Using E-learning among EFL Students at Moulay Ismail University: Perspectives, Prospects, and Challenges

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USING E-LEARNING AMONG EFL STUDENTS AT MOULAY ISMAIL UNIVERSITY: PERSPECTIVES, PROSPECTS, AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The educational process has been dramatically transformed by technology; this transformation has caused the emergence of central concepts, among which is distance learning. The latter has brought new opportunities to learn from; meanwhile, it has presented challenges that have impacted learning in many ways. Thus, the present study investigated the implementation of E-learning among EFL students at Moulay Ismail University to identify students' perceptions about this type of learning and consider the pros and cons to ensure best practice solutions that endorse online learning quality. The study included 315 students at Moulay Ismail University in Morocco who completed an online questionnaire and used descriptive analysis because the data was presented in simple summaries that aimed to describe the basic features of the data and measures. The findings, both quantitative and qualitative, indicated that e-learning is still in its early stages. At the same time, students are not entirely prepared to supersede traditional learning with distance education due to some reasons, in particular, such as lack of university support in offering resources to learn online, lack of internet connection, malfunction of technological tools, etc. All in all, EFL students prefer blended learning because it allows them to combine a new technological experience with a traditional one. Meaning that e-learning should not be excluded entirely from the educational system, but it can be used only as a support to foster EFL students' academic achievements.

Keywords: *Challenges, EFL Students, E-learning, Prospects, Technology*

INTRODUCTION

In the field of research, the role that technology plays in the educational setting has long been a subject of study. Both strong and convincing arguments are made for and against the use of technology instruments in the classroom. Many instructors and students today view technology as a revolutionizing and remodeling agent in education that can be traced back to its high accessibility and convenience of use, in addition to the fact that it has opened the door for a type of Learning which can occur beyond walls and a type of Learning in which the utmost emphasis is on student-centered Learning and the creation of autonomous lifelong learners.

Turekeeva (2021) stated that thanks to technological advancements, the world has starts evolving rapidly to the point that today's creation and innovation are obsolete tomorrow. Technological advancements have invaded all aspects of life, including the education system. The educational field, therefore, has witnessed many changes, and E-learning finally recognizes its initial idea (Ja'ashan, 2020). Most Moroccan universities have already started using E-learning but mainly in the blended form with face-to-face Learning.

Much research recently has focused on the growth of E-learning as a new trend in the educational environment. Abdelaziz, Riad & Sensousy (2014) noted that the traditional learning styles and methods changed due to the emergence of E-learning and the relationship between learners and instructors. Darcy (2012) mentioned that E-learning has a pivotal role in the learning process, especially in higher education, because it brings many benefits for instance facilitating the process of communication presentations between students and professors, delivering and sharing course materials, and recording lectures and presentations. In the same vein; Bilal (2015) stated that E-learning could be a sound equalizer of our times because it gives a chance to universities to reach their students at any time and to deliver courses in different innovative ways that suit their interests and circumstances.

Technological advancements have dramatically influenced the process of teaching and learning. The transition from a traditional learning environment to an online learning environment brings new benefits, but at the same time, presents new challenges. The transition, therefore, increases the need for identifying and considering the benefits and challenges to ensure the best practice solutions that enhance online learning quality. The effort to adopt E-learning at Moulay Ismail University must consider its advantages and disadvantages and must only be incorporated if the pros outweigh the cons.

Following the preceding discussion, several objectives were identified. The study aimed at exploring the issue of the emergence of E-learning as a new trend at Moulay Ismail University. The objectives were to explore EFL students' perspectives and readiness for E-learning, to determine benefits that arise from using E-learning, and to find out the challenges EFL students face with E-learning.

