Blended Learning: Advantages and Disadvantages

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Abstract:

The teaching of English has witnessed remarkable developments in terms of approaches and methods used in the English language classroom. The basic teaching media used in an English language class include the whiteboard. Moreover, teachers have been encouraged to use the various types of technology that have emerged in recent years such as the data projector, the smart board, mobile devices, audio and video recordings and computers in order to show students words, pictures and texts. Moreover, many ways of learning have appeared such as distant learning and blended learning to enable students to learn. Blended learning that uses both online and in-person learning (Harmer, 2012) has been adopted in the Algerian universities right after the Covid pandemic emergence. To this end, the aim of this paper is to shed light on blended learning in the Algerian universities context, highlighting its advantages and disadvantages.

Keywords: Blended teaching, Face to face teaching, Online teaching, Onsite teaching

Introduction

The pandemic era has obliged many educational and higher education institutions to look for ways to ensure the good learning conditions while avoiding contaminations and infections among the administrators, teaching staff and students. The Algerian universities are no exception as they varied the means of instruction. They have adopted blended learning as a way of teaching students. Blended learning has been a temporary solution resorted to in this period of time. The focus of this presentation is on defining blended learning and highlighting its advantages and disadvantages.

1. Blended Learning

Blended comes from the verb "to blend" which means "to mix", so blended learning refers to mixed learning. Blended learning is also known as "hybrid learning" in which some learning happens online whereas some other of it happens face to face; that is in class or onsite. In fact, rapid technological development has made learning easier by converging traditional face to face and technology-mediated learning environments, also called blended learning environments.

Blended learning is an approach to learning that combines both face-to-face/onsite and online learning so as to balance pedagogical instruction and technology to improve students' learning (Singh et al., 2021; Tong et al., 2022). According to Harmer (2012), "*Many teachers organise BLENDED LEARNING in which the students get some of the input from material such as a COURSEBOOK, and then expand on it with material and websites on the internet*" (p. 193)*. In other words, the course "deepens and expands the online experience in a face-to-face classroom*" (ibid). Furthermore, this form of teaching allows teachers to reinvent and revise the content mainly in disciplines where teachers encountered challenges in teaching students in an online medium of teaching (Rodriguez, 2020).

Dziuban, Hartman and Moskal (2004, p. 3) argued that:

blended learning should be viewed as a pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment, rather than a ratio of delivery modalities. In other words, blended learning

should be approached not merely as a temporal construct, but rather as a fundamental redesign of the instructional model with the following characteristics:

- a shift from lecture- to student-centered instruction in which students become active and interactive learners (this shift should apply to the entire course, including face-to-face contact sessions); „

- increases in interaction between student-instructor, student-student, student-content, and student-outside resources; „

- integrated formative and summative assessment mechanisms for students and instructor.

Moreover, Tong et al (2022, p. 1) stated the following:

Individuals attempting to study remotely during the COVID-19 lockdown will find that blended learning is a helpful solution and results in a significant increase in learning engagement. The best benefits for teachers and students are obtained by maximizing the advantages of each teaching method and by combining the advantages of online and face-to-face instruction.

Singh et al (2021) mentioned that blended learning has been widely accepted by instructors as it has the potential to create extra opportunities that can be incorporated in face to face learning on a regular basis while providing with them much flexibility to advance at their own speed.

1.1. In-Person Learning

In-person learning refers to any form of instruction that occurs in the same place and at the right time between teachers and students; nonetheless, this form can also occur through the audio, video and Internet technologies, allowing students to interact from different places and at different times.

1.2. Synchronous Learning

This form of learning, also called distance learning/education, happens at the same time but not in the same location. This includes online learning in which students learn from teachers/instructors and colleagues in real times, but not in person. Examples of synchronous learning encompass: interactive webinars, educational video conferences, lectures, etc. that are broadcast at the same time. Harmer (2012) states that in webinars, participants

can see the speaker talking to a webcam while he or she also shows PowerPoint or Keynote slides. Participants can interact with each other by writing in CHATBOXES or with microphones. They can use icons for things like applause and laughter (p. 193).

1.3. Asynchronous Learning

Asynchronous learning is a teaching methodology whereby learners learn independently and in different times and spaces (DeMarchi, 2025). Asynchronous learning often takes place in online learning environments where the teacher/instructor sets up a learning path for students to engage with and proceed through at their own speed.

2.Using Virtual Learning Environments and Learning Platforms

Harmer (2012) states that a lot of teaching and learning takes place in a variety of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and online platforms. He explains that course designers can use software such as BLACKBOARD, MOODLE, and others to run courses and lessons. In this case, users need a password to enter. Moreover, teachers and students can post materials such as texts, exercises and videos and audios, and only the members of the group can access them. Assignments can be submitted, commented on and graded online, and discussions happen on discussion boards.

