevented us from conducting the teachers' questionnaire as earlier as possible. In reality, we could barely balance between finishing the first semester interrogations and examinations and carrying out this study. In other words, time constraints were at play all throughout the entire work. Besides, because the sample is made up of 90% of females, we recommend conducting other studies with more homogeneous samples in terms of gender. This is due to the belief that males are more inclined towards technology than females. In case this is true, the results of this study might be biased. Furthermore, to obtain more generalizable findings, we think that further studies with larger samples should be put on the research agenda.

2.11. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the analysis of the teachers' and students' questionnaires, some recommendations are necessary to make distance learning successful and properly implemented.

a. Recommendations for Teachers

- Teachers can create an environment in which both they and their students feel empowered for remote teaching and learning. For example, they can organize an online session through video-conferencing once per month in order to offer practice for this type of education. Both teachers and students can seize such opportunities to deal with all types of pedagogical or logistic problems that may rise.

- Teachers should assign time before hand for live questions and answers in a scheduled live lecture in which students who attend can give immediate reaction towards the content.

- Teachers may create slides to enable students to follow.

- Teachers should encourage students to learn more about informatics and computer use. At initial steps, the teachers may choose easy and concise lessons.

b. Recommendations for Learners

- Students and their families need to start to prepare places at home far distractions to ensure the success of the online learning process when required.

- Students must take part in all the activities during the online sessions.

- Students must connect with classmates and teachers for asking for and sharing information.

- Students need to seek help from teachers or friends if they have issues with distance communication, with the electronic platform or with the lessons uploaded to it.

- Students must show as much commitment towards distance learning as the one they have toward face-to-face learning.

c. Recommendations for the Administration

- The administration has to recruit qualified engineer to manage well the E-learning platform.
- The administration has to fix the electronic platform technical problems as soon as possible, and facilitate the logging in process.
- The administration must announce the online sessions well ahead so that the learners get prepared.
- The administration must boost the internet connection inside the university.

d. Recommendations for the Government

- The government should solve the problem of the lack of electronic tools by starting internet clubs at the universities and the students' residency halls. It can also allot a budget to help students purchase their own tools like tablets or digital phones. Besides, it can sign conventions with telecommunication companies to let students benefit from broadband for free.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodology, data analysis and results yielded by this research. We have noticed from the results of the questionnaires of both teachers and students that EFL sophomores at Abd Elhafid Boussouf University in Mila have negative attitudes towards distance learning. Most of them show their unwillingness to achieve learning through the use of the internet. Lack of instruments and poor internet connection made most students less motivated to learn. These views are echoed in the teachers' questionnaire. It was remarked, also, that only few participants indicated that they were well equipped with high internet connection and multiple technological tools such as cell phones, laptops and desktop computers to learn online. Overall, our learners seem to be not prepared yet for e-Learning.

General Conclusion

Given the special circumstances that the whole world went through because of Covid-19 pandemic, the total shut down touched the educational institutions. This situation left no alternative but to, suddenly, opt for electronic education at the Algerian universities. The question that must be posed: were EFL students prepared for online learning? The present research aims to provide a detailed picture of EFL sophomores' degree of preparedness for distance learning during the Corona virus pandemic at Mila University Centre.

This work consists of two chapters, one chapter for the literature review and a second one that dealt with the research methodology. To start with, the literature review is divided into two sections which are: distance learning and EFL sophomores preparedness for digital learning, respectively. The practical chapter presents the analysis and interpretations of the collected data.

This descriptive study was conducted following a mixed method design as we obtained quantitative and qualitative data from two questionnaires which were conducted with 40 learners and ten teachers at the Department of Foreign Languages. After the analysis of the gathered data, it became crystal clear that both of the teachers and students are not ready yet to shift to online learning; they are still more accustomed to the traditional classrooms. Indeed, they face a multiplicity of technical and logistic problems. Obviously, a number of implications and recommendations were volunteered at the end of this dissertation.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Students' Questionnaire

Dear students

We, Master two EFL students, would like to ask you to answer the following questionnaire which is part of our dissertation entitled *EFL sophomores preparedness for distance learning*. This questionnaire aims to investigate whether or not the students are prepared for using distance learning tools when learning EFL at Mila University Centre during the pandemic period.

Section One: Background Information

1. Age: ...

2. Gender:

a- Male

b- Female

Section Two: Technical Preparedness for Learning

3. What does distance learning mean for you?

.....
.....

4. Do you have any technological tool like digital phones, laptops and desktop computers that helps you to learn online?

a- If yes, what is it?.....

b-If no, why?.....

5. a. Do you have internet sources at home or at your University?

a- Yes b- No

5.b. Explain:

6. a. Do you find any difficulties in using the digital tools in your online learning this year?

a- Yes b- No

6.b.Explain:

Section Three: Preparedness for the Distance Learning Process

7. a. Do you prefer distance learning or face to face learning?

a- distance learning b-Face to face learning

7. b. if distance learning is it because:

a. less time and money are spent in/on transportation?

b. of the flexibility of accessing to lessons at any time?

c. learning is more enjoyable and effective?

d. it provides more independence?

e. it provides more learner autonomy?

f. other:

7. c. If you prefer face to face learning, is it because:

a. you like the interaction between the teacher and the learner?

b. you need the teacher's feedback?

c. you understand more when the teacher uses body language?

d. you like to work cooperatively with your classmates?

e. other

8. a. Is Distance learning as effective as classroom learning?

a-Yes b- No

8.b.Why?.....
.....

