Assessing the Efficiency of E-Teaching at Tertiary Level in Algeria during Covid-19 Pandemic: The Case of EFL Teachers

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ABSTRACT: *In Algeria, adopting e-teaching at the tertiary level could be quite challenging especially in the EFL context. In Fact, English courses in the different specialties - except English departments had been delivered exclusively online during both the first and second wave of the pandemic. This paper aimed to shed light on the efficiency of the online English courses from three angles: a. identifying the obstacles faced by the EFL teachers in course delivery, b. analyzing the students' involvement, c. measuring the teaching achievement. In order to collect data, an online questionnaire was destined to 42 EFL teachers in Algeria. Results revealed that: first, the principal hurdles that EFL teachers encountered in course delivery refer to the lack of ICT training, internet quality, and the lack of technological tools. Second, despite the different strategies employed by our EFL teachers such as syllabus adaptation, online platforms, and both synchronous and asynchronous methods, students displayed less involvement and interest than expected. Finally, many EFL teachers couldn't reach their teaching goals. The findings imply that more consideration should be given to our EFL teachers in terms of ICT training and digital resources for better courses delivery. Besides, teachers should find more adequate strategies to foster students' motivation for successful e-learning applications.*

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, EFL teachers, E-teaching, ICT training, Tertiary level

Introduction

There is no doubt that one of the terrifying phenomena that human beings have witnessed during the 21th century is the corona virus pandemic. In fact, countries all around the globe were touched by the virus on different periods starting from its inception in China by the end of 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) declared Covid-19 as a global

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pandemic on 11 March 2020. Since the Covid-19 was very contagious and mortal, governments were forced to suspend the activities of many sectors. As far as Algeria is concerned, measures took place by the end of March 2020 at all levels including the closure of the educational institutions. Even though distance education was a novel concept within the Algerian context, launching online courses was seen as the only alternative to finish the 2019-2020 academic year at the tertiary level. Teachers and students, then, found themselves in a new environment where they ought to collaborate virtually and rely on remote tools only. Since English courses could be exclusively delivered via internet during both the first and second wave of Covid-19 pandemic, EFL teachers from different universities had to struggle with many obstacles in order to reach their teaching objectives. Then, to what extent the e-teaching was efficient in the EFL context during that pandemic?

E-teaching during the first wave of the pandemic

Covid-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the educational system of Algeria since most instructors were unfamiliar with distance education and unaware of the real implications it imposes. In fact, educators from different generations and regions have been suddenly dived into a new world of instruction where the use of technology to design and deliver efficient courses has become compulsory. On parallel, even though students used to manipulate remote tools and internet quite easily for different needs, they found themselves in an unprecedented dilemma which is virtual learning. This joins Erkut's (2020) point of view who argued that the Turkish educational system was not ready to a sudden reform due to the crisis towards effective online teaching.

One has to admit that Algeria is known to be poor country in terms of technology in general and internet accessibility and quality in particular. It is not a discovery that internet network in Algeria does not cover all the vast country, and many regions are still isolated without any internet accessibility. Moreover, even the big cities do not enjoy a high internet debit to access to any websites and applications appropriately. Similarly, Apriyanti (2020) stated that lack of internet access and digital tools in villages or rural areas was a barrier to online courses.

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In order to ensure the continuity of the second term of 2019-2020 academic year, the Ministry of Higher Education relied on Moodle platform (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) for the online learning. In fact, teachers and students were invited to use the platform for the educational purpose. Thus, teachers from different disciplines were required to design and deliver online course using the Moodle platform. Additionally, the platform offers a space where both teachers and students could communicate via messages in order to maintain the teaching and learning process.

E-teaching during the second wave of the pandemic

After the first wave of the covid-19, Algeria recorded less virus propagation and deaths in comparison to other countries for, and within the beginning of the new academic year 2020-2021, the Ministry of Higher Education commanded the Algerian universities to switch into hybrid instruction; both in-class and online courses have been planned to cope with the new calendar of instruction. Therefore, a necessity for training instructors in the conception and delivery of online courses emerged.

In order to make the online courses efficient and successful, universities and institutes scheduled multiple e-teaching training sessions to respond to that emergency. Actually, experts, teachers mainly with competencies in IT, have played the role of tutors and trainers for their colleagues. The main objective was to guide and assist teachers to enable them to be autonomous in conceptualizing and implementing their courses in different platforms and website such as Zoom, Google classroom, and YouTube. The training was of paramount importance especially for teachers who were required to deliver online courses only namely EFL teachers in the different disciplines. The reason is that in the different curricula, English courses are considered as facultative and could not be included within the revised schedule.