2.1. Advantages of Blended Learning

Blended learning has many benefits and advantages. The advocates argue that blended learning:

- allows the students to work independently besides the teacher's assistance.

- allows teachers in reaching a large audience in a short time.

- gives the opportunity to students to prepare and think over the content and the different activities and assignments, and

- provides an opportunity for more more useful face-to-face discussions.

According to Stein and Graham (2014), blended courses:

- provide the opportunity for teachers to mix the best of onsite and online to create a new learning environment for their students

- can have a positive impact on efficiency, convenience, and learning outcomes

- add flexibility to participants' schedules

- provide learning benefit through automated and asynchronous online tools

- can tap into the modern, social Web to help learners venture beyond the traditional confines of the classroom

- make access to learning activities easier

The same authors argue that blended courses can decrease costs to teachers, students and institutions in that both teachers and students can spend less travel time and transportation savings, and institutions can benefit from physical campus resources reduction.

2.2. Disadvantages of Blended Learning

Some disadvantages do exist in blended learning. Researchers argue that blended learning has some disadvantages, as follows:

- It is not easy for some teachers to switch to a new method of learning mainly when they are already accustomed to a traditional approach.

- It may decrease motivation as it may not suit all students' levels.

- It may not suit some students who do not know how to use technology.

- It cannot prevent plagiarism as students can get access to the web easily, and can do tests and examinations in group.

3. Methodology

A descriptive analytical approach was selected to suit this study.

3.1. Instrument

For approaching this study, a questionnaire has been selected and shared through Google Form to Algerian teachers.

3.2. Sample

This study was intended to Algerian teachers and instructors. To this end, 40 teachers from different Algerian universities answered this questionnaire.
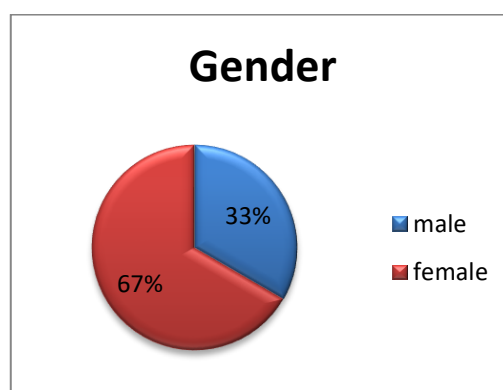
3.3. Teachers' Questionnaire Analysis