Research Questions
1. The following questions were addressed by this study:
2. What do EFL students believe about the emergence of E-learning as a new trend at Moulay Ismail University?
3. To what extent are EFL Students ready for this mode of Learning?
4. What are the potential benefits that EFL students will get from using E-learning?
5. What challenges do EFL students have with E- learning?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Definition of E-learning

E-learning has been defined by many scholars. According to Chitra & Raj (2018); E-learning, also called online Learning, virtual Learning, distant Learning, web-based Learning, is an intended use of technological tools in the Learning and teaching environment. Arkorful; & Abaidoo (2015) added that this mode of teaching and Learning can be utilized to give educational programs to distant students through online learning platforms based on the use of multimedia technologies such as Zoom platform, email, online discussion groups, etc. Similarly; Honeyman & Miller (1993) defined E-learning as an educational field that mainly revolves around teaching methods and strategies to deliver courses to learners who are physically absent in a traditional classroom; this means that E-learning is a process that aims to smooth the way for learning when distance and time separate information from students.

Different Types of E-learning

E-learning is divided into different types: synchronous, asynchronous, blended Learning, massive online open courses, and open scheduled online courses. According to Watts (2016), synchronous can be considered a type of e-learning where instructors and students meet virtually for prearranged sessions

that take place through different platforms such as online chat, instant messaging, videoconferencing, live-streaming video, etc. Keegan (1980) mentioned that although videoconferencing allows learners to see one another, it cannot stand as face-to-face interaction because of the physical separation. Asynchronous is another type of e-learning; in this context, Fidalgo et al. (2020) defined this type as a process in which instructors and students do not have predetermined sessions, explaining that students can access to the course content at any desirable time; Watt (2016) added that the communication process, through asynchronous Learning, usually happen through email and online forums.

Blended learning is a different sort of E-learning that combines both in-person and online Learning, according to Garrison & Kanuka, (2004); in other words, blended Learning includes integrating of two main components: face-to-face and technology. Tseng & Walsh, (2016) illustrated that blended Learning has different strategies that aim to help students with different learning styles and needs to learn effectively.

MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) is another type of E-learning. Cormier et al. (2010) stated that this type of E-learning was first launched in 2006 and delivered open online courses to a large number of students without any cost. Zawaki-Richter & Naidu (2016) added that a MOOC is utilized for higher education and career advancement; it gives a certification that enhances employment chances and further studies.

Advantages of E-learning

According to UNESCO (2002), E-learning provides plenty of advantages, and its methods and strategies have their own pedagogical merits that pave the ground for various ways of knowledge creation and acquisition. Buselic (2012) stated that students have different Learning styles; some learn from visual stimuli, and others learn better by reading or interacting; hence, E-learning can benefit all students because it provides different materials that can meet every student's learning styles and needs. Franklin, Yoakam & Warren (1996) noted that E-learning enhances interaction among students, which they can share and exchange ideas swiftly and efficiently. Introverted students also who feel shy to raise questions in class can open up and feel comfortable online.

Songkram (2015) mentioned that E-learning could help students to reduce expenditure. Authors Raj & Chitra (2018) explained that the reason behind this cost reduction is that learning online happens swiftly and smoothly; students do not need to travel, look for accommodation, etc. This, therefore, shows that E-learning, in comparison to traditional Learning can be more economical and affordable for students (Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira, 2016).

Al Rawashdeh et al. (2021) acknowledged that flexibility is another advantage of e-learning because students can flexibly take classes anytime and anywhere. Students also can access the course content and watch recorded lectures several times, especially during exam preparation. Joshua et al. (2016) stated that E-learning teaches students how to depend on themselves because professors stand only as guides and advisors, rather than, as a leading source of knowledge.

Disadvantages of E-learning

Al-Rawashdeh et al. (2021) stated that despite the positive side of E-learning, students can still face many challenges that pave the way to limited and pejorative outcomes. Arkorful & Abaidoo (2015) mentioned that E-learning could reduce the effectiveness of students' interaction because E-learning lacks face-to-face engagement between students and instructors, meaning that the lack of face-to-face interaction can lead to miscommunication because the message cannot be conveyed properly. Instructors, through E-learning, assess students online which increases illegal activities such as

plagiarism and cheating. The lack of face-of-face interaction, therefore, can be considered the most unique challenge of using e-learning (Islam, Beer, and Slack, 2015).

