

Exploring Online Learning in University: Bridging the Gap between Practice and Perception

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the impact of implementing a hybrid training system in language teaching at Algerian universities during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research aims to understand students' perceptions and satisfaction and the effect of distance learning on their learning process. The methodology employed in this study is a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. A survey was conducted with 200 third-year students majoring in French Language and Literature, using online questionnaires and interviews to collect data on their experiences with the hybrid training system. Data analysis was performed using descriptive methods and content analysis. The study results indicate that 68% of students reported satisfaction with the hybrid training system, primarily due to the flexibility and variety of learning media. However, 23% of students complained about poor internet connection quality, and another 22% faced technical limitations such as a lack of devices. Overall, students appreciated the availability of instructors to answer questions online and provide prompt feedback. The implications of this study suggest that hybrid training has great potential to enhance the quality of language teaching in the digital era, although technical challenges still need to be addressed. The findings of this research can be used to develop more effective and adaptive training programs and to improve technical infrastructure to better support hybrid training in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic in Algeria, as elsewhere in the world, has led to significant economic, political, and social disruptions. Algeria implemented urgent measures to manage the crisis across various sectors to address these challenges, particularly in higher education and scientific research ([Kerras & Eddine Salhi, 2021](#)). One critical adaptation was the shift from face-to-face to online courses to ensure the continuity of educational activities ([Zermane & Aitouche, 2020](#)). This transition underscored digital technology's profound impact on university teaching and optimizing the teaching/learning process, especially in foreign language education ([Ahmed & Opoku, 2022](#); [Cole et al., 2021](#)).

Algerian universities are now adopting a hybrid training model, combining online and face-to-face instruction. This shift presents challenges for both students and teachers. Students must adapt to new content structures designed to develop various skills, including cross-disciplinary ones. Teachers need

support transitioning traditional teaching methods to digital formats using available resources and skills ([Almahasees et al., 2021](#); [Khaldi & Aissaoui, 2022](#)). To facilitate this transition, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has introduced in-service training programs to foster "active teaching and digital culture." These initiatives anticipated new ministerial regulations requiring all courses to be delivered in hybrid form starting in 2023, offering students the choice between online and face-to-face learning. Additionally, the "0 paper Policy" encourages the exclusive use of digital tools.

This study aims to evaluate the impact of hybrid training in language teaching at Algerian universities during the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on students' perceptions and satisfaction and the effects of distance learning on their educational process. By understanding these dynamics, we hope to bridge the gap between practice and perception in online learning, improving the design and implementation of hybrid training programs. We will address critical questions about the perceptions and experiences of both teaching staff and students involved in this e-learning system, seeking to understand the real impact of distance learning on student outcomes.

To conduct this evaluation, we employed a mixed-methods approach, drawing on studies related to digital tools, distance learning platforms, and techno-pedagogy. Our investigation involved third-year students majoring in French Language and Literature, assessing their experiences and feedback through qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings will provide insights into the challenges and benefits of hybrid training, guiding future improvements in language education in the digital era.

METHODS

Research Design

The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach to answer these questions, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques ([Leavy, 2022](#)). This methodology enables a comprehensive evaluation of the hybrid learning experience by capturing numerical data and detailed participant insights. Quantitative data was gathered through online questionnaires, allowing for statistical analysis of student satisfaction and the perceived effectiveness of the hybrid system. Concurrently, qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews, providing a nuanced understanding of individual experiences and challenges faced by students. By combining these methods, we ensured a robust analysis that addresses the students' measurable outcomes and personal perspectives, thereby offering a holistic view of the impact of hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Participants

The study was conducted with 200 third-year students majoring in French Language and Literature at an Algerian university. These students were selected because they were enrolled in a hybrid training program that combined online and face-to-face instruction, making them ideal candidates for evaluating the effectiveness of such a system. The participants were divided into six groups, each following a cross-curricular unit module designed to prepare and design a university research project. This division allowed for a structured and systematic approach to data collection, ensuring that a diverse range of experiences and perspectives were captured. The hybrid training program aimed to blend the flexibility and accessibility of online learning with the interactive and engaging aspects of in-person instruction, providing a comprehensive learning environment for the students.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a combination of online questionnaires and interviews to ensure a thorough understanding of the students' experiences with hybrid learning. The questionnaires were designed to include both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing for the collection of quantitative data on students' satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of the hybrid training program and qualitative data on their personal experiences and challenges. To complement the survey data, interviews were conducted with a subset of students, providing an opportunity to delve deeper into their perceptions and satisfaction with the hybrid learning model. These interviews offered rich, detailed insights into how students navigated the hybrid system, perceived benefits, and encountered obstacles.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using descriptive methods, and content analysis was performed to examine the collected information thoroughly. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis, which facilitated the identification of trends and patterns in students' responses regarding their satisfaction and experiences with the hybrid learning system. This statistical approach allowed for a precise measurement of general sentiment and the prevalence of specific issues or benefits associated with the hybrid format. Concurrently, the interview's qualitative data underwent content analysis, which involved systematically coding and categorizing the responses to uncover key themes and insights. This method provided a deeper understanding of the nuanced experiences of individual students, revealing intricate details about their perceptions, challenges, and the overall impact of the hybrid learning environment.

