Online Teaching in the French as a Foreign Language Classroom: Benefits and Challenges.

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Abstract.

Our paper is part of the international conference on distance learning and artificial intelligence systems from 11 to 13 May 2023 which will be organized by the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Martil in collaboration with the CED of Abdelmalek Essaadi University. During our intervention, we will determine the concept of teaching in general as well as online teaching by taking into account its role in language classroom practices. Indeed, we will contextualize our work in the qualifying secondary cycle. First, we postulated the strengths and difficulties of distance learning. Then, we developed a questionnaire with the Sphinx software to identify the difficulties of distance learning among our learners in order to propose some relevant solutions. Finally, we analyzed and presented the data and deduced an interpretation of these results

Keywords: distance learning, qualifying secondary cycle, issues, challenges, language class.

Introduction

With the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic and following the state of health emergency, the Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research has put in place preventive measures to ensure educational continuity in this difficult context, during the second period of the school year 2019-2020.

From March 16, 2020 until May 20, 2020, the Ministry in charge has replaced the face-to-face courses by distance learning via all available technological means (platforms, sites, television, ...).

In this regard, a difficulty arose during the online practices, that of the evaluation of the learners. This led us to question the difficulties that can obstruct distance learning practices. Based on this problem, we ask ourselves:

What difficulties do teachers encounter during an online practice?

To answer this question, we will base ourselves on the work of certain researchers who have tried to define the term teaching and distance teaching in particular. We will take as an example the difficulties encountered by teachers in the Moroccan qualifying secondary cycle based on a questionnaire.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1 Concepts: EAD, e-Learning and Blended learning

Different concepts have evolved with the strong growth of ICT and its integration in the field of education. We distinguish, among others:

-**Distance Education (DE):** Online education is defined by the fact that "learners' learning is accessible at any time, from any place and outside the educational institution, it is through electronic means and tools accessible at a distance" (Riyami, 2018, p.22).

"Distance learning consists of learning situations during which the mode of transmission of knowledge is carried out other than in direct, face-to-face relationship between the trainer and the person trained and where the accompaniment is most often in the form of corrections of assignments" (Http: //foad.arifor.fr).

We note that EAD is a pedagogical approach that eliminates the constraints of time and space of the educational institution. It offers many advantages to learners, teachers and educational institutions. It also allows learners to have permanent access to information and knowledge in real time and in delayed time.

-**E-Learning or online training:** The notion of e-Learning is the subject of several discussions at the academic level. It is a tool that is used in many sectors (administrations, companies, etc.). According to its direct translation, e-Learning is a learning process by which individuals acquire new skills or knowledge through information and communication technologies (Baujard, 2006).

For Favier et al, e-Learning is: "a network for jointly updating, storing, searching, distributing and sharing information/knowledge [...] accessible to users via a computer, using internet technology standards and, more generally, interactive ICTs [multimedia supports, CD-ROMs, DVDs, groupware, intranet, extranet, videoconferences], oriented towards learning solutions that go beyond traditional learning paradigms

[disappearance of units of time, place and action between learners and teachers" (Favier et al. , 2004).

The LabSET3 definition considers that e-Learning is: "online learning focused on the development of skills by the learner and structured by interactions with the tutor and peers" ().

In general, we consider that e-learning consists of the use of ICT to provide online or distance training (e-learning most often refers to continuing education in companies), synchronously (intranet, ...) or asynchronously (videoconferences, ...) for the benefit of specific people.

Blended learning: This is a mixed training between presence and distance for the benefit of Moroccan students (Burton et al., 2011; Cisel & Bruillard, 2012). Blended learning is one of several online applications for e-learning that have made it possible to reconcile digitalization and traditional teaching. Access to digital resources via web-based distance communication tools have developed modes of teaching that rely heavily on courses, digital resources, or distance discussions (Burton et al., 2011).

The "blended learning" model has developed with the goal of taking advantage of both face-to-face and distance learning to develop learner/teacher and learner/learner interactions. This device offers students resources to use, or activities to carry out at a distance (outside the classroom), or in presence (in the classroom). Hybrid training brings together elements and resources that are well suited to innovative pedagogical dimensions.