Valentine (2002) argued that lack of training can lead to the misuse of technology because some instructors and students still do not possess enough skills to use technological tools. Training in distance learning technology use, therefore, is still highly needed to increase the chance of using all its potential. Greenberg (1998) noted that technological advancement could not pave the way to successful E-learning, but effective E-learning has much to do with creative and well-trained, and informed instructors. Bates (1995) added that E-learning cannot replace traditional Learning, but instructors should go for training to benefit from both experiences (traditional Learning and Modern learning). They should be trained to use technology as a support to enhance Learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design
While perspectives among EFL students on the implementation of online Learning at Moulay Ismail University vary, the current study employed an experimental research design to look into and gain a thorough grasp of the topic of e-learning and to what extent it can influence the quality of education. Study's findings were not conclusive and my mind was ready to be changed as a researcher towards the topic.

Research Respondents
There are 315 EFL students from Moulay Ismail University successfully responded to the questionnaire; 172 students are males and 143 students are females.
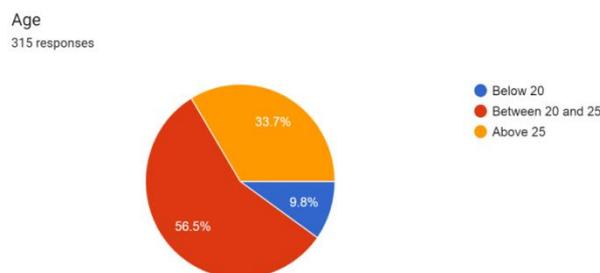

Age
315 responses

- Below 20
- Between 20 and 25
- Above 25

33.7%
9.8%
56.5%

Fig 2: Participants by Age

Figure 2 demonstrated that 178 respondents are between 20 and 25 years old and 106 respondents are above 25, while only 31 respondents are below 20.

Research Instrument
Data for the study came from an online questionnaire that included two sections: Seven closed-ended questions were included in the first section, while the second section mainly consisted of three qualitative questions asking EFL students about their feelings, opinions, and benefits and drawbacks they had discovered as a result of using online Learning.

Data Analysis

The present study used descriptive analysis because the data was presented in simple summaries that aimed to describe the basic features of the data and measures and to reach conclusions that extended beyond the immediate data alone.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Part One*:* Findings of Quantitative Questions' Analysis
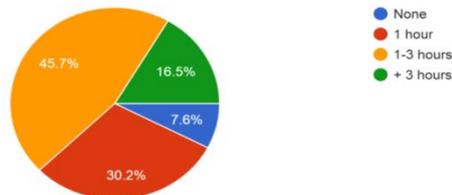

Fig 3: Participants ' Time Spent on Online Learning

Figure 3 revealed that 144 EFL students, more significant percentage of 45, 7%, use online Learning for one to three hours daily; 52 EFL students spend over three hours, whereas 95 EFL students barely spend an hour, 24 EFL students did not use any online learning at all. Figure 3 showed that most of EFL students use e-learning at varying rates.
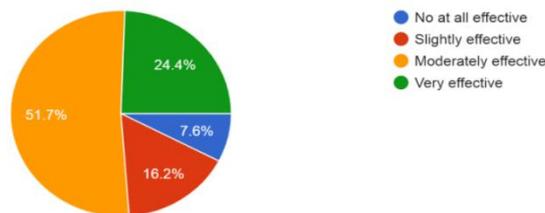

