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DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR THE PROFIT OF NEWLY RECRUITED TEACHERS: REINFORCING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES THROUGH UFMC ALGERIAN TRAINING

Abstract: Although the educational sector has witnessed an exceptional advancement in computer technologies, their smart use was fairly limited in the EFL context. Hence, the unexpected pandemic encouraged teachers to adopt a non-traditional approach to meet the students' learning needs. Blended learning was readily arrogated to deliver the courses on-line and decrease the social distance at university. In parallel, UFMC Algerian training was scheduled by Constantine University –Algeria- for the benefits of newly recruited teachers to improve their on-line teaching. Thus, the new learned skills were momentarily applied to reinforce a blended approach to learning with Master Students at Ibn Khaldoun University, Algeria. Upon students' consensus, on-line interaction was not accredited before the pandemic that is why a clash arose between distance education and face-to-face interaction. In this prospect, it is recommended to train teachers and learners in the usability of MOOCs to elevate learners' inclusion in the classroom and raise their awareness vis-à-vis self-blend and flex models.

Keywords: Technological facilities; Blended Learning; UFMC Algerian training; MOOC; Self Blend; Flex Model.

Streszczenie: Choć sektor edukacyjny był świadkiem wyjątkowego postępu w technologiach komputerowych, inteligentne wykorzystanie tych technologii było dość ograniczone w kontekście EFL. Dlatego też nieoczekiwana pandemia zachęciła nauczycieli do przyjęcia nietradycyjnego podejścia w celu zaspokojenia potrzeb edukacyjnych uczniów. Blended learning został z łatwością wykorzystany do prowadzenia kursów online i zmniejszenia dystansu społecznego na uniwersytecie. Równoległe, algierskie szkolenie UFMC zostało zaplanowane przez Constantine University – Algieria – z korzyścią dla nowo zatrudnionych nauczycieli w celu poprawy ich nauczania online. W ten sposób nowo nabyte umiejętności były tymczasowo stosowane w celu wzmocnienia mieszanego podejścia do uczenia się ze studentami studiów magisterskich na Uniwersytecie Ibn

Khaldoun w Algierii. Zgodnie z opinią studentów, interakcja online nie była stosowana przed pandemią, dlatego też doszło do konfliktu między edukacją na odległość a interakcją twarzą w twarz. W tej perspektywie zaleca się przeszkolenie nauczycieli i uczniów w zakresie użyteczności MOOC, aby zwiększyć integrację uczniów w klasie i podnieść ich świadomość w zakresie samodzielnego łączenia i elastycznych modeli.

Słowa kluczowe: Udogodnienia technologiczne; Blended Learning; Algierskie szkolenie UFMC; MOOC; Self Blend; Flex Model.

1. General Overview

Today's schools are organized to produce Industrial Age worker citizens. If schools are to prepare young people for successful lives in the 21st century, they need to do things differently. 21st century schools need to develop different skills and dispositions from those that were required in the 20th century.

(NZCER, 2009, as qtd in Hirschman and Wood, 2008, p. 26)

By convention, the 21 century learners are addicted to technological devices as smart-phones, laptops besides the addiction to diversified applications, this aforementioned addiction is not context bound, but it is universal. The digital tools became integral parts of the individuals' lives. In fact, we could never disregard that the new generation or as Simon Sinek (2016) has labelled 'millennial' have their own characteristics which do not match with the requirements of the new world, especially after Covid 19 pandemic, many gaps emerged and many foibles were unveiled. Therefore, the new system or the blended approach that was adopted was not adequate to address the students' needs and interests for many reasons; one of these reasons is the absence of training vis-a-vis the on-line course providers (Nava, 2015; Ghounane, 2020; Bouhezam, 2021).

Accordingly, we cannot disregard that generations are different in perspective. Today's learners are digitally smart; consequently, a clash is recognized between the learners' preferences and the approaches adopted in class. Apparently, the majority of students get used to traditional settings taught by teachers who were not accommodated and trained in using technologies. This clash is the responsibility of all poles, including policy makers, administrative staff, teachers and students.