This being said, this type of training is delivered through several learning modalities. The main ones are:

*Asynchronous distance learning, i.e. through e-learning content;

*Face-to-face, which takes place in the presence of a teacher in a class-room, i.e., between two people physically present in the same place, and ;

*Education_Technology Synergy Support Laboratory, *Synchronous distance learning, i.e., by means of a videoconference

The advantages of such a blended learning solution are mainly:

1. A better pedagogical acquisition,

2. Better learner involvement, self-assessment, autonomy,

3. A better mobilization of the actors (Depover & Marchand, 2002)

It should be noted that the concepts of e-learning and distance learning are confused, although distance learning may involve, in addition to online learning, the provision of courses by mail, for example. In this work, we use the term "distance learning" and we therefore limit our study to purely online learning via the use of technologies, without taking an interest in the other aspects of training (distribution of courses, mail, etc.).

1.2. The historical evolution of distance learning

Distance learning is not a recent phenomenon as it has been around for over a century. In fact, this mode of learning emerged in the mid-19th century and became known as correspondence learning. However, this has evolved over the years from paper (the simplest version) sent by mail or fax, via audio and video tape, via radio to Hertz radio and dedicated programming on television stations. Auxiliary Instruction (A.I.)

The three generations representing the evolution of distance education are:

* 1st generation: correspondence education:

The first correspondence course was established in the United Kingdom in 1840, marking the beginning of distance education, which has expanded widely in Europe and then in other parts of the world. It is primarily a "second chance" education for adults who do not complete secondary or higher education.

Tutors help them by mail (often limited to proofreading work) and sometimes by telephone; generally, interaction rates are low and dropout rates are high. Beginning in 1920, educational programs - especially university programs - were introduced in Europe. In 1939, the French government created the Centre national d'enseignement à distance (CNED), most of which are still taught by correspondence today.

*2nd generation: televised education and industrial model:

In 1970, the Spanish government created the National University of Distance Education (UNED) and the British government created the Open University. From the beginning, it offers individualized tutoring to students and makes full use of television and videotape; it is a typical example of the second generation of distance education: rationalization, industrialization, planning, economies of scale, division of the teaching function into different roles, entrusted to different people: academic experts, course authors, teaching and technical staff to produce courses, tutors to facilitate the learners' progress, and examiners to assess their knowledge and skills.

The second generation of distance learning has been developed in the context of the "behaviourist" concept of education. Print remains the primary medium, but the audiovisual sector is playing an increasingly pedagogical role. Interaction was still limited to the correction of assignments by mail and sometimes by telephone between learners and tutors.

In 1971, the number of CNED students exceeded 100,000, and there are currently 380,000, including 180,000 at the higher level. The Open University has recently reached 250,000 students and UNED 100,000.

*3rd generation: interactive distance learning:

The evolution achieved through the development of educational technologies and the integration of the computer tool has allowed the introduction of unlimited educational potential through interactive courses. Indeed, the first computer-assisted teaching systems appeared in the 1970s. The objective was first of all learning as a transfer of knowledge. A multitude of educational programs were developed, but were soon abandoned because their content was limited and their use rigid. The cognitive aspect was totally ignored with little research, diagnosis and adaptation of strategies. Knowledge and decisions were pre-determined, without regard for the user's behavior. But despite their limited application, these systems have had a significant impact on education. Medical diagnostic training systems have been widely used in some universities (Illinois, Washington) as well as space navigation simulation systems.

In addition, the reasoning capabilities provided by artificial intelligence and expert systems have enabled innovation by introducing higher levels of interaction between learners and systems. This has resulted in

an intelligent computer-aided education (C.I.A.O.) system that overcomes many shortcomings of previous systems. Research into tailoring learning to the learner's level and linking it to the learner's level of knowledge has led to a new generation of systems called intelligent tutorials.