RESULTS

Training Methods: Technical Conditions and Training Environment

Digital Accessibility

In this section, we describe the hybrid learning experiences of the students in our study, with a particular focus on the technical means and techno-pedagogical resources utilized. It allows us to evaluate the readiness of Algerian universities for implementing hybrid systems. Notably, for 90% of the students, the first wave of Covid-19 marked their initial experience with distance learning. These students were more accustomed to distance learning by the second academic year. This familiarity positioned them well to assess the new environment, which differs significantly from face-to-face teaching. When assessing students' adaptation and interaction with digital technology, 90% of the students surveyed had no reservations.

Regarding digital accessibility, 23% of students expressed dissatisfaction with the poor quality of their internet connection, compared to 48% who rated it as average, 21% as good, and only 18% as excellent. However, by using the Moodle application on smartphones rather than the platform itself, as well as instant messaging and Facebook publications—where students can connect free of charge with certain "zero connection" telephone operators—students did not complain significantly about connection speed issues when consulting or downloading courses. They often took screenshots using their smartphones and participated in tests and activities such as questionnaires and surveys on social networks without the quality of their connection affecting their practice.

From a teaching perspective, managing interruptions and interference caused by connection issues is often lost. Consequently, building knowledge is sometimes paused due to slow connection speeds. The instability of internet coverage can occasionally hinder the continuity of distance learning, affecting the dissemination of knowledge and posting of course and activity materials online.

These results indicate that internet connectivity, an essential tool for disseminating digital content, is unsatisfactory for a few respondents. However, only 22% of learners had problems accessing technical teaching materials. These students expressed a lack of resources (personal computers, tablets, and others.), making it challenging to complete distance learning tasks such as writing presentations, reading sheets, and summary sheets. They also faced difficulties accessing the internet. However, when it came to consulting courses and accessing the platform via the ministry-developed application, this did not negatively impact the course, given that most students have smartphones.

Training Applications and Software

Adopting hybrid learning as a teaching method requires consideration of several parameters, primarily digital resources, to ensure effective distance learning transmission. Regarding the digital applications and software used for training, the choice is limited compared to the diversity of available digital tools. In our context, the selection is primarily based on availability and ease of use. The tools most used and appreciated by students include email for sending work and contacting teachers, which is used by 33% of students. Facebook and Messenger are utilized by 67% of students for consulting publications and discussions with teachers and students in closed groups. Video conferences via Google Meet or Zoom are used by 43% of students to attend courses, and the Moodle platform is employed by 38% to download digitized documents such as handouts and articles and to complete activities. Among the surveyed students, 67% expressed satisfaction with using distance learning tools. They found

Facebook effective for sharing training documents, and both synchronous (webinars, videoconferences) and asynchronous (email, messaging, YouTube) means of communication and collaboration effective for course dissemination.

Despite this, students still encounter technical difficulties, particularly with the Moodle platform. They report having trouble understanding how the e-learning platform works, locating courses, and downloading them. It contrasts with the ease of accessing documents on social networks. Pedagogically, some students faced difficulties completing assignments. Approximately 33% reported struggling to understand long documents in PDF or Word format, compared to 15% who found it challenging to understand videos and 42% who had difficulties expressing themselves orally and in writing and selecting the most appropriate editorial program. It suggests a discrepancy between the activities' adaptation to the platform and social networks used for distance learning. While students may lack the skills required to follow distance courses, they adeptly use various digital tools. Frequently using tablets and smartphones alongside social networks and applications makes them better equipped to follow courses and complete assignments on these devices than on a platform or computer. Students also believe these tools enhance their learning by providing better access to information and knowledge sharing.