Then, relying on e-teaching exclusively to deliver English courses would not be an easy task for EFL teachers. In fact, EFL teachers used to find difficulties in keeping their students motivated and involved in learning English in the traditional setting i.e. classroom. Therefore, additional challenges were added to the list for our EFL teachers within the pandemic and e-teaching. EFL teachers, therefore, ought to reconsider several parameters to be effective and

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to reach their teaching objectives. Sharing a similar point of view Thomas and Rogers (2020) argue that the current crisis may force educators to rethink the used educational material.

Review of previous studies

Distance education under the Covid-19 pandemic has attracted many researchers. Several studies in this regard have been conducted around the globe in order to assess and analyze the efficiency of distance learning, and to provide solutions for better online learning applications. The main concerns were related to the challenges encountered by teachers such as internet accessibility and technological tools in designing and implementing the online courses. Besides, the choice of the adequate strategies to get students involved and motivated for instance, the use of synchronous and asynchronous resources, and relying on different virtual platforms and websites. As far as the Algerian context is concerned, the following studies depict the reality of distance learning under the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research investigation carried out by A. and H. Chelghoum (2020) on e-learning in Algeria during the Covid-19 pandemic came out with the following elements:

> ➢ The majority of teachers faced an internet accessibility issue. They also encountered real difficulty in keeping students engaged in learning.
> ➢ Teachers need to be trained to be able to manage their classes.
> ➢ Teachers relied mainly on asynchronous resources because it is hard to have all the students connected at the same time since they are numerous.
> ➢ Algerian authorities should provide schools and universities with the necessary material for better distance learning application.

When investigating the influence of remote learning on student's habits during the Covid-19 pandemic, N. Benkhider and S. Kherbachi (2020) concluded that digital technologies seem to be the appropriate tool to provide learning and enhance students' motivation. Besides, they call the authorities to increase the availability of internet access and digital resources. They also argued that the non-mastery of the IT tools remains a real challenge for both teachers and students for an effective e-learning.

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Amongst the main recommendations provided by I. Bentaleb (2021) in her article on e-learning during covid-19 pandemic, training in ICT's for both teachers and students remains a priority especially teachers in course design and delivery via different platforms. She also recommended the ministry of education to equip the Algerian universities with the needed tools and provide internet access for both teachers and students.

In an international context, an investigation was made by Luluk Iswati (2021) on the ESP teachers' strategies and challenges during the pandemic in Indonesia. The research findings showed that in order to attain their teaching objectives the ESP teachers employed various strategies such as insuring instruction clarity, relying on several learning platforms, using authentic materials, and virtual grouping. The ESP teachers also relied more on asynchronous than synchronous method, avoided giving not doable tasks, and scoring students' active participation for the sake of keeping students involved and motivated in learning. The ESP teachers had to deal with inconsistent internet connection, finding the appropriate time for synchronous sessions, and difficulty in monitoring students' progress. The research concluded that technical preparedness is also required for conducting online teaching.

The above research studies investigated distance learning during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown more specifically. The investigations, then, had been mainly conducted for short-term assessment, in other words during the first wave of the corona virus only. However, to our knowledge, there has been no real investigation in assessing the efficiency of e-teaching during both the first and second wave of the pandemic where English courses had been delivered online exclusively at the tertiary level.

Methodology

In order to assess the efficiency of e-teaching during Covid-19 in an EFL context, the present study relied on a quantitative method. The study sample consists of 42 part-time and full-time EFL teachers chosen randomly from 13 institutes and universities in Algeria, and representing 29 specialties. An online questionnaire was sent through "Google Forms" to over 50 teachers, yet only 42 full-questionnaires were kept for the empirical study. The questionnaire is divided into three main parts

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encompassing different questions related to the investigation at two different periods of the covid-19 pandemic i.e. 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 academic years. Part one attempts to identify the difficulties encountered by the EFL teachers in course delivery. The second part displays the different strategies used by the EFL teachers to boost the students' motivation. The last part tries to measure the teaching achievement.