A smart tutor system is a one-to-one (tutor-learner) learning system. These systems aim to replicate the behavior of intelligent tutors to provide users with personalized training. These systems dynamically generate tasks, adjust the difficulty according to the students' performance, and analyze the interpretation of the students' behavior. In effect, an intelligent learning system can draw conclusions about a student's knowledge and interact intelligently with the student, dynamically adapting the topics presented based on the results obtained and the learning mode best suited to the increase.

The means of communication and interaction between learners and instructors are also changing. Each learner interacts with tutors and peers through video conferencing, e-mail and web discussions. They also use the network's learning resources where they self-assess and become highly autonomous. These interactions significantly reduce dropout rates. In addition, educational technologies are diversifying, including print, audiovisual media, multimedia, telephone, e-mail, Web, and videoconference interactions....

This third generation of distance learning has emerged in a context influenced by the notion of "constructivism" in education. This third generation of distance learning uses interactive technology for collaborative

learning, learner reconstruction of learned concepts, anonymous and instantaneous self-assessment, and more.

In addition, globalization allows learners to choose courses from all over the world, forming groups of students from different countries and continents. This is extremely rewarding for students and a competitive challenge for educational institutions.

Finally, the economic accessibility of new information technologies allows all institutions, including traditional universities, to take advantage of it to enrich face-to-face teaching and sometimes even offer distance learning courses. We are therefore witnessing a very important phenomenon of convergence of face-to-face and distance learning in the world.

Thus, the characteristics of third generation distance learning are:

- interactive educational technology,

- a fusion of face-to-face and distance learning methods,

- Compete with distance learning institutions around the world.

Different generations of distance education exist around the world and even within the same institutions, especially given the time required for retraining. Institutions that offer both face-to-face and distance learning programs are called "dual". These may or may not be in-person and distance versions of the same program. In-person programs may include distance learning courses and are called "blended."

In short, the rapid development of educational technologies has pushed Morocco to integrate these tools into its educational system, taking into

account ongoing developments on the one hand and laying the foundation for a competitive education open to a changing environment on the other.

1.2.1. The advantages of online education

More flexibility

Online courses allow you to fit them into your schedule wherever you want. Normally, people who work and want to take courses in addition to their work find it difficult to manage their time. Online courses allow them to decide when they are most available to study. They can take their courses and programs while traveling by bus, car, train, or plane. This is obviously not possible in face-to-face education, which requires a predefined schedule and a fixed location. But online courses give you the time to manage yourself to learn.

Suitable for all paces

Every learner works at their own pace. In case you are faster than others, there is no need to wait for them. The reverse is also true: if you are slower, you can take your time without getting in the way. The courses can also be tailored to the level of learning.

Practice

Distance learning, unlike face-to-face learning, provides training in an asynchronous time and place. In addition, learners no longer need to travel to schools and conform to schedules. In other words, you can learn wherever you want, whenever you want. All you need is a WI-FI connection and a laptop, tablet, or smartphone.

Choosing the training of your dreams

Getting the training of your dreams often requires traveling to another city or country. Online training makes this task easier for many students.

1.2.2. Challenges of Online Education

Less interaction

Online learning facilitates remote access to a classroom at a time that is convenient for the learner. However, the learner may experience a sense of isolation due to the one-on-one format of this type of learning, which can make them feel lonely. But with the constant advancement of technology, learners can engage more actively with teachers or other students, using tools such as video conferencing, social media, and discussion forums.

Health Issues

Learners who take online training spend a great deal of time on their computers and other such devices; this can lead to eyestrain, the occurrence of poor posture, or other physical problems, which can affect the learner.

Less commitment

Younger learners are often the ones with the most self-discipline problems. Therefore, they will be less motivated to complete their online training, because there will not have been a physically present teacher to motivate them to study.

2. Research method and planning

We developed a self-administered questionnaire using Google Forms. This questionnaire is intended for teachers of French at the secondary level (college and qualifying). Two different socio-economic environments in the provincial directorate of Ouezzane were targeted, namely rural and urban.