1. **Gender**

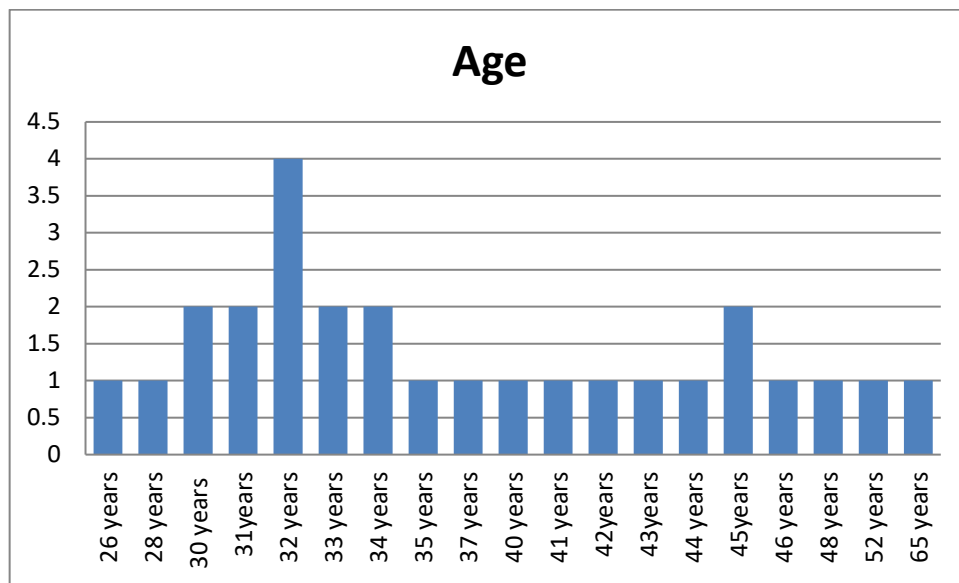**Figure 1:** Gender of teachers

2. **Age**

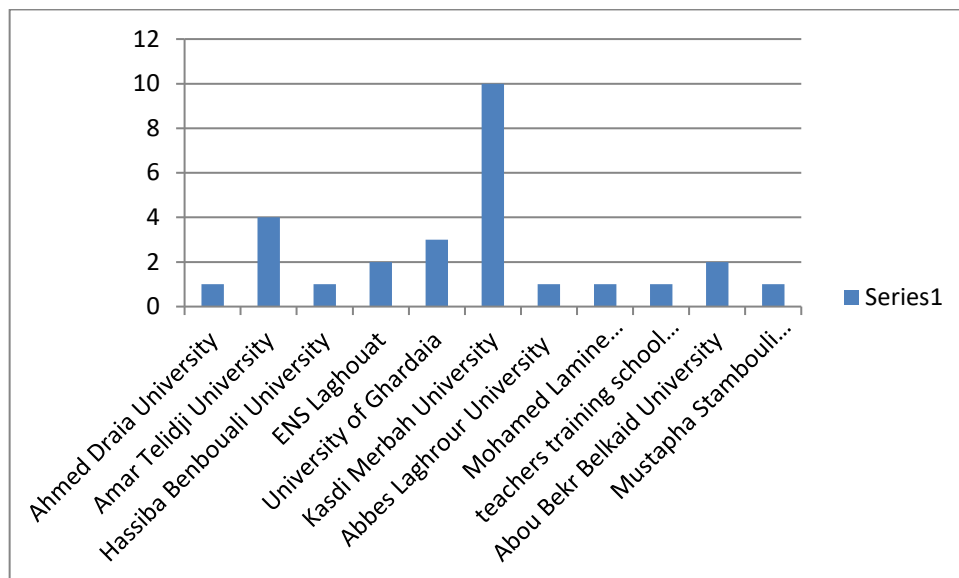**Figure 2:** Age of teachers

3. University

Figure 3: The universities the teachers belong to

From the figure of Sex and the two graphs above, 33% of the respondents are males and 67% are males. They are between 26 and 65 years old. Moreover, they belong to the following universities and institutions:

- Ahmed Draia University

- Amar Telidji University

- Hassiba Benbouali University

- ENS Laghouat

- University of Ghardaia

- Kasdi Merbah University

- Abbes Laghrour University

- Mohammed Lamine Debaghine

- Abou Bekr Belakaid University

- Mustapha Stambouli University

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4. Do you teach Licence students?
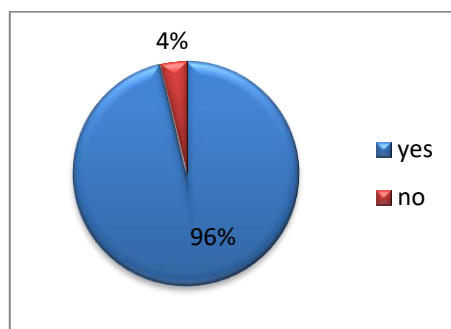
Figure 4: Whether teachers teach Licence students

The figure above shows that 96% of the respondents teach Licence students, and this is logical as Licence years are three (3).
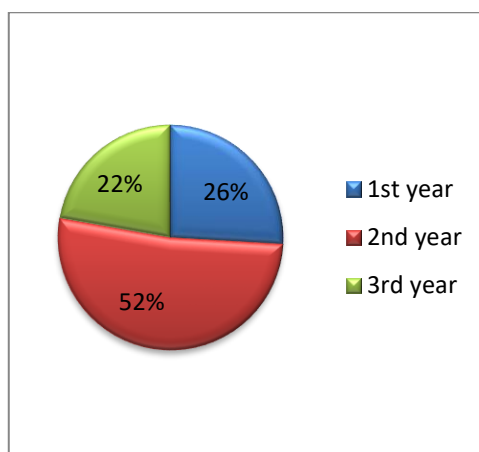
5. Which class(es) ?

Figure 5: The classes of Licence they teach

Following the figure above, 26% of the respondents teach first year Licence, 52% that make the majority teach second year Licence and 22% teach third year Licence.
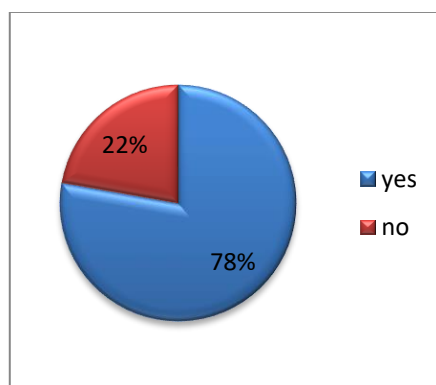
6. Do you teach Master students?

Figure 6: Whether teachers teach Master students

From the figure above, 78% of the respondents teach Master students.
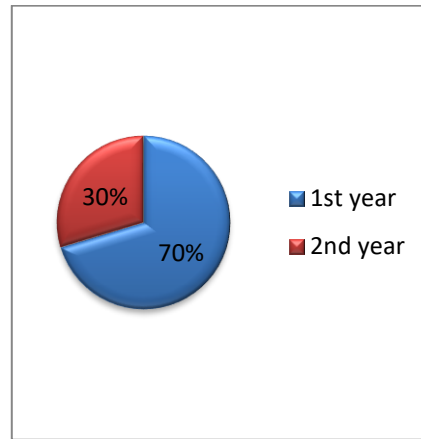
7. Which class (es) ?