Results

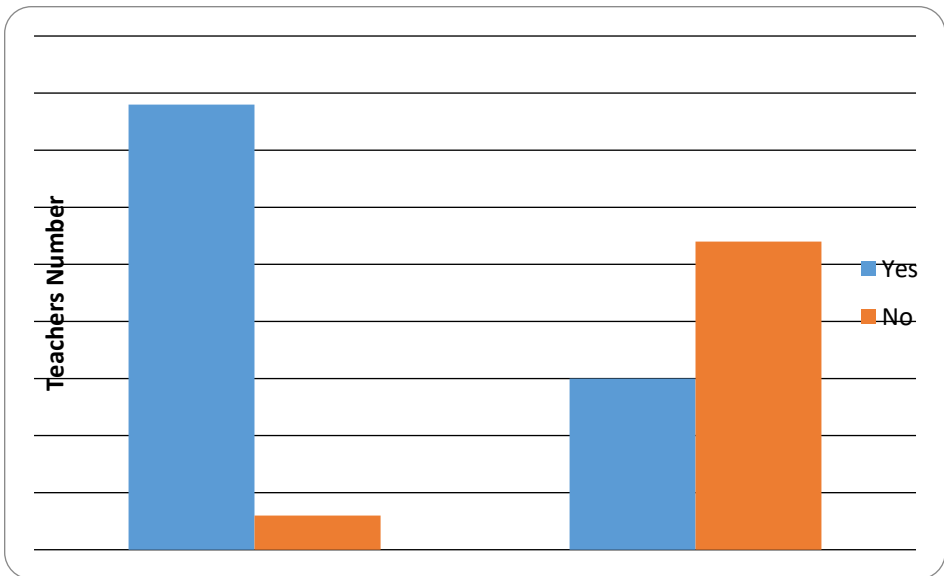Question1: Did you encounter any difficulties in course delivery?

Figure 1. 2019-2020 versus 2020-2021 Difficulties

Figure1 shows that, during the 2019-2020 academic year, most of the EFL teachers encountered difficulties in delivering online courses representing 92.9%. However, the number of teachers went down to 35.71% during the 2020-2021 academic year.

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Question2: What was the main difficulty that you have encountered?
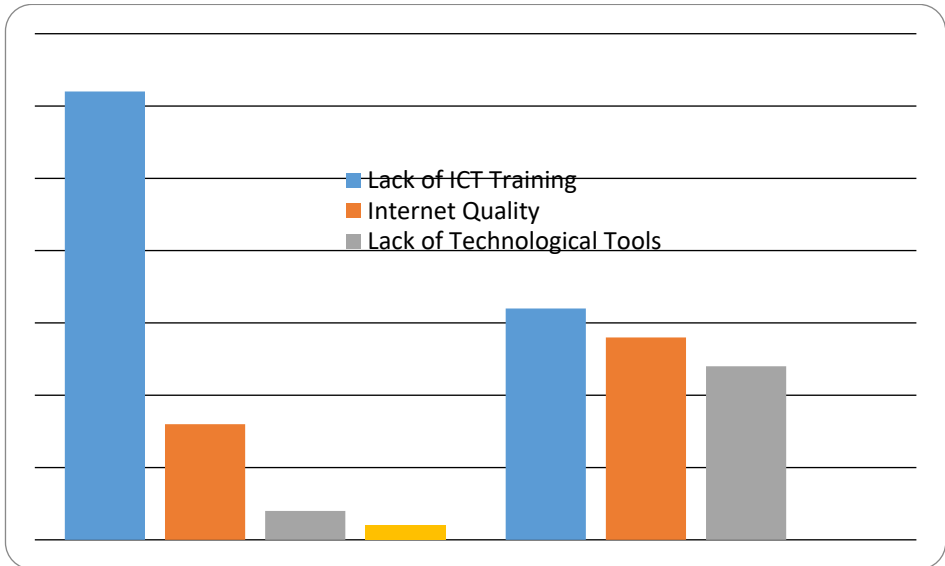

Figure 2. Main Difficulty in Course Delivery

Figure2 indicates that the lack of ICT training was the main difficulty with 73.8% faced by the EFL teachers followed by internet quality with 19% during 2019-2020 academic year. However, this difficulty represented only 38.9% during 2020-2021 academic year followed closely by internet quality with 33.33% and lack of technological tools with 28.57%.

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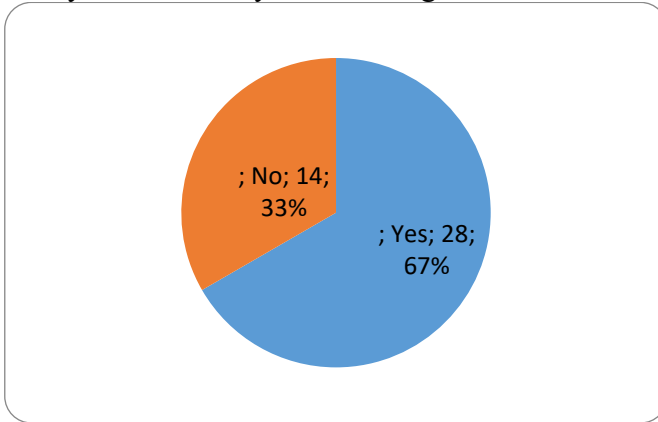Question3: Did you receive any ICT training?