3. Main results of the research

Question 01: Do you know about distance education?

Q 01. Avez-vous des connaissances sur l'enseignement en ligne (à distance) ?

28%

72%

oui   non
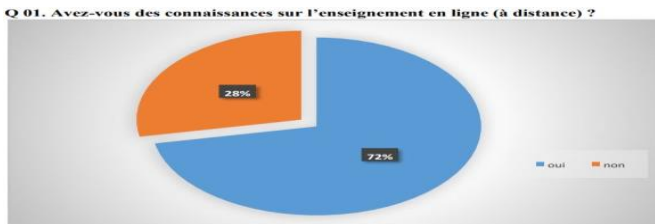
Surveys among teachers have shown a broad understanding and knowledge about this mode of teaching, it represents for them; "The act of transmitting courses at a distance on platforms or sites" And thanks to the development of communication technologies and the explosion of the Internet such as (Moodle and class-room, social networks facebook ...) . Distance learning has become widespread with the use of ICTs, even in the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic of COVID - 19 .

Question 2: What is the best way for you to get your courses?

20%

80%

l'enseignement à distance
l'enseignement presentiel
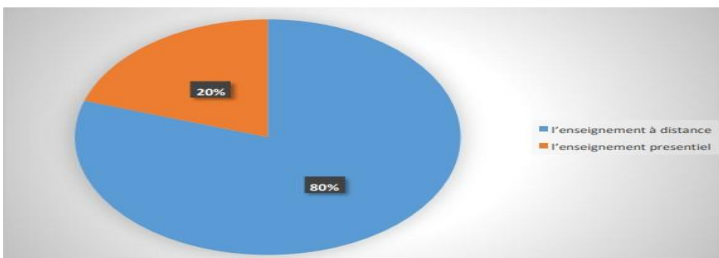
According to the results mentioned 80% found that the face-to-face courses are very much requested by the students because there is the possibility of interaction in class. If there is a misunderstanding the presence of the teacher facilitates the clarification of concepts or knowledge.

Question 3: have you ever been trained in distance learning or not?

Q 03 Avez-vous déjà été formés à l'enseignement à distance ou non ?

oui non
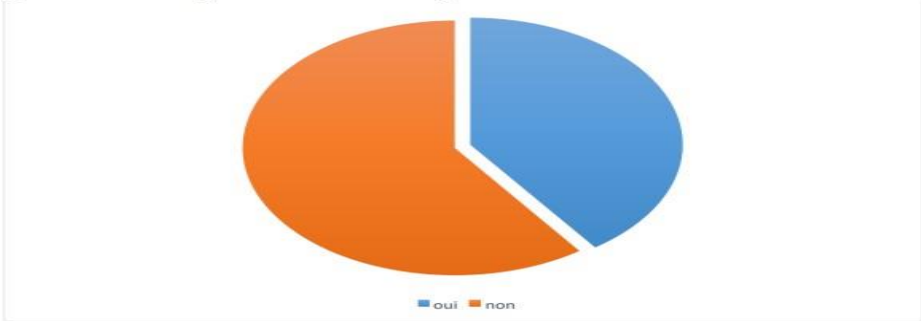
According to the results mentioned the teachers have not done an exact training on distance education (online) but they have made efforts on their part in order to apply this mode of teaching, a certain category say that it is a question of time to confirm on the results, it requires an acceptability