Figure 7: The classes of Master they teach

70% of the respondents above teach the first year Master class, while 30% teach the second year class.

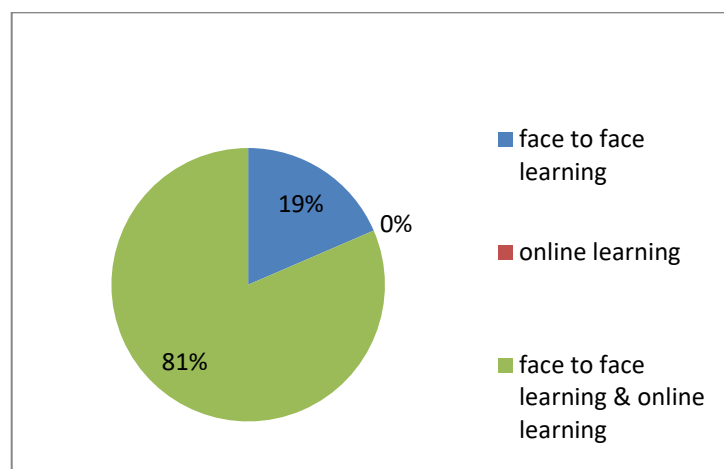**8.What kind of learning are you having in your department?**

Figure 8: The kind of teaching in their departments

The figure indicates that 19% of the respondents are having face to face learning, and 81% combine both face to face and online learning (blended learning).

9. Through which platform (s)/application (s) are you teaching online?
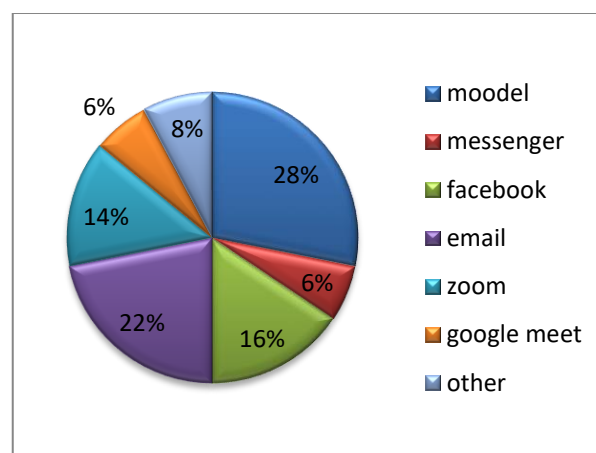

Figure 9: The platforms and applications they are using

The respondents who teach online use the following platforms and applications:

- Moodle (28%)

- Messenger (6%)

- Facebook (16%)

- Email (22%)

- Zoom (14%)

- Google Meet (6%)

Other answers included the following:

- Google classroom

- - Microsoft teams

- Whatsapp

- Edmodo application/platform

- Youtube channel

- Telegram

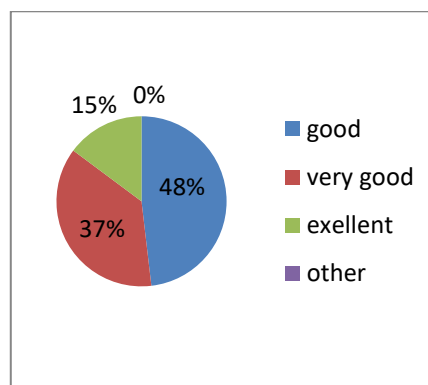**10. This or these platform(s)/app(s) is/are:**

Figure 10: How they find those platforms/applications

48% mentioned that the platforms/applications they use are good, 37% said they are very good, and 15% find them excellent.