Figure 3. ICT Training

Figure3 portrays that more than half of the participants received training which represents 67% and 14 teachers out of 42 did not receive any training representing 33% during the 2020-2021 academic year.

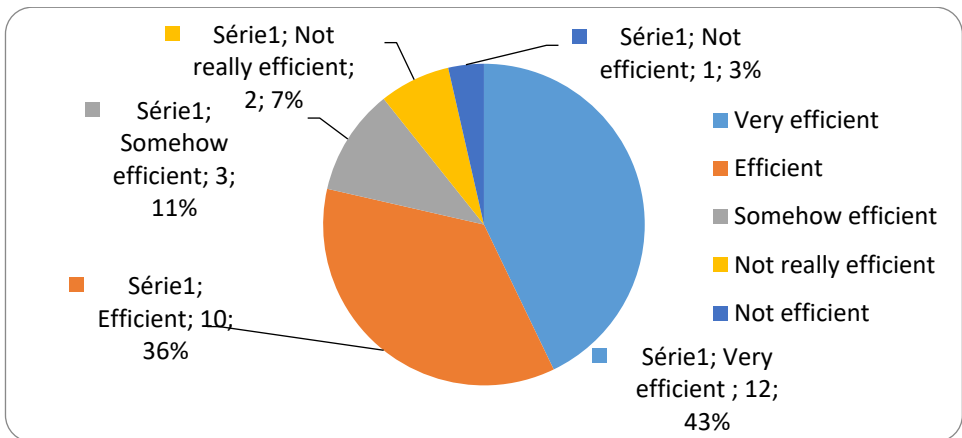Question4: The ICT training that you have received was?

Figure 4. ICT Training Efficiency

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Figure4 indicates that 12 participants out of 28 who received the ICT training found it very efficient to deliver online courses; this represents 43%, followed by efficient with 36% then, somehow efficient with 11%. Only 7% found it not really efficient and 3% not efficient.

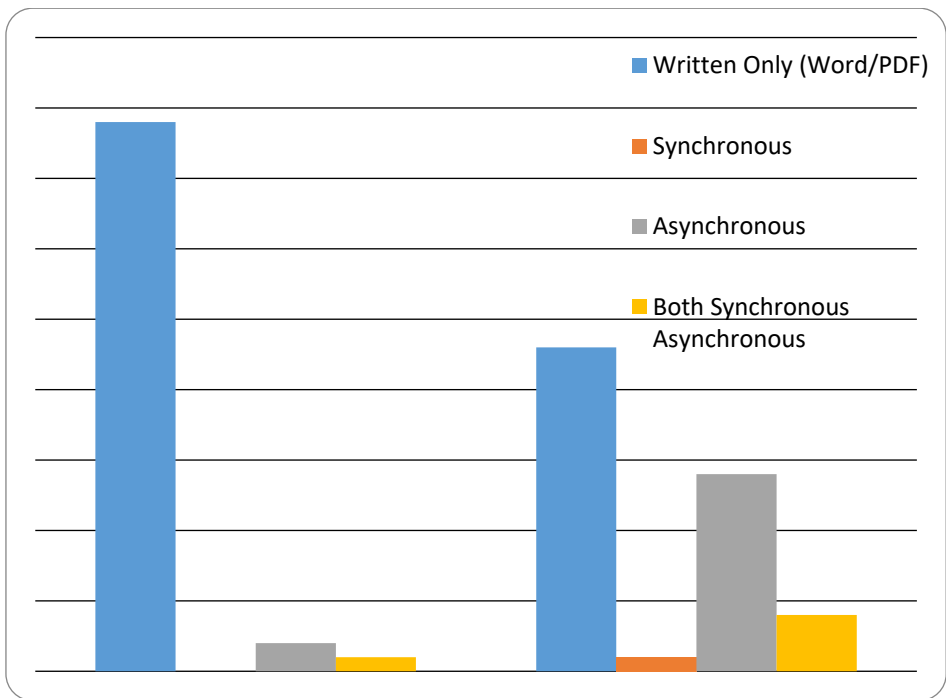Question5: In which format did you deliver your online courses?