Teaching Component: Modular Structuring of Courses

The evaluation, of course, content organization aimed to enable learners to build personalized paths according to their needs, profiles, and learning paces. Approximately 68% of the students' perceptions of the teaching methods referred to 'explicit teaching.' Testimonies from interviews highlighted several key points, such as students finding that the courses and the approach aligned with their interests and knowledge levels. They appreciated the structured approach, which enabled them to identify their strengths and weaknesses immediately. Compared to classroom lessons, students felt that online lessons allowed them to get straight to the point. Breaking down the lessons into different formats and recording them for review helped students understand better and avoid forgetting the content. The clear, well-explained project stages assisted students in organizing and visualizing the different stages involved in writing and conducting university research. The organization of the distance learning course and the weekly activities proposed by the teacher encouraged students to establish a work routine and increased their motivation to work from home.

The added value of blended learning for our study population is clear: students are satisfied with the form and content of the courses. The proposed system successfully supported students in their synchronous and asynchronous progress. Students felt that the teaching method provided freedom in their learning and personal organization, allowing them to watch video content at their convenience to understand better or review the material. The well-structured teaching scenario, with segmented content in various formats, was greatly appreciated by several students. Ensuring active student involvement was also positively received, as the proposed activities encouraged interaction and collaborative work, such as creating monitoring and progress sheets or knowledge maps.

Face-to-face training, conducted every two weeks for three hours, was also integral to the course. Students commented that the hybrid method got them involved and enabled them to discuss their projects with other students in class, which was very helpful. They felt that the hybrid format of the course made their learning more effective and interactive, allowing them to progress steadily when working in groups in class. Knowing the lessons in advance, step by step with the teacher, helped them understand what to expect in class by following the steps. Group activities in class made the sessions less tedious and more dynamic. The precise structure of the online course made the work come naturally at home and then in class.

These comments highlight the importance of clear course organization and structuring and establishing a routine that encourages independent work. The hybrid structure of the course makes it easier to direct content before the session and thoughtfully consider questions to be developed in class. Announcing that sessions are dedicated to the practice and questions encourage students to participate actively and dynamically in their learning.

Mediatization of Materials and Activities

The activities and supports aimed to help learners identify and acquire learning strategies appropriate to their profiles, using multiple references to confront their representations with those of others. Regarding the added value of course materials and activities offered in distance learning for students' autonomy, 68% of students' representations highlighted several key benefits. They noted that "on the Internet, the wealth of different media helped me understand better." Additionally, students appreciated the availability of multiple formats for the same content, as exemplified by one student's comment: "If I had trouble reading a document, there was another PPT file available on Facebook or Moodle that summarized things better in diagrams, as well as video conferences with the teacher." The appeal of interactive elements was also emphasized, with another student stating, "This teaching, where I used video conferences, was more attractive to me." Furthermore, using technical sheets was crucial for maintaining a structured learning process, as one student expressed: "Using technical sheets was important for me to follow the course in a structured way." These insights collectively underscore the significant role of diverse and well-organized materials in enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning.

Students explained that the activities and materials proposed by the teacher were engaging and motivating, enabling them to participate in the requested activities. Student satisfaction was linked to the various activities and the range of learning materials available on the Moodle platform. Additionally, artificial intelligence tools like Quizbot.com, Getquiz, and Wizardo.com were used to develop different training and assessment activities.

However, the system was not universally appreciated. Some students complained about the lack of information transmission during face-to-face courses. One student remarked, "The blended learning system does not entirely convince me." Others echoed this sentiment, expressing a desire for more comprehensive lessons: "The videos are very well done, and the exercises help assimilate the material, but I'd prefer the lessons not to be just question and answer sessions and for more information on different methodologies to be given." Additionally, there was a call for incorporating traditional assessment methods: "I'd have liked to have had some face-to-face assessment activities as well." These comments suggest that teachers should strike a balance by providing more opportunities to explain content in face-to-face lessons, even if only as a reminder.

Evaluation and Self-assessment

In analyzing the quality of online assessment, we noted that 78% of students' responses focused more on the quick and easy online exchange between teaching partners during assessment than on the types of activities themselves. It considerably reduced the distance and enabled better monitoring and continuous assessment of students.