The absence of training to meet the requirements of the digital world should be reviewed as well, as clarified by Simon Sinek (2016) in an interview when making a compelling argument about the digital gap that arose between those who have grown up in the digital world and those who have acquired acquaintance with digital technology at later points in their lives. This perspective has intrinsic implications in education. It is hard for digital natives to excel academically using the out-dated teaching methods and being taught by digital experts (Warman, 2022). As a result,

hybrid learning was regarded as the best initiative to provide an interactive digital environment that runs an autonomous and self-regulated learning. Hediassah & Surjono (2020) put forward that hybrid learning and blended learning could be used interchangeably to refer to the fusion between face to face learning with on-line learning in order to gain advantages from distance education and classroom interaction. In this vein, Qi and Tian (2011) have introduced four major properties which characterize hybrid learning, they are outlined as follows:

- (1) Fusion of collective learning and individual learning,
- (2) mixture of synchronous learning and asynchronous learning,
- (3) Combination of self-paced and group-paced learning,
- (4) Combining the formal learning context and the non-formal learning in terms of lifelong learning incorporation and/or setting of learning.

Thus, teachers play the role of facilitators of the blended process, their intervention is necessary when needed, and their role is quite complementary.

Hybrid learning in the Algerian higher education in particular is practically exclusive. As hybrid courses are gaining popularity and their success often depends on the teacher consistency and on-going support. After its launching in 2012, the 'University Mentouri Brothers of Constantine', Algeria, has provided newly recruited teachers at university -all fields- with the opportunity to have a constructive on-line training in "ICT and educational practice". Owing to this specific on-line training, which was officially launched by the state (decree N 932 of July 28, 2016), instructors now should be prepared to adopt and adapt to a modernized working environment, to be acquainted with hybrid teaching and more importantly to be able to design hybrid on-line courses.

Accordingly, the training program has clearly depicted that hybrid teaching does not require lecturing in class and urge the students, instead, to read a textbook and do on-line assignments at home. In fact, the best hybrid instruction permits the learners to interact with the content and be engaged in learning activities before, during, and after the face-to-face interaction. It is noteworthy to mention that this training, as a unique learning resource, bridges the gap between theory and practice and entails the acquisition of new competences and skills which go beyond the traditional asset. As an illustration, Moodle and Open Edx are the reference LMS platforms to implement ICT teachers' training in Algeria.

With its free application cost and open accessibility, Moodle network is being promoted steadily (Ghounane, 2020; Bouhezam, 2021). Therefore, Moodle has rich backgrounds and services which permit many possible tasks for its users including teachers, students and groups, they are outlined as follows:

- Chats and forums discussions,
- File sharing,

- The SCORM module,
- Different types of assignments, databases, lessons, multiple types of tests with one or more items and quizzes,
- Referenda, surveys, questionnaires, glossaries, wikis and peer-coaching using workshop activity,
- Work submissions,
- Sharing results and feedback for students as grades and comments,
- Final survey.

Furthermore, Moodle has other options as: a calendar where all tasks can be announced and pre-determined; a messages exchange system that is completely supported by the platform and an area where it is possible to know who is on-line. Another benefit which recommends Moodle for being implemented in the teachers' training is its ability to combine on-line learning and classroom learning vis-a-vis blended strategies.

The Open Edx is a Learning Management System (LMS), available for computers and android versions provides accessibility to course content and supporting infrastructure (schedules, discussion boards, collaboration tools, student administration, certificate generation, messaging, and so forth). The open EdX is an on-line course provider which hosts on-line university-level courses in a wide range of disciplines to a large number of students, including some courses that are free of charge. It conducts research into learning based on how people use its platform. The Open edX is a non-commercial organization whereby the sign up is for free and requires only the creation of an account with a reliable email.