Figure 5. Course Format

Figure5 shows that the great majority of the EFL teachers delivered their online courses in a written form only representing 92.85% during the 2019-2020 academic year. On contrast, during 2020-2021 academic year, only 23 participants out of 42 delivered their courses in written form only representing 54.8% followed by asynchronous courses with 33.33%, then

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comes both synchronous and asynchronous courses with 9.52% and finally, synchronous courses with 2.4% only.

Question6: Did you use any online platforms except Moodle to interact with your students?
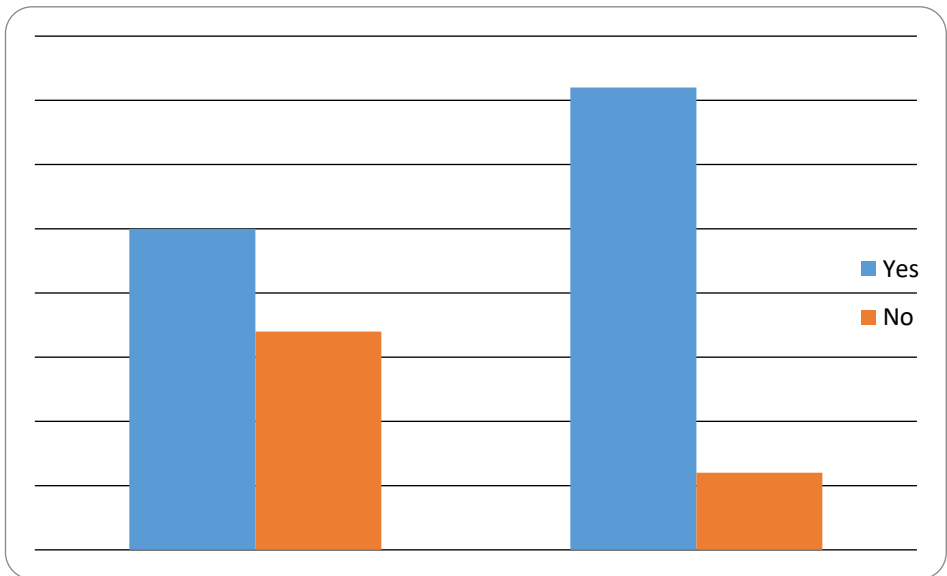

Figure 6. Use of Online Platforms

Figure6 illustrates that more than half of our participants 59.52% used other online platforms during 2019-2020 academic year. The number increased to 36 teachers during 2020-2021 academic year representing 85.71%.

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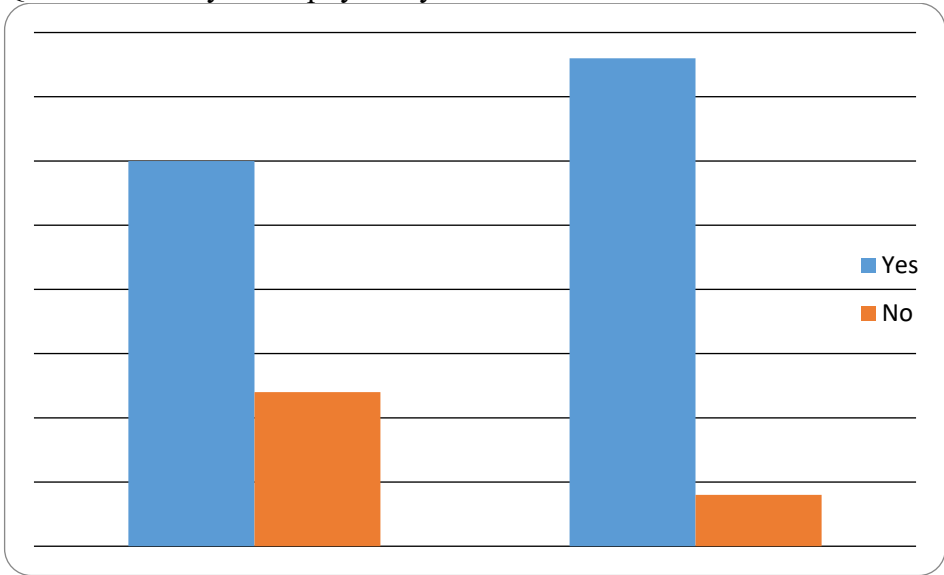Question7: Did you adapt your syllabus for the online courses?

Figure 7. Syllabus Adaptation

Figure7 indicates that many EFL teachers adapted their syllabus during 2019-2020 academic year representing 71.42%. Concerning 2020-2021 academic year, it is noticed that more teachers adapted their syllabus which represents 90.47% of the total participants.