Students highlighted several positive aspects of the distance learning system. They noted that their teacher was "much more available to answer our questions at a distance than in person," which increased their motivation as they felt "well guided and corrected in real-time." The prompt responses to their questions allowed them to "make good progress and rectify mistakes" quickly. Group support on platforms like Facebook and Messenger, where "all questions are never left unanswered," further motivated students to improve continuously. The quick feedback on corrections encouraged them to "keep working," and activities after each lesson helped them "evaluate themselves easily and get the results quickly," facilitating faster learning and correcting mistakes. Students also appreciated that the system was "rewarding and motivating," knowing there was "an output at the end of each objective" rather than just preparing for exams. Additionally, "little exercises and Kahoots" were valuable tools for assessing their understanding, helping them identify areas they had mastered and those that needed further attention.

Students appreciated the dynamic and varied assessment activities and the regular, dynamic exchange with the teacher. The various assessment activities, including practical projects, case studies, predefined criteria, and writing standards, ensured comprehensive assessments, enabling students to demonstrate their skills concretely, comply with research standards, and develop critical reflection on their progress. Data from the Moodle platform indicated positive developments, with students regularly logging on to the course area, viewing all content weekly and often multiple times, and completing all evaluations in real-time.

DISCUSSION

The researcher must reflect on the various aspects of the hybrid system that elicited positive student feedback to comprehensively assess our experience. The researcher has garnered several noteworthy observations by analyzing data from our survey on students' practices and perceptions of blended learning. Firstly, compared to the previous year's courses, there is a clear overall satisfaction with the distance learning course and its impact on learners' motivation to engage in online courses. The shift in instructional methods has been accompanied by a significant pedagogical transformation that fosters student commitment to this enriched and rewarding hybrid experience ([Adi Badiozaman et al., 2023](#); [Furwana et al., 2024](#)).

However, it is also apparent that the technical conditions of the training are only moderately favourable or ineffective for a minority of students. For these learners, technical improvements could ensure even better pedagogical outcomes and a more efficient teaching/learning process ([Omirzak et al., 2022](#); [Ratnawati et al., 2021](#)). Despite these challenges, students expressed high satisfaction with their involvement in the proposed teaching scenario for skill acquisition in this hybrid and co-modal framework. The students appreciated the system's openness, allowing them to organize their courses flexibly and adapt to the learning pace by repeatedly viewing content using various digital tools ([Hofer et al., 2021](#)).

Regarding the quality of teaching and support lecturers provided, students preferred remote lecturers over face-to-face instructors. They highlighted the ease, speed, and accessibility of communication with remote teachers, often facilitated by instant messaging and platform forums. This setup has fostered more collaborative work and fluid interaction ([Garlinska et al., 2023](#); [Maphosa, 2021](#)). Students emphasized that the support teachers provide is one of the most satisfying aspects of this training type. Significant changes were noted in the vision and role of teachers and their involvement in course creation during the various course stages.

Finally, the respondents exhibited mixed feelings about the assessment process and the proposed activities. Online assessment presents teachers with new opportunities for remote diagnosis, feedback, and support ([Furwana et al., 2024](#)). It allows learners to gauge their level without the pressure or judgment of grades, ask questions using synchronous or asynchronous tools, and take online comprehension flash tests. However, the reliability of online test results is questionable compared to face-to-face assessments due to the high risk of fraud and partial or total plagiarism.

Therefore, researcher can conclude that distance learning's success largely hinges on the goodwill and collaboration of educational players—students and teachers—beyond the programs, content, and methods. New technologies add substantial value to language teaching by enabling learners to acquire knowledge at their own pace and develop autonomy in their learning. For teachers, it facilitates regular contact with students and the ability to monitor their progress effectively. Evaluating the system through questionnaire and interview feedback reveals high overall satisfaction, particularly regarding the modelling and mediatization of learning, the support provided by teachers, and the evaluation process.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the significant impact of hybrid learning systems implemented in Algerian universities during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in language teaching. The findings reveal high student satisfaction with hybrid learning's flexibility, quality of teaching, and instructor support. Despite initial challenges with internet connectivity and access to technical resources, students adapted well, using smartphones and social media platforms like Facebook and Messenger to mitigate connectivity issues. However, technical difficulties with platforms like Moodle suggest a need for enhanced training and usability improvements. The modular structuring of courses, diverse digital tools, and interactive materials were well-received, but a balanced approach incorporating both online and face-to-face elements may be most effective.

Implications for the future of hybrid learning include substantial investment in digital infrastructure to ensure reliable connectivity and access to resources. Comprehensive training for students and teachers on digital tools and platforms and continuous improvement of e-learning platforms like Moodle based on user feedback is essential. Implementing robust measures to ensure the integrity of online assessments is also crucial. By addressing these areas, Algerian universities can better

support hybrid learning, enhance educational outcomes, and meet the evolving demands of the digital age.

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