Fig 4: The Effectiveness of E-learning for Participants

Based on Figure 4, a high percentage, 51, 7 % that represented 163 EFL students from the total respondents were stated that E-learning has been moderately effective for them, and 77 EFL students expressed that E-learning has been very effective for them; while, 51 EFL students mentioned that E-learning has been slightly effective, 24 EFL students acknowledged that E-learning has not been effective at all for them. Figure 4 shows that the use of E-learning has a positive impact on most EFL students ' academic achievements.
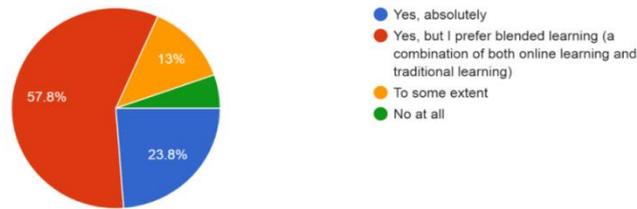
Do you enjoy E-learning?
315 responses

- Yes, absolutely
- Yes, but I prefer blended learning (a combination of both online learning and traditional learning)
- To some extent
- No at all

Fig 5: Participants ' Enjoyment of Online Learning

Figure 5 highlighted that while 182 EFL students stated their satisfaction with E-learning in a blended format with face-to-face Learning, approximately 75 EFL students thoroughly enjoyed it, 17 EFL students claimed that they had no enjoyment in this method of Learning, compared to the 41 EFL students who said they partially enjoyed it. Figure 5 demonstrates that most EFL students view remote Learning as a fresh learning style with prospects, especially when supplemented with in-person instruction.

Do you agree with the idea of replacing traditional learning with E-learning?
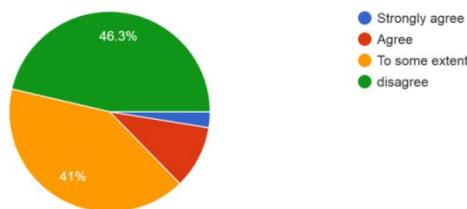315 responses

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- To some extent
- disagree

Fig 6: Participants ' Opinions on the Idea of Replacing Traditional Learning with Online Learning

Figure 6 clearly demonstrated that 146 EFL students disagreed with the idea of substituting online Learning for traditional classroom instruction, while 129 EFL students expressed reluctance; on the other hand, 32 EFL students supported the idea of substituting online Learning for traditional Learning, and only 8 EFL students supported it strongly. Figure 6 shows that the majority of EFL students are still unwilling to completely abandon traditional education.

How helpful has your university been in offering the resources to use E-learning?
315 responses

- Not at all helpful
- Slightly helpful
- Moderately helpful
- Very helpful

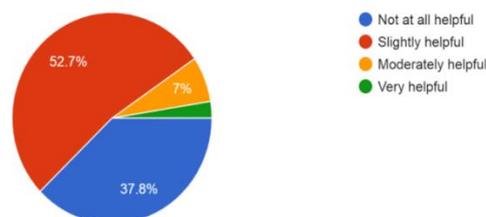**Fig 7: The Assistance of Moulay Ismail University in offering Resources for online Learning**

Figure 7 exposed that 166 EFL students reported that Moulay Ismail University has been just slightly useful, while 119 EFL students said it has not been helpful in providing the tools to use E-learning; on the other hand, 22 EFL students, or a low percentage, 7%, said that the university had been somewhat

beneficial. Figure 7 made it clear that Moulay Ismail University lacks the technology resources necessary to make it easy for EFL learners to opt for online classes.
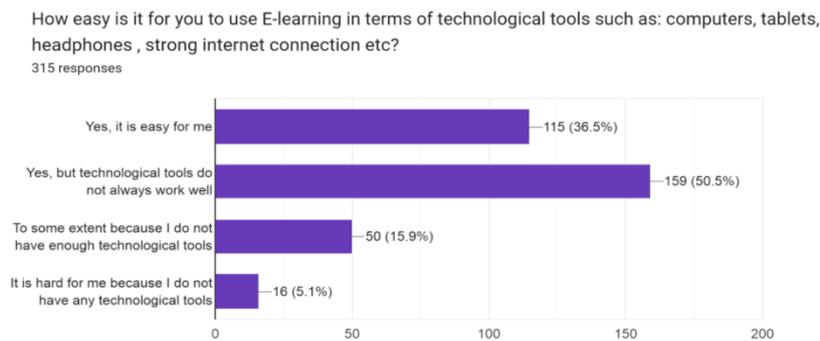