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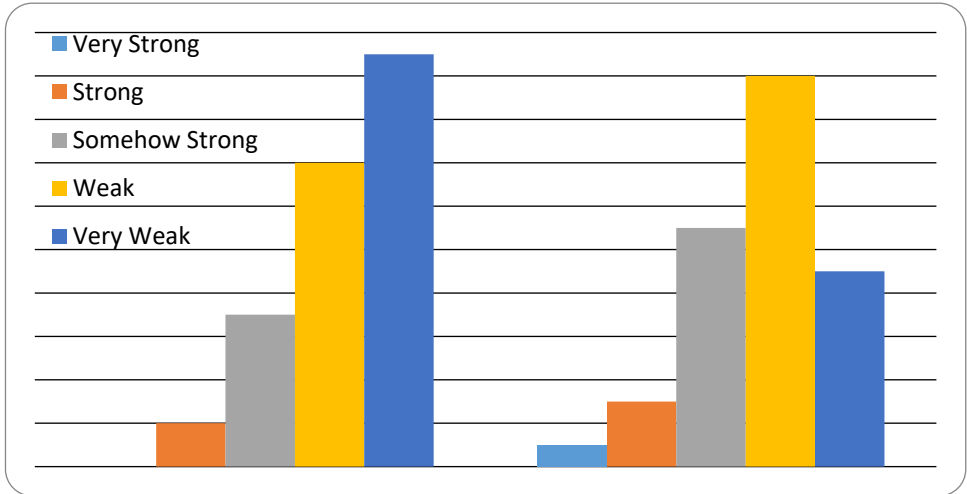Question8: How do you consider your students' interaction?

Figure 8. Students' Interaction

Figure 8 shows that, concerning students' interaction with teachers, the modality "very weak" comes at first representing 45.23% followed by "weak" with 33.33% during 2019-2020 academic year. Results changed during 2020-2021 academic year, where the modality "weak" took the first position with 42.85% followed by "somehow strong" with 26.2% and "very weak" with 21.43%.

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Question9: Where do you situate your global students' evaluation success?

Legend:
- Less than 10%
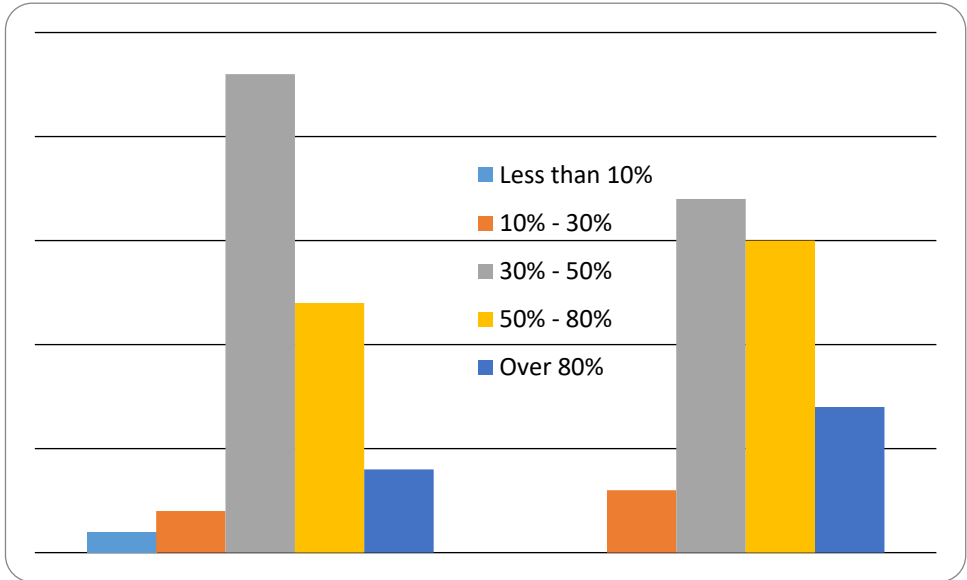- 10% - 30%
- 30% - 50%
- 50% - 80%
- Over 80%

Figure 9. Global Students' Evaluation Success

Figure9 portrays that, as far as global students' evaluation success is concerned, the modality "30%-50%" comes at first place with 54.76% followed by "50%-80%" with 28.57% during 2019-2020 academic year. Statistics changed during 2020-2021 academic year, therefore; the modality "30%-50%" and "50%-80%" are closed in percentage with 40.47% and 35.71%. There is also an increase of the modality "50%-80%" representing 16.66%.