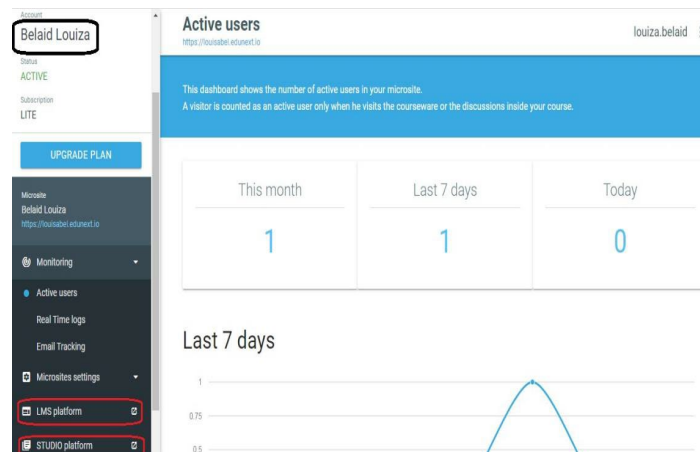


Figure 1: LMS/Studio platform, a screenshot taken from our account created in Edx platform

As trainees, we have always needed support throughout the journey; it was not easy because some of the activities were updated with the inclusion of new skills and new requirements. The type of support that was delivered by the training team differed considerably from one activity to another. This means that the most important roles of the trainers were not delimited to instructions via forum or giving immediate feedback, but sometimes we requested clarifications throughout emails too, they also gave us enough time to evaluate our activities; they were moderators and we considered them as a guide to accomplish each task of the workshop.

The trainees' roles throughout the training journey were:

- a) **Pedagogical role:** giving tasks to complete, answering some pedagogical questions and assessing the trainees' productions.
- b) **Technical role:** exploring training needs; making trainees comfortable with the system and the software that they are using.
- c) **Administrative role:** serving as a link between learners and institution on administrative issues (for example providing the trainees with the course evaluators IDs).
- d) **Socio-effective role:** developing human relationships and social skills, developing group cohesiveness, maintaining the group as a unit, and in other ways helping members to cooperate collaboratively.

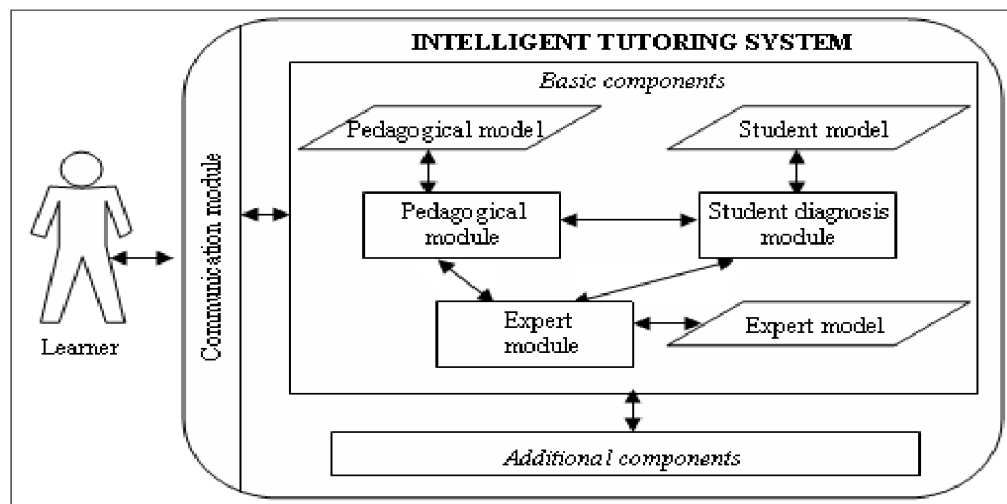


Figure 2: Framework of intelligent e-tutoring, Anohina (2007).

Source: <https://doi.org/10.15837/ijccc.2007.1.2336>

1.1 Training objectives

The ICT and educational practice teachers' training does not revolve around applications or word office including Word, Excel, and Power-Point, but it includes different processes that can be transmitted in a more effective hybrid learning framework for students in higher education. This model is developed through a successive set of workshops designed for trainees in order to:

- ✓ Acquire new skills about an editorial chain (Scenari) for the production of educational documents,
- ✓ Create a course map (mapping),
- ✓ Generate clear and measurable general and specific objectives (Bloom's taxonomy),
- ✓ Differentiate between the teaching methods (Objective vs. Competence based approach),
- ✓ Understand the strategies of evaluation/assessment,
- ✓ Analyse an on-line training system,
- ✓ Construct a collaborative work with the members of the group,
- ✓ Design an educational (pedagogical) scenario,
- ✓ Master the Moodle platform with its functions,
- ✓ Master the functions of Open edX platform alongside Studio LMS,
- ✓ Understand the functions of an on-line tutor.