11. The kind of lessons you send through this or these platform(s)/app(s) are:
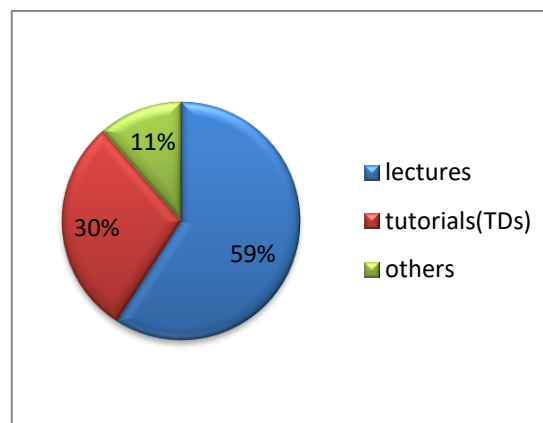

Figure 11: The kind of lessons they send through those platforms/applications

From the figure above, 59% send lectures, 30% send tutorials and 11% send audios, videos, both videos and audios, assignments, tests, video presentations (PowerPoint slides).
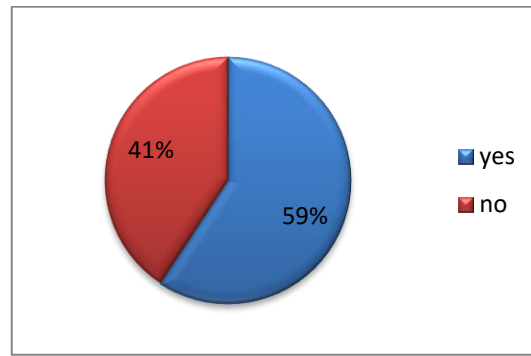
12. Do you like to teach 'live'?

Figure 12: Whether they like teaching "live"

The figure above indicates that 59% of the respondents teach 'live', while 41% do not.

Why?

59% who teach 'live' mentioned the reasons, as follows:

- It is more convenient.

- It is vivid and motivating.

- It facilitates the work.

- This enables interaction and facilitates communication which is the lifeblood of teaching and learning.

- It is often very helpful.

- It ensures coordination and interactivity.

- Students are more willing to interact and grasp the information they receive.

- To motivate students and get sure that they attend the lectures

- It helps for assessing our students.

- There is teacher-student interaction.

- It saves time; actually, it a great way to increase the number of sessions when the ones scheduled by the administration do not suffice, and it is a great way to capture the students since they spend most of their time online and on their phones.

- Teaching live may encourage students to participate and engage in the course by becoming more motivated.

- The students are more comfortable, and we can teach from any place.

- I feel the interaction with my students.

- To feel better interaction

- It is more interactive, and the students prefer live lessons.

However, the respondents who do not teach 'live' mentioned the following reasons:

- Bad connection

- Technical problems in the Internet connection

- The lack of culture of e-learning,

- The lack of necessary equipments,

- The lack of necessary training about e-learning and how to use the different applications

- I prefer face to face teaching method because it provides more interaction with students

- Face to face is always better for better interaction

- There will be no Student/ teacher interaction.

- We don't have the habit to do so.

- We are not acquainted with that method yet.

- Not all the students have access to Internet.

- The interaction and the reactions are better received in the classroom.

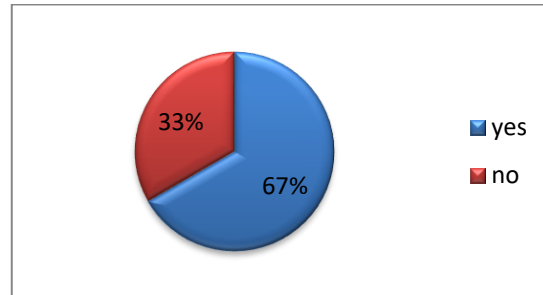### 13. Did you have the opportunity to interact with your learners " live" online?

Figure 13: Whether they interact with their learners "live"

From the figure above, 67% of the teachers interact with their learners 'live', while 33% do not and provided the following reasons:

- There is bad Internet connection.

- The use of Moodle for instance doesn't allow the teacher to interact with his students.

- There are no facilities for students.

- There are technical problems.

- Outside the classroom I don't find the suitable atmosphere for a live lecture.

- Too difficult to make it

- One reason is because I really do not like improvisation, and if I decide to do something online that would be a recorded video. A second reason is because face to face sessions were enough.

- The nature of my module doesn't need 'live' sessions.

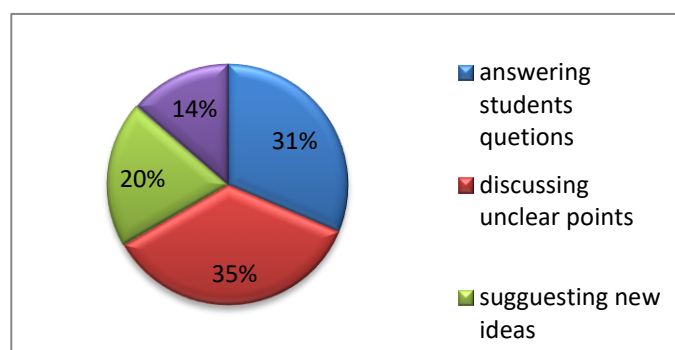### 14. If 'yes', what is the content of this 'live'?