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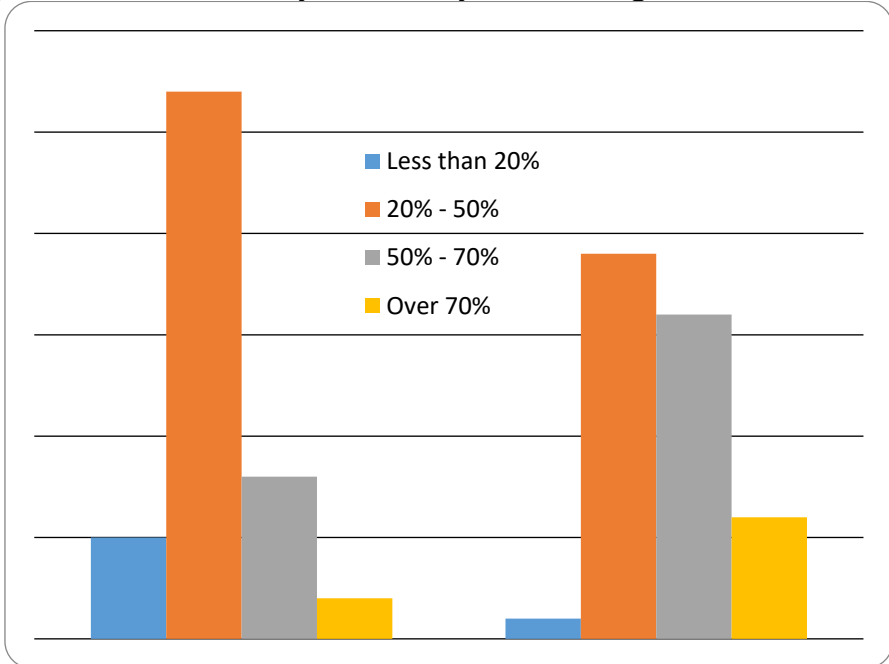Question10: Where do you situate your teaching achievement?

Figure 10. Teaching Achievement

Figure10 indicates, that concerning teaching achievement, the modality "20%-50%" comes at first position far from other modalities with 64.28% during the 2019-2020 academic year. This modality is still ranked at first with 45.23% during the 2020-2021 academic year, however; it is followed closely by the modality "50%-70%" representing 38.1% then, "over 70%" with 14.28%.

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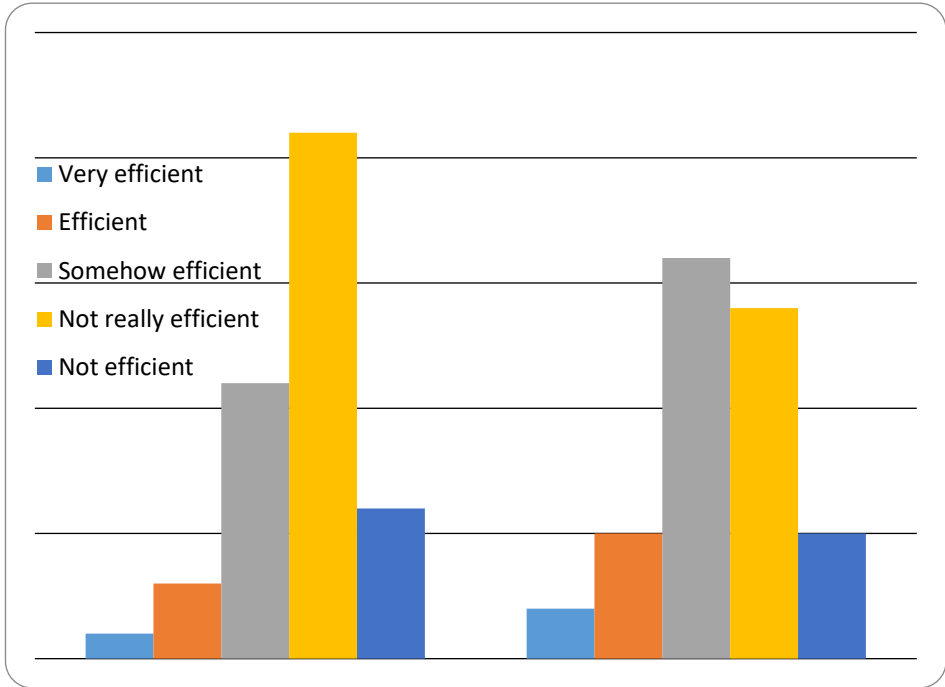Question11: According to you, e-teaching is?