Section 4: Preparedness for Online Assessment

9. a. Does the Department of Foreign Languages/teachers require you to sit for online examinations?

a- Yes b- No

9. b. If yes, have you faced any problems in that?

A-Yes b- No

9. c. If yes, what kind of problems?

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.....

Section 5: Future Considerations

10. a. Are you for or against carrying on with distance teaching/learning at Algerian universities in the future?

a- For

b- Against

10. b. Justify your answer, please.

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.....

Thank you very much!

Appendix II: Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teachers,

This questionnaire is designed to investigate whether second year EFL learners at our Department are prepared to learn virtually or not. It would be a great pleasure if you could help us by answering the following questions. Your answers would be a rich source of data for our investigation. Certainly, they will be treated as confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Section One: Background Information

1. How many years have you been teaching English?

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Section Two: Distance Learning

2. As an instructor, what does distance learning mean for you?

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3. How did you use distance teaching at this Department during the Corona virus19 period?

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4. a. Are you for or against online teaching/learning?

a- For

b- Against

4. b. Why

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.....

Section Three: Technical Issues

5. What kind of challenges (pedagogical, administrative, logistic, technical, etc.) you, as a teacher, have faced during the period when distance teaching/learning has been advocated because of the Corona virus19?

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Section Four: Online Evaluation

6. a. Have you tried online assessment so far?

a-Yes b- No

6. b. Are you for or against online assessment?

a- for b-against

6. c. why?

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.....

Section Five: Future Considerations

7. Upon reflecting on your experience of using distance learning in our Department, do you think it should be maintained, adapted or abandoned in the future? Elaborate, please.

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Thank you very much!

Résumé

La présente étude vise à étudier la préparation des étudiants de deuxième année d'anglais à l'apprentissage à distance. Dans cette recherche, nous avons exploré dans quelle mesure les étudiants de deuxième année d'anglais au Centre Universitaire de Mila sont préparés à l'apprentissage en ligne. L'échantillon de cette étude était composé de quarante étudiants sur 219 qui forment l'ensemble de la population. Afin de connaître la perception des étudiants sur l'utilisation de la technologie dans l'apprentissage, cette étude descriptive exploratoire a utilisé deux questionnaires : un pour les enseignants et un autre pour les apprenants. Les résultats ont démontré la réticence des étudiants à recevoir des cours en ligne. Les données recueillies ont clairement défini que l'absence d'enseignant, le manque d'équipement et la mauvaise connexion Internet font partie des obstacles qui ont empêché la majorité des apprenants de terminer leurs cours virtuellement. En outre, l'analyse du questionnaire des enseignants a montré que la minorité de l'échantillon aime dispenser des cours en ligne. Cependant, la plupart des enseignants étaient contre cette nouvelle forme d'apprentissage car elle est distrayante et prend du temps. Enfin, les implications et les limites de l'étude ont été discutées et des suggestions pour d'autres recherches ont été proposées.

Les mots clés : Les étudiants d'anglais, l'apprentissage en ligne, le degré de la préparation des étudiants

المخلص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى اكتشاف مدى استعداد طلبة الليسانس لغة إنجليزية بالمركز الجامعي ميلة للتعليم عن بعد، حيث تتألف عينة هذا البحث من أربعين طالبًا من أصل 219 وهو العدد الاجمالي لطلبة السنة الثانية تخصص لغة انجليزية بالقسم. فمن أجل معرفة مدى تقبل الطلبة للدراسة عن بعد عن طريق الاعتماد الكلي للتكنولوجيا، تم انتهاج استبيانين: أحدهما للمعلمين (عشرة معلمين) والثاني للمتعلمين. وقد أظهرت النتائج ان معظم الطلبة أبدوا عدم جاهزيتهم المادية والمعلوماتية في تلقي الدروس عبر المنصات الالكترونية. حيث حددت البيانات بوضوح أن غياب المعلم ونقص المعدات وضعف الاتصال بالإنترنت من بين أبرز التحديات التي عرقلت مسار العملية التعليمية. كما أظهر تحليل استبيان المعلمين أيضا أن الأقلية من المدرسين أبدوا إعجابهم بمزايا التكنولوجيا في تسهيل عملية التدريس دون مشقة التنقل اليومي إلى الجامعة. إلا أن غالبية المعلمين يعارضون الطريقة الجديدة للتعليم بسبب انعدام الامكانيات ولكونها مصدر إلهاء و مضيعة للوقت بالنسبة للطلبة. في الأخير، تمت عرض توصيات الدراسة وتقديم اقتراحات لإنجاز بحوث مستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم عن بعد، جاهزية الطلبة، طلبة سنة ثانية لغة إنجليزية