Figure 14: The content of the "live"

31% of the participants reported that the content of 'live' included answering questions, 35% discussing unclear points about the lessons, 20% suggesting new ideas and 14% mentioned the following:

- Doing lectures and revising for the exams

- Discussion of 5th year students' dissertation work

- Role playing

- Giving activities and posting announcements

-   Having oral classes and debating with the students
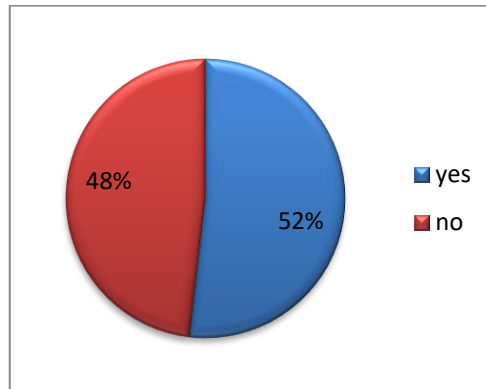
15. Have you ever tested your learners online?

Figure 15: Whether they have test their learners online

As the figure above shows, 52% have tested their learners online, while 48% have not.

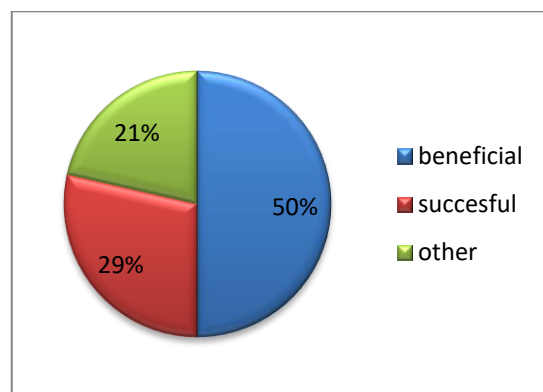### 16.If yes, can you describe this experience?

Figure 16: How they find online testing

This experience of testing students online is beneficial according to 50% of the respondents, whereas 29% find it successful. Moreover, 21% find it:

-   Not functional
-   Untrustworthy
-   It depends on the students' level and motivation

If no, why? (What is the problem?)

The respondents who answered 'No' mentioned the following reasons:

-   Bad connection
-   Cheating
-   I do not believe in online assessment
-   Fear of having technical problems
-   Time constraint
-   It doesn't work the way we want
-   It is difficult to control the students' plagiarism
-   Using inappropriate teaching methods
-   The lack of technological support.
-   Not beneficial for the moment

- No facilities

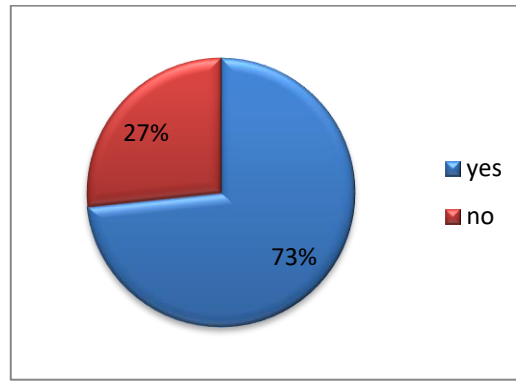**17. Have you benefited from online teaching?**

Figure 17: Whether they have benefited from online teaching

From the figure above, 73% said they have benefited from online teaching, while 27% have not.

If no, why? (What is the problem?)

Those who said 'No' mentioned the following reasons:

- Bad connection

- Students are not helping

- It depends on the app the teacher uses. Like moodle you just have to upload the lesson in a mere passive way.

- We are not ready for this kind of teaching

18. What are the obstacles of online teaching in Algeria (in general) and in your university (in particular) in your opinion?

According to the participants, the obstacles of online teaching were, as follows:

- Bad connection

- The mentality of students: uninterested students. Most students don't have a pc. Ignorance of how to use these platforms. Students do not have access to internet. Students became lazy. The students' competence in using ICT, students are still unfamiliar with online teaching.

- Good but lacks some logistic capacities and technological equipment on the university part

- There is a problem in evaluation

- Lack of sophisticated material

- They need to be familiar with online learning as most of them develop wrong image about it.

- Unavailability of electricity sometimes

- We need a space for that, and the Internet connection needs enhancement.

- No internet access for students

- Availability of net at campus and remote areas

- Lack of interest, and unawareness about using ICT tools.

- The acceptance of this kind of teaching from both teachers and learners

- Lack of training for both teachers and students.