Figure 11. Teachers' Perception toward E-Teaching

Figure11 shows that during 2019-2020 academic year, 21 teachers out 42 perceived that e-teaching as not really efficient which represents 50% follows by 11 teachers who found it somehow efficient with 26.2% and only 7.14% as efficient. As far as the 2020-2021 academic year, 38.1% of our participants consider that e-teaching is somehow efficient followed closely by not really efficient with 33.33% and only 11.9% as efficient.

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Discussion

Concerning the first part of the questionnaire, the investigation came out with the following points:

- While the main obstacle encountered by our EFL teachers in course delivery concerned the lack of ICT training during 2019-2020 academic year, other difficulties became more serious as internet quality and lack of technological tools during the 2020-2021 academic year. This means that even though many participants managed to learn how to deliver online course appropriately, the quality of internet and lack of technological tools appeared as other barriers in course delivery.
- The EFL teachers, who enrolled in the ICT training, asserted that the training was beneficial in implementing and delivering courses, therefore; it is quite important that extra sessions should be planned for the teachers who couldn't attend the training. As ICT skills are required for e-teaching applications, our EFL teacher ought to follow this special training to fulfill the requirements of this new mode of teaching.

The second part of the questionnaire advanced the followings:

- The great majority of the EFL teachers delivered their online courses in a written form only during the 2019-2020 academic year; neglecting other possibilities. This could be explained by the lack of ICT training as manifested in their main difficulties previously. However, during the 2020-2021 academic year, different techniques had been chosen to deliver the online courses such as the synchronous and asynchronous methods. It seems that the teachers who received the training could explore other strategies to be more efficient.
- Statistics also indicated that during the two academic years - 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, our EFL teachers brought changes to their syllabi in order to adapt them to the new mode of teaching. Besides, the number of teachers relying on other online platforms except Moodle increased during the 2020-2021 academic year. This could explain the willingness of teachers to provide alternatives of communication and interaction for the students who could have difficulties to reach the Moodle platform.

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- Despite the efforts furnished by our EFL teachers to make the process of teaching and learning more successful, the majority of the students manifested less interest and involvement towards those online courses. As a matter of fact, a considerable number of students could not succeed in their evaluation during the 2019-2020 academic year. Fortunately, better results were recorded during 2020-2021 academic year as far as students' evaluation success and students' feedback are concerned.

The last part of the questionnaire portrays the following essential elements:

- It is obvious that during the 2019-2020 academic year more than half of our EFL teachers could only reach between 30% and 50% of their teaching goals. It means that the new mode of teaching was very challenging to adopt at different levels. However, changes occurred within the 2020-2021 academic year where more teachers could attain from 50% to 70% of their teaching objectives. This was probably due to the ICT training and the different strategies used by our EFL teachers.

- During the 2019-2020 academic year, the majority of the EFL teachers considered that e-teaching was not efficient or somehow efficient. It seems that they were unconfident about this new model of teaching since they faced many obstacles such as course delivery and their students' involvement. Even though our EFL teachers' perception did not changed considerably towards e-teaching efficiency during the 2020-2021 academic year, less EFL teachers believed that this mode is not efficient and there were more teachers who considered that e-teaching is efficient. It can be explained by the fact that our EFL teachers encountered fewer difficulties and could reach their teaching objectives to some extent.

Conclusions

One can assert that Covid-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the teaching and learning process in Algeria. The sudden shift from the traditional face-to-face education to the virtual one has brought real challenges at different levels. The research study attempted to assess the efficiency of e-teaching under the corona virus pandemic at the tertiary level in Algeria in an EFL context. The investigation revealed several

obstacles that the EFL teachers are still encountering in course delivery namely ICT training, internet quality and technological tools. Therefore, it is highly recommended for the Ministry of Higher Education to respond to those needs in order to facilitate online courses delivery. Additionally, it is noticed that some EFL teachers opted for different strategies for the sake of getting their students more committed in the online learning such as syllabus adaptation, the use of synchronous and asynchronous methods, and online platforms for interaction. Unfortunately, their efforts were partially awarded. In fact, students displayed less motivation than expected, and many of them could not success in their evaluations. For that reason, our EFL teachers should explore other horizons to enhance students' involvement and to capture their attention for better results. Albeit a considerable number of EFL teachers perceived e-teaching as not really efficient to reach their teaching objectives, some still optimistic. To end up, one should admit that the Algerian educational system is experiencing a very new mode of teaching which is e-teaching, therefore; it is advisable for all the parties – teacher, students, and the Ministry of Higher Education to work hand in hand to overcome the persistent challenges of the e-teaching applications for a common success.

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