Students' Voices: Exploring Perceptions of Hybrid Language Learning

Voix des étudiants : explorer les perceptions de l'apprentissage hybride des langues

Nawal KHERRA (ID)
University of Setif 2/ Algéria
n.kherra@univ-setif2.dz

Fouzia ROUAGHE (ID)
University of Setif 2/ Algéria
f.rouaghe@univ-setif2.dz

David D. PERRODIN (ID)
Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University/ Thailand
daviddperrodin@gmail.com

Mobina RAHNAMA (ID)
University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Ibri/ Oman
mobina.rahnama@gmail.com

Abstract
Thispaper reflects on the gradual integration of hybrid systems in Algeria's university education context. Our contribution is intended as an analytical study of this new form of training provided for students studying for a degree in French language and literature. It uses action research results to understand current and actual hybrid teaching practices, learners' acquisition and engagement strategies in a new teaching situation, and their perceptions of this new teaching/learning mode. The results reflect excellent student perceptions of the media coverage and mediation of the hybrid system and support of teachers, offering flexible and accessible distance learning opportunities, access to rich resources, and the personalization of the training and assessments, thus encouraging learning autonomy. The aim is to promote in-depth reflection on future practices in distance language teaching to optimize learners' learning experiences in an increasingly digital world.
Keywords: hybrid learning, co-modality, techno-pedagogy, assessment, digital tools.

Résumé
Cet article propose une réflexion sur l'intégration progressive des dispositifs hybrides dans le contexte de l'enseignement universitaire algérien. Notre contribution se veut une étude analytique de cette nouvelle forme de formation dispensée aux étudiants en licence de langue et littérature françaises. Elle s'appuie sur les résultats d'une recherche-action pour comprendre les pratiques pédagogiques hybrides actuelles et réelles, les stratégies d'acquisition et d'engagement des apprenants dans une nouvelle situation d'enseignement ainsi que leurs perceptions de ce nouveau mode

d'enseignement/apprentissage. Les résultats reflètent une excellente perception des étudiants sur la médiatisation et la médiation du système hybride et du soutien des enseignants. Cela offre pour eux des possibilités d'apprentissage à distance flexibles et accessibles, l'accès à des ressources riches et la personnalisation de la formation et des évaluations, encourageant ainsi l'autonomie d'apprentissage. L'objectif de cette recherche est de promouvoir une réflexion approfondie sur les pratiques futures en matière d'enseignement des langues à distance afin d'optimiser les expériences d'apprentissage des apprenants dans un monde de plus en plus numérique.

Mots clés : Formation hybride, comodalité, techno pédagogie, évaluation, outils numériques.

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* Corresponding author: Nawal Kherra

Introduction

Like elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic in Algeria has had numerous negative economic, political, and social repercussions. To address these challenges, the country has implemented urgent measures to manage the health crisis across various sectors, notably higher education and scientific research. In the latter, a series of preventive decisions were made to find suitable alternatives that would allow face-to-face courses to be replaced with online ones, ensuring the continuity of educational activities.

Since this shift, the profound changes that digital technology can bring to the development of university teaching and the optimization of the teaching/learning process in general, and foreign languages in particular, have become undeniable. This includes gradually introducing numerous training programs and teaching and self-learning applications. Algerian universities are thus transitioning toward an exclusively hybrid training model, posing a real challenge for students and teachers. On the one hand, there is a need to restructure content to develop practical training tools for enhancing all skills, including interdisciplinary ones. On the other hand, teachers require support to shift their traditional methods toward new digital formats using the resources and skills available to them. To facilitate this transition, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has provided various in-service training programs to teachers at different universities (Bouchebcheb, 2021; Kherra, 2017; Ferhani, 2022) aimed at fostering "active teaching and a digital culture" (CECI, 2021). These courses anticipated the new official ministerial requirements, practical from 2023, which mandate all courses to be offered in a hybrid format (Ministerial Decree No. 171, February 9, 2023). This gives students the choice of attending classes either remotely or in person. Additionally, it prohibits using paper in courses and tutorials ("Generalization of the Zero Paper Policy," Decree No. 1023, July 25, 2023) and encourages using various digital tools.