1.2 Training workshops and activities

This on-line training provides five interactive workshops whereby trainees carry out a number of activities in each workshop; these activities could be quizzes, assignments or group work tasks, all we need to do is to download the required documents that are interpreted in details to understand how to correct the activities that are supposed to be graded by the trainer after the deadline. The workshops are designed to be delivered to meet every trainee's needs; they are arranged in two parts:

- a. **Theoretical part:** this section has a rich amount of knowledge to enable the trainee to understand the activity; data is provided through documents and videos.
- b. **Practical part:** this section has either quizzes or assignments to submit, it is delimited by a deadline, and all information that is provided in the theoretical part should be consulted to understand what task should be performed and how it is fulfilled. The five workshops are outlined as follows:

First workshop 'C2I': Aid Tools for the Use of ICT in Higher Education

Second workshop 'CCEH': Hybrid Course Design

Third workshop 'MCFEH': Methodology for Hybrid Course Design

Fourth workshop 'MOOC': Massive Open Online Course Design

Fifth workshop 'SP': Educational Follow-up

1.2.1 Teachers' expectations

We cannot disregard that there are many challenges and benefits of hybrid learning. The unexpected pandemic of Covid 19 urged universities to adopt an improvised agenda to keep students and teachers in quarantine; meanwhile, courses were supposed to be delivered on-line. This shift was abrupt and unplanned and it would cost much time and efforts to cope with the new situation. Therefore, teachers' should raise awareness vis-a-vis on-line course providers to save such a situation and help learners perform better than on-site interaction because of the delinquencies that some of the teachers still have in planning a successful on-line course for students at university.

The learning and teaching needs of teachers are quite flexible. The process of transferring knowledge into practice, for example, may result in different supplementary needs that have not been investigated before; teachers should always be updated with the new teaching techniques to meet the needs of learners and include them all in the learning process. In this vein, reflective teaching should be activated in association with the following queries; are there any new technological advances? What are the new challenges for teachers? How can universities, teachers, students, teachers training centers' and trainers get together to make hybrid or e-learning a real and sustainable approach? As clarified by Bin Herzallah (2021):

Key to successful teacher professional development programs is a modular structure, corresponding to different levels of teacher experience and expertise using technology. Adapting materials to teachers' comfort level and starting points is essential. In this way, teachers new to technology can be exposed to the full series of professional development modules, while those further along on the learning curve can enter where their knowledge and skills stop, and help their less technology-savvy colleagues along. (p. 77)

It is frequently assumed that instructors need to be provided with trainings that enable good practice than prescribe it. We expect serious consideration of the teachers' needs, and because they are sometimes under growing pressure to perform, on-site meetings are recommended. It is also beneficial to invite experienced on-line or hybrid teachers in the same sector to share their recommendations with newly recruited teachers, as well as, experienced teachers who were never trained in hybrid teaching. Thus, some experienced teachers need further training in ICTs and MOOC too. In a nutshell, considerable attention should be given to teachers' views, beliefs, values, experiences as well as needs.

2. Moodle online course

When dealing with online courses, it is necessary to rethink the methodologies and approaches adopted in on-site courses. An account must be made for the '*course design*' itself and the '*communication architecture*'. Moodle (LMS) platform that is adopted by the University Ibn Khaldoun of Tiaret integrates several modules which allow creation, organization, delivery, communication, collaboration and assessment activities, this diversity in options is quite interesting and help learners develop their skills and competencies. Yet, teachers' training of the usability of the platform is a must to be able to use SCORM and other creative options as URL, you-tube, on-line quizzes and so forth.

a. Course chapters

Dialectology and sociolinguistic variation on-line course consists of three main inseparable chapters: (1) Traditional vs. Urban dialectology (2) Individual and Speech community repertoire and (3) Language Contact. Each chapter has a precise time, specific objectives, SCORM package, and files (doc, pdf) to download or verify on-line. In fact, we have provided our students with aid resources, web links (URL), videos, and on-line quizzes to achieve in the platform. Forum, discussion and wiki spaces were provided as well to exchange ideas and raise issues when necessary. Therefore, the captured images below demonstrate a sample of the questions/queries we shared with the students via our Edx webpage. The quizzes included are aligned to the specific learning outcomes we intend to address in each chapter.