How easy is it for you to use E-learning in terms of technological tools such as: computers, tablets, headphones , strong internet connection etc?
315 responses

Fig 8: Participants ' Flexibility of Utilizing E-learning in Terms of Technological Tools

115 EFL students believe they can use online Learning without any problems since they have access to enough technology, as shown in Figure 8 above, 159 EFL students claimed that online Learning was simple for them, although they complained that sometimes technological tools did not perform as intended, 50 EFL students reported finding it difficult to use online Learning because they lacked the necessary technological resources, and 16 EFL students reported having none. Figure 8 shows that most EFL students could use technology to their advantage, although it can occasionally deceive them.
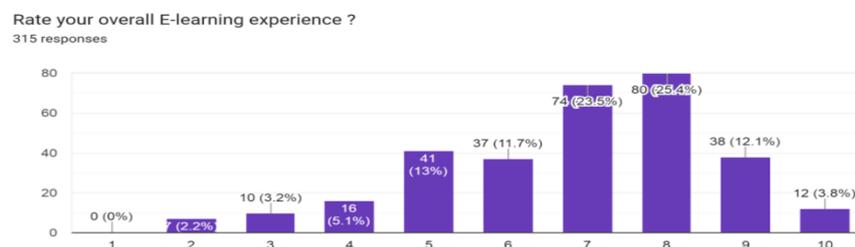

Rate your overall E-learning experience ?
315 responses

Fig 9: Participants ' Experiences with E-learning

Figure 9 exposed that 154 EFL students acknowledged that they have a good E-learning experience, 38 EFL students have a very good experience, and 12 EFL students feel that they have an excellent E-learning experience, 41 EFL students stated that they only have an average e-learning experience and 33 EFL students have less than an average. Figure 9 shows that most EFL students have an adequate experience with e-learning.

Part Two: Findings of Qualitative Questions 'Analysis
The remaining questions on the questionnaire were qualitative in nature, asking EFL students about their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of adopting online Learning; the results are as below:
The analysis revealed that most of Moulay Ismail University's EFL students responded constructively to the issue of the expansion of distant Learning. They stated their enthusiasm and familiarity with using e-learning as a new modality in their educational endeavors because they are digital natives; they noted the benefits of e-learning in this context, and participants frequently cited the following benefits:
- Flexibility: EFL students stated that E-learning is self-paced, which allows them to learn at their own speed; they added that they could flexibly schedule their timetable that suits their desires, and they can learn at any time and from anywhere with the use of computers and connections. Place and time, thanks to E-learning use, no longer stand as problems for EFL students.

- Cost Reduction: EFL students acknowledged that the cost of E-learning can be lower compared to traditional Learning because online Learning can reduce the costs that are associated with renting, commuting, food, etc.; therefore, E-learning can be economically workable for EFL students and professors.
- Convenient Learning: EFL students mentioned that learning from home makes them feel comfortable and less stressed because online Learning helps them to interact easily and ask questions about a given topic, especially for introverted and shy students. EFL students added that students have different styles of learning and online Learning can be the solution because it provides different learning materials and different sources of knowledge that meet every EFL student's needs.