- Furthermore, I do not trust testing online; students cheat in class let alone online

- May be no enough facilities

- Absence

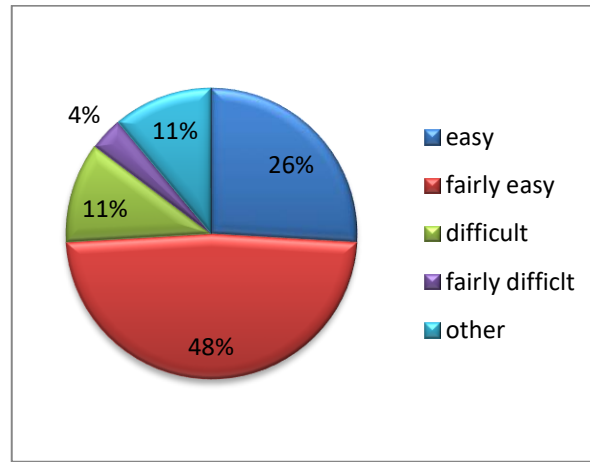**19. The content of the lessons you sent/gave/put online was:**

Figure 19: The content of the online lessons

26% of the respondents said that the content of the lessons sent online was easy, fairly easy for 48% of them. It is difficult for 11% and 4% find it fairly difficult.

Other answers mentioned that it depends on the lecture and its purpose and the level of students.
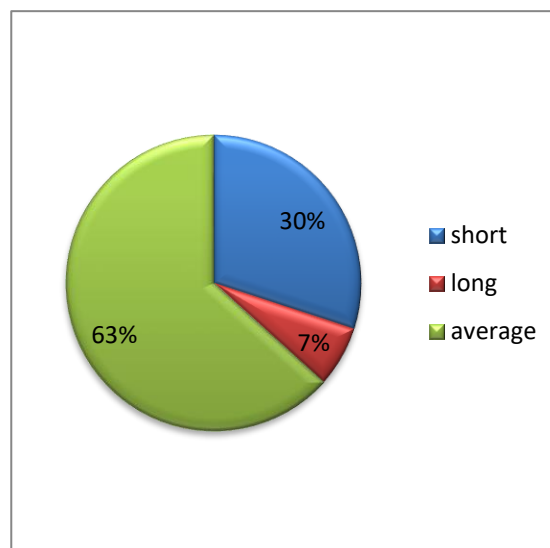
20. The lessons were online:

Figure 20: The Length of the Online Lessons

From the figure above, 30% of the respondents post short lessons, 7% long lessons, and 63% average ones

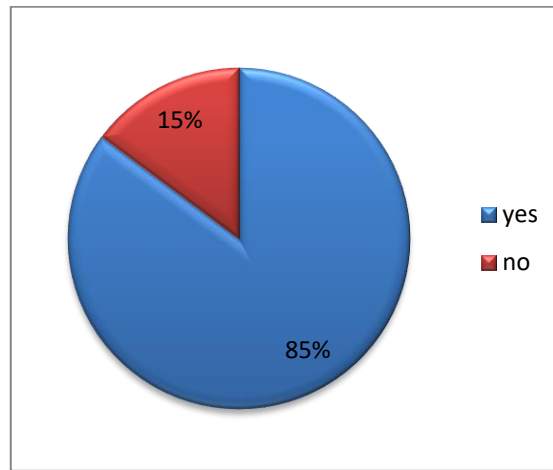**21. Were there any tasks to be done online?**

Figure 21: Whether the tasks to be done online

85% of the respondents mentioned that there are tasks done online contrary to 15% who answered 'No'.

22. What kind of tasks ?

Figure 22: The kinds of online tasks
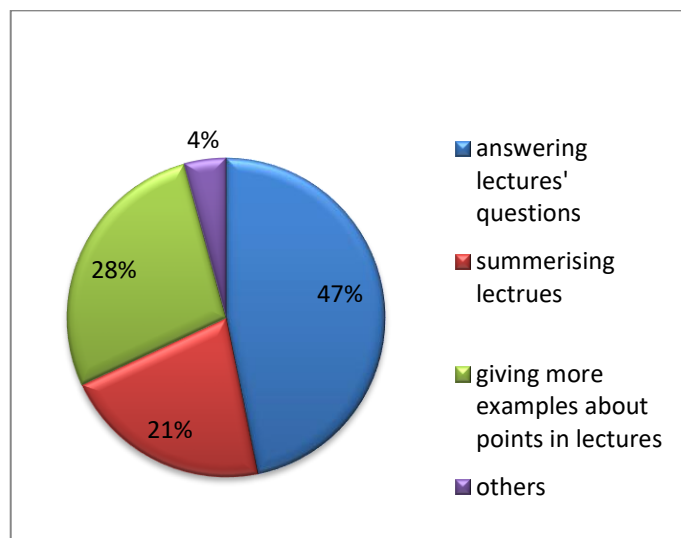
Concerning the kinds of tasks, 47% answer lecture questions, 21% summarise lectures, 28% give more examples about points in lectures and 4% make focus on modelling and designing mindmaps.