● *Unique choice question*



Question 3
Pas encore répondu
Noté sur 1,00
Marquer la question
Modifier la question

Traditional dialectology is characterized by:

- a. Social variation
- b. Flexibility
- c. Regional variation
- d. Social factors

● **Multiple choice question**

Question 6

Pas encore répondu

Noté sur 3,00

🚩 Marquer la question

⚙️ Modifier la question

Which of the following factors is considered as an intervening variable?

- a. Race
- b. Age
- c. Gender
- d. Ethnicity
- e. Social status

● **True/false questions**

Question 2

Pas encore répondu

Noté sur 1,00

🚩 Marquer la question

⚙️ Modifier la question

Urban dialects' variation is uncontrolled.

Sélectionnez une réponse :

- Vrai
- Faux

● **Fill in gaps**

Question 5

Pas encore répondu

Noté sur 3,00

🚩 Marquer la question

⚙️ Modifier la question

Language though and time. Whenever we move from one to another we realize at the three levels.

● **Short answer question**

Question 4

Pas encore répondu

Noté sur 1,00

🚩 Marquer la question

⚙️ Modifier la question

Mutual intelligibility is a valid criterion in comparing between languages and dialects.

Réponse :

Most types of the questions that are implemented in this on-line course are tightly linked to the overall aim of the course as they match with the taxonomy of Bloom (revised version). In this regard, the development of these questions target to diagnose the understandability of the content to proceed in the remaining sequences.

b. Course policies on grading

Actually, grades could be entered in multiple positions in Moodle. The grading of this course includes learners' participation (on-line posts), accessing the SCORM packages, accomplishing the workshop activities, individual assignments' submissions, quizzes attempts besides the exam. Problems as plagiarism, on-line attendance issues, and requests for extensions of the deadlines are all taken into account.

c. Communication spaces

Moodle represents one of the most widely used open e-learning platforms that facilitate the exchange of information among learners who are geographically distant; this communication occurs through-out mechanisms of synchronous (chats) and asynchronous communication (discussion forums). These spaces are open to all students with their teachers, teachers, in this regard, may leave an open question or video link to initiate an on-line debate.

2.1 Online learning outcomes

On-line learning was based on the construction of active learning communities and the encouragement of a collaborative environment. Collaborative group discussion was a prerequisite strategy to assist enrolled students with basic instructions in online interaction and hence to develop the necessary skills of critical thinking, self-regulation, and the construction of an input +1. In other words, when students were gathered in an on-line/on-site group, they did not feel

excluded or isolated, but they were integrated as part of a learning community whereby every learner has received support and educational reinforcement.

Yet, collaborative on-line learning in higher education is not merely working in groups; it is an opportunity to exchange thoughts and perceptions through communication spaces. Discussion forums, as an illustration, can be real meeting spaces to collaborate and share ideas about the given projects, or assignments. On-line group collaboration entails a careful control of the tutor; his/her intervention is always needed. Tutors incorporate a variety of instructional strategies to improve the quality of group discussion, increase the likelihood of student participation and give constructive feedback on the progress of each group when necessary. Our applicability of the new learned skills from the UFMC training on the selected sample helped improving the learners' readability to be included in the classroom context and raised as well their interest in on-line platforms. Yet, the on-site mode of teaching is still needed, at least for the current time. The on-line usability and flexibility should be accelerated and diffused in official trainings for all poles, besides, the availability of the learning and smart facilities becomes compulsory to successfully excuse the self and flex models of teaching.

3. Conclusion

The self-blend and self-flex models are at the heart of the 21st century education. They are technically used to help learners educate themselves using on-line resources in a way that best fit a myriad of lifestyles, skills and preferences. In adult education, the self-blend model is typically used for individuals to complete a course, which is afterwards assessed by a tutor, which is the case for the UFMC program in Algeria. Extending our knowledge throughout the training helped in accommodating our teaching to suit the overall needs of learners; further, we prospered in Edx, and Opale software and other on-line facilities. In a nutshell, reflective teaching is improved via the UFMC on-line training by which evaluating one's teaching practices and students' inclusion is rendered a priority.

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