Question 4: What software do you use in your course?
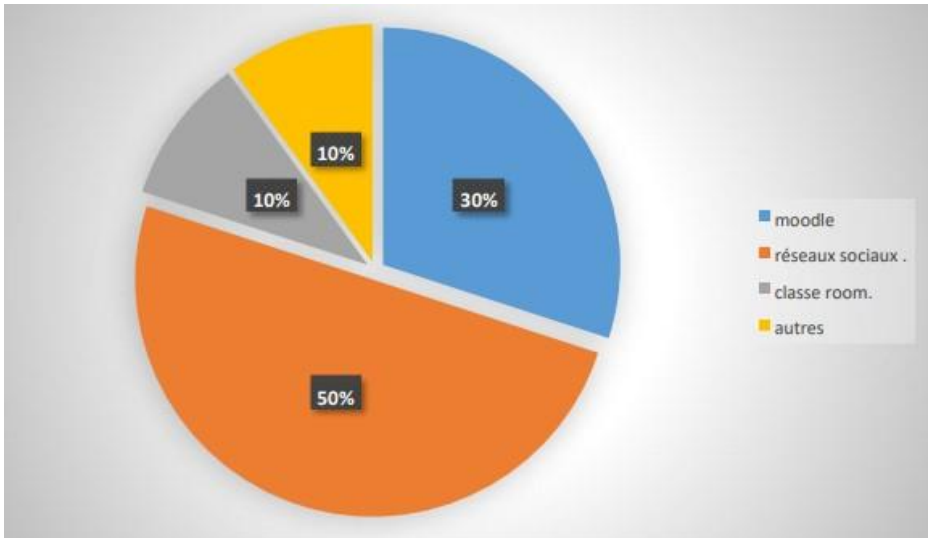
The technical conditions mentioned among teachers for the sharing of courses are: 50% of social networks is more precisely Facebook created by students that allow the dissemination of courses in forms (files, images, videos ... etc.), because students spend their time connected on social networks, while 30% of teachers questioned prefer to share their courses to the availability of means, internet and the Moodle platform.

Question 5: have you already organized an online session?

Q 05. Vous avez déjà organisé une séance en ligne (classe inversé) ?
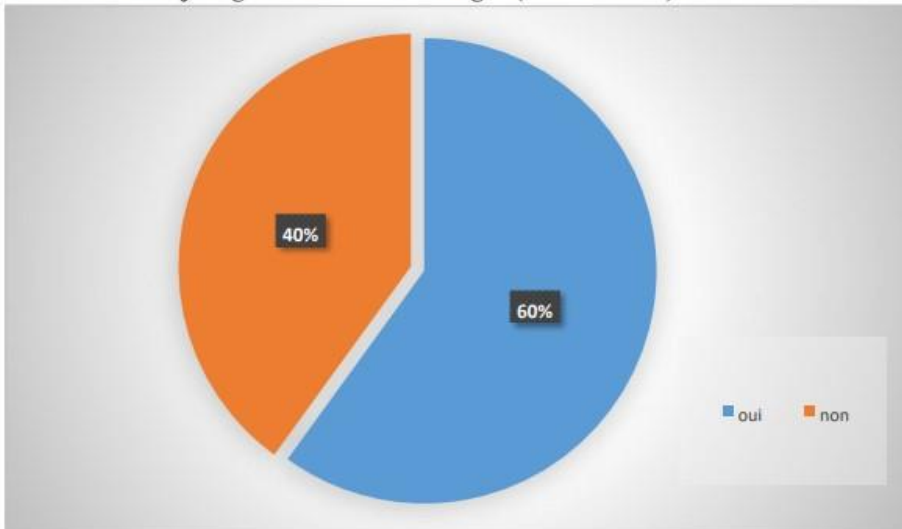
The majority of the teachers interviewed have organized an online session to ensure their courses during the pandemic of COVID-19 through the dissemination of new technologies (Moodle platform, room class.), nevertheless the technical means have a positive result the quality of learning.

Conclusion

Within the framework of measures aimed at controlling any danger of propagation of COVID-19, and as an important precaution to curb the virus, distance learning remains a relevant solution that allows students the pedagogical continuity to replace the face-to-face teaching during the confinement. In this sense, there is no need to travel to the schools, the courses will be carried out online, which allows students to consult them at any time with the appropriate rhythm. You can learn wherever you want and whenever you want in a familiar environment that allows you to work easily and save time. All we need is an internet connection and a laptop, a tablet, a smartphone and a good TV screen

that allows us to follow the courses broadcasted on Moroccan channels more comfortably.

So isn't it time to think about teaching French in a virtual classroom?

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