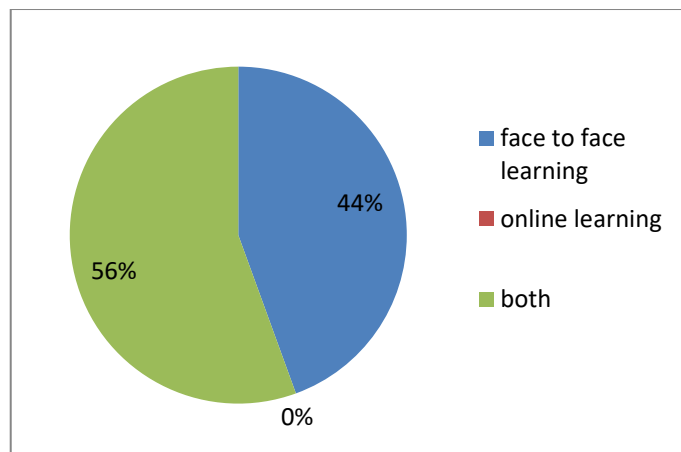## 23. Now, which teaching do you prefer?

Figure 23: The teaching they prefer

44% prefer face to face teaching, while 56% prefer blended learning: face to face and online learning.

Why?

The respondents who prefer face to face learning mentioned the following reasons:

- The best way is to teach face to face.

- It depends on the learner itself

- Direct contact helps interact better than online due to technical problems

- We use online learning as a solution for specific situation but face to face is very important because students attend, concentrate more at the same time. Teachers can understand their emotions and feeling if the lecture is understood or no. Teachers can use different skills at the same time to make the lesson understood ie: writing, reading, speaking, drawing and acting.

- More attainable; trustworthy;

- It provides better learning atmosphere, more interaction, detailed explanation and clear instructions with more valid reliable assessment than online learning.

- We have to teach the two types and we have to be trained for both so that we have quality education and to stay updated.

- To have an active teaching process

- I feel it more real than online

- Each type has advantages for both the teacher / learners

- Because we are not accustomed to use technology in education. We don't have the culture of learning online, most students thought that it is just waste of time. We are not ready to integrate technology in classroom in terms of materials and training.

- Face to Face learning gives more opportunity to interact with the students, avoid the problems of lack of using internet and ICTs tools.

- we use face to face but when there are exceptions we use online learning.

- It is more effective as it allows students to advance in their studies at their own pace. Thus, learning will become more enjoyable for students. I prefer full interaction

- The teacher should be in classroom to have better results which is proved during covid-19

The respondents who prefer blended learning gave the following reasons:

- Blended learning proved to enhance the teaching learning process especially during corona virus pandemic.

- Both learning ways are complementary.

- More interactive and more fruitful

- When combined, they surround the learner inside and outside the classroom. They can reach both the active students who bother to read physical copies of the lesson and use actual pens and markers, and the lazy-keyboard-search-botton-forever-plugged-to-their-phone-ones

- I think that we have to start thinking seriously about online learning to face the obstacles we might have in the future so that we don' waste time like with what happened during the first period of Covid 19.

- To suit and satisfy learners' needs

- They may be both beneficial for the students as they can receive knowledge and feedback using different teaching approaches and more technological advances.

- To have the benefit of the two methods

- The teacher should be familiar with both techniques.

10. First of all, we have to get used to adapt to the new situation and get ready as well for new changes. We must benefit from the advances of technology and start thinking about new ways of teaching to meet this digital generation.

4. Discussion of the Findings

From the obtained findings, it appears that teachers agree with the idea of teaching online and use different platforms and applications; moreover, they teach lessons, answer and clarify points about lectures, etc.; nonetheless, many of the respondents need to be trained in how to teach online and in improving the quality of the Internet. Moreover, the great majority of the respondents (81%) adopt blended learning in their departments, while 56% of the them prefer blended learning and stated many reasons for that such as enhancing the teaching learning process especially during corona virus pandemic, giving knowledge and feedback to students using different teaching approaches and more technological advances, and so on. Furthermore, some teachers refuse to test students online because of the high possibility of cheating online. Concerning online teaching, the teachers use a variety of platforms and applications such as Moodle, Email, Messenger, Google Classroom, Zoom and so on. However, some teachers mentioned the lack of online teaching culture among students, claiming that they are lazy and some students do not have computers besides the Internet connexion problems.

Conclusion

Blended learning is beneficial and promising when it is enhanced with better Internet connexion, teachers' training, technological tools, and so on. Though some teachers prefer face to face teaching and learning as it enables students interact and discuss with their teachers onsite, they are not against online learning, especially if it is improved in terms of those elements just mentioned, mainly the good quality of the Internet, teachers' training, etc. Therefore, blended learning remains a reasonable solution, mainly in critical periods such as Covid 19 pandemic. Both teachers and students are required to organise online learning and establish rules for a better learning environment. Finally, specialists should look for means that prevent cheating online. In sum, blended teaching and learning is important nowadays and assists both teachers and students.

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