Another significant finding of this study was that E-learning has some drawbacks; the following are the most common disadvantages repeated by participants:
- Technical issues: EFL students expressed that technological tools sometimes deceive them such as the computer stops working or the internet connection being unstable; therefore, it can be hard for EFL students to go online and learn from platforms that require an Internet connection; on this view, EFL students complained that the university is not that helpful when it comes to distant education, such as building libraries that have adequate technological tools to learn, creating websites where recorded lectures be posted.
- Procrastination: EFL students agreed that procrastination is the common drawback that comes as a result of distance education because the online environment makes it easy to postpone studying and doing assignments on time. EFL students added that they could easily fall into the trap of procrastination because they do not feel obliged to learn, and there is no one to remind them of the deadline of assignments and exams.
- Distraction: EFL students acknowledged that E-learning creates much distraction and drives them away from learning to other activities such as texting, listening to music, watching funny videos on social media, etc. Distraction, therefore, can dwindle the productivity of distance education and lead to time wastage and lack of concentration.
- Health issues: EFL students stated that the excessive use of E-learning and sitting for a long time in front of the screen could create health issues such as weak eyesight, appetite loss, insomnia, irregular sleep, etc.

In a few words, the present study mainly found that:
- The majority of EFL students at Moulay Ismail University reacted positively to the issue of integrating E-learning in Moroccan universities and they expressed their satisfaction and comfortability with this mode of learning thanks to its flexibility and high accessibility.
- EFL students are not ready to entirely give up on traditional Learning because it offers the essential aspect to humans as social entities, which are face-to-face interactions. EFL students prefer blended Learning because it allows them to learn both traditionally and virtually.
- EFL students complained that technological tools sometimes disappoint them, such as computer stopping working, and the internet connection being unstable. This, therefore, can make the e-learning process hard going because E-learning heavily depends on technological tools. EFL students complained that they do not get much help from the university when it comes to distant education.
- EFL students mentioned that distance education brings different advantages such as flexibility, self-paced Learning, cost reduction, and convenient Learning.

EFL students stated that they face some challenges when they use E-learning, for instant: technical issues, procrastination, distraction, and health issues.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrated that E-learning at Moulay Ismail University is still in its onset; on this view, most EFL students are already utilizing online Learning, but commonly in the blended learning model with face-to-face teaching. EFL students prefer blended Learning because it does not rely entirely on technological tools that sometimes cannot function well. The study highlights the idea that distance learning can be beneficial for EFL students. However, it should be used only as a support to enhance students ' academic performance, not to completely replace traditional learning.

The outcome of this study met my expectations as a researcher and digital natives simultaneously. We cannot deny that technology has dramatically changed many aspects of life, including education. Therefore, this change leads to the evolution of new learning methods in the educational sector, like the emergence of distance learning. E-learning is already used in Moroccan universities because EFL students grew up as digital natives, and they are familiar with technological tools; this clearly gives them the confidence to use this type of learning as a support to foster their scholastic achievements.
According to my stance, distant education, to some extent, is demanding in terms of effort because it requires planning, and both EFL students and professors must make sacrifices so that they can get things done on time. What I like most about online Learning is its flexibility and convenience because EFL students can comfortably learn at their own pace, time. Place will no longer be obstacles for them; therefore, the expenditure on rent, transportation, meals, etc will be reduced. However, what I do not like about distance education is the process of assessing students; that is to say, traditional Learning makes assessment easy because EFL students can be immediately assessed through direct questions and informal testing. In distance education, EFL students should wait for their work to be reviewed by their professors. All in all, E-learning remains a double-edged sword because it has both positive and negative sides, and I am not against, and at the same time not with the idea of entirely replacing traditional learning with online learning, but I believe that adopting any new learning method in the educational sector must consider its pros and cons and should be only used if the pros outweigh the cons.

The generalizability of this study is limited by the number of participants because the focus was on EFL students at Moulay Ismail University, meaning that the findings of this study are based only on EFL students' perceptions, opinions and experiences. This limitation, therefore, makes it hard to determine how far E- learning impacts students ' academic achievements. This is why further research is needed to establish a tangible connection between technology and the learning environment for which future studies should take into account other departments and universities to have a clear and full picture about the issue of the emergence of E-learning as a new trend in Moroccan universities.

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