Digitalization in language classrooms is paradoxically seen as both restrictive and liberating, full of opportunities, and aligned with traditional methods. Yet, it has significantly stirred debate within the scientific community (Amer-Medjani and Kherra, 8:2023). This situation raises numerous questions about the reliability of the deployed tools and the satisfaction of the educational stakeholders involved in this type of training. The goal is to

better understand the future of language teaching in the digital age and to improve the form and content of these training programs as much as possible.

We conducted our experiment to evaluate this new language teaching/learning process. The premise that the first level of evaluating the quality and effectiveness of any hybrid training process involves assessing the perceptions and satisfaction of all learners involved (Yennek, 2015) as well as "the system as a whole (structuring, objectives, activities, evaluation), the mediatization of content, and the student survey" (Deschryver and Charlier, 33: 2012),we attempt in this article to answer the following questions: What are the perceptions and representations of the teaching staff involved in this e-learning system? And what is the real impact of distance learning on student learning?

To understand the challenges inherent in implementing this type of training and to gain insights into the impact of this innovative context on the pedagogical and personal benefits perceived in the context of language teaching, we drew on studies and research focusing on the use of digital tools and particularly those concerned with the appropriation of distance learning platforms and tools (Brunel et al., 2015; Kaddouri and Bouamari,2010). Also, the work related to technopedagogy (Barette, 2007; Gerin-Lajoie 2017; Lebrun, 2021), which combines aspects of "technology" referring to the different tools used for teaching/learning and "pedagogy" referring to the strategies developed to build knowledge and improve the quality of training through these tools. The aim is to enhance teaching and learning by using various tools, resources, and systems, which can notably simplify the teacher's tasks or make the activities proposed to learners more attractive (OQLF, 2021).

Based on these theories, we followed a well-structured path from designing our courses and tutorials to completing a qualitative and quantitative evaluation. The latter involves a study and analysis of the perceptions and proposals of third-year French language and literature students participating in this hybrid training process and enrolled in a cross-disciplinary unit module to prepare and design a university research project. In the following sections, we present and discuss our survey's investigative tools and results in detail.

1. Investigative methodology: Descriptive and analytical study

To conduct our action research on the effects of implementing a hybrid training system in the Algerian university context, we surveyed 200 third-year bachelor's students in French language and literature, divided into six groups, at our university.

The courses focused on a cross-disciplinary subject emphasizing theory and practical application. The training system for the six groups utilized both synchronous tools (webinars, videoconferencing, audio conferencing, etc.) and asynchronous tools (Moodle platform, email, YouTube videos, etc.). This system is "particularly flexible because the digital environment allows for adaptation to the learner's needs in managing time, space, pace, and content, which fosters active learning" (French Alliance, Cavilam, 2018). Our study aims to evaluate this process using various tools to gather the most representative results possible from the students.

After designing and implementing our courses throughout the semester, we opted for two modes of evaluation:

- Quantitative assessment: participation rates, skills assessment through exercises, MCQs, tests, success levels, etc.
- Qualitative evaluation: questionnaires and interviews assessing the quality of the training system and student satisfaction.

We chose a mixed-method approach to provide a comprehensive view of the complex issues inherent in hybrid research. By integrating quantitative and qualitative perspectives, we expanded the analysis for a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon, aiming to gather extensive information about learning activities and practices (Creswell, 2017). According to (Vause, 21: 2009), this involves "beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, and conceptions of teaching, teachers, learning, learners, subjects, curricula, teaching materials, and activities."

We conducted the survey using an online questionnaire via Google, a method proven effective by numerous studies (Bista and Salah 2017), especially suitable in blended learning contexts where maintaining digital contact with students ensures response reliability. The data collected were then used to develop an interview protocol for a second, more detailed sample on unresolved questions or those requiring further explanation. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, allowing students to delve deeper into specific areas needing more thorough analysis. This approach will enable us to refine the hybrid training programs based on students' perceptions.

In formulating questions, we drew from the work of Burton et al. (2011) and the Hy-Sup collective, which provide a "detailed and coherent description of hybrid systems' characteristics, including the link between presence and distance, human support, and the mediation/mediatization of knowledge" (Peltier and Séguin, 2021). We developed a grid for students to assess training aspects and express difficulties encountered in following lessons and assimilating module content.

The survey focused on:

- Training arrangements: organization, material availability, technical conditions, training environment, the openness of training, the link between presence and distance learning, workload, overall assessment, etc.
- Teaching quality: teaching methods and media, aids, course objectives, content structuring, skill formulation.
- Assessment and self-assessment methods: activity types, teacher support, addressing shortcomings, achievement verification, student needs, and expectations.

Results underwent quantitative and qualitative processing. For practicality and clarity, results were grouped using SPSS software into categories reflecting the dimensions listed. Interview results were analyzed by cross-referencing data on accessibility, material conditions, institutional evaluations, and teaching components, with reflective questions on students' course perceptions.

2. Analysis of survey results

Based on our evaluation criteria, we detailed results from our corpus analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and statistical methods to understand students' course appreciation and benefits. Qualitative data involved content analysis; we transcribed recordings and identified relevant emerging themes and perspectives. This approach allowed us to deeply explore students' views and self-management approaches to blended learning, enriching our understanding of factors influencing this educational method.

2.1. Training methods: Technical conditions and training environment

2.1.1. Digital accessibility

Distance learning was a new experience for 90% of students during the first wave of COVID-19. These students were more accustomed to this learning mode by the second academic year. Most students (90%) had no issues adapting to and interacting with digital technology. However, 23% expressed dissatisfaction with poor internet quality, while 48% rated it as average and only 18% as excellent. Using the Moodle app on smartphones and social networks for assessments mitigated connection speed concerns, as students could perform activities like screen captures and participate in tests and surveys without connectivity affecting their experience.

Despite some challenges with internet stability potentially hindering knowledge dissemination and online material posting, only 22% of students faced difficulties accessing technical materials, primarily due to a lack of personal devices like computers or tablets. However, most could access courses via a ministry-developed app on their smartphones, mitigating negative impacts on learningas illustrated in the chart below:

Figure 01: Digital Accessibility
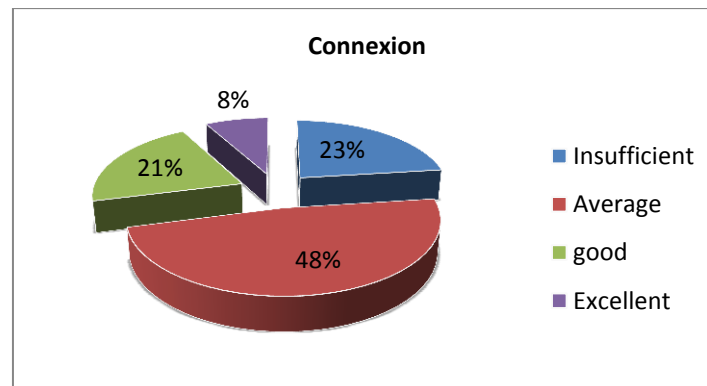
These results indicate that internet connectivity, a crucial tool for disseminating digital content, is perceived as inadequate by a small segment of respondents. Nonetheless, only 22% of learners reported difficulties accessing technical teaching materials. These individuals highlighted a lack of technical resources, such as personal computers and tablets, which impeded their ability to perform distance learning tasks, including writing presentations,

reading documents, and creating summaries. Additionally, they faced challenges in accessing the internet. However, in terms of accessing courses and the educational platform via the application developed by the Ministry, there was no negative impact on their studies, as the majority of students possess smartphones.

2.1.2. Training applications and software

Adopting hybridization as a teaching method requires careful consideration of several parameters, primarily digital resources, to ensure effective distance learning. Among the digital applications and software used for training, the choice is relatively limited despite the vast array of digital tools available. In our context, this choice is primarily influenced by availability and ease of use. Notably, the most used and appreciated tools by students include 33% use email to submit work and contact teachers, 67% use Facebook and Messenger for accessing publications and discussions in closed groups, 43% participate in courses via video conferences through Google Meet or Zoom, and 38% use the Moodle platform to download digitized documents such as handouts and articles and to participate in activities.

Figure 02:Training Tools
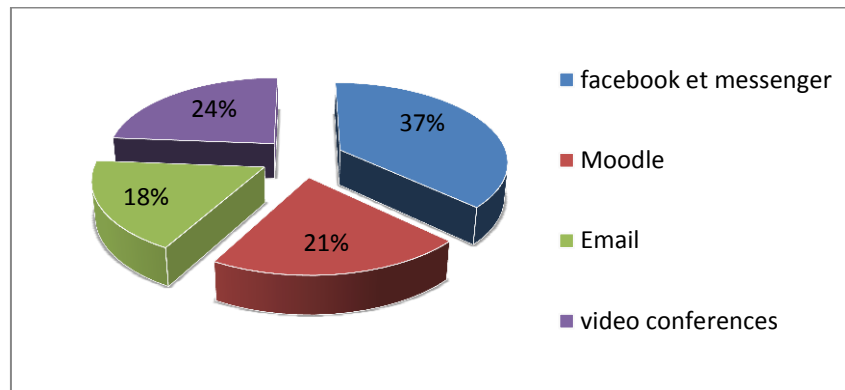
Of all students surveyed, 67% expressed satisfaction with using distance learning tools. They particularly find Facebook effective for uploading training documents, and synchronous (webinars, videoconferencing) and asynchronous (email, messaging, YouTube) communication tools are most effective for disseminating courses. However, students still face numerous technical difficulties, especially with the Moodle platform, including understanding its operation, locating courses, and downloading materials. This contrasts with the ease of accessing documents on social networks.

Pedagogical challenges also persist, particularly with complex assignments. Some 33% of students struggle with understanding lengthy documents in PDF or Word format, 15% find it challenging to comprehend videos, and 42% have trouble expressing themselves orally or in writing, including choosing the most appropriate software for their assignments. This indicates a discrepancy in activity usage and adaptation between the platform and social networks used for the courses.

Figure 03: Difficulties in Using Digital Tools
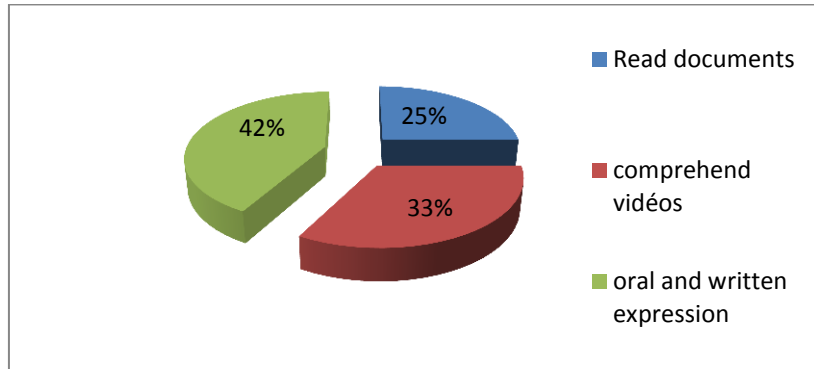
Although students are proficient with various digital tools due to the frequent use of new-generation tablets and smartphones in conjunction with social networks and applications, they find these more user-friendly for following courses and completing assignments than traditional platforms or computers. They also feel that these tools enhance their learning by improving access to information and facilitating knowledge sharing.

2.2 The teaching component

2.2.1 Modular structuring of courses

Our evaluation of the course content's organization aimed to enable learners to build personalized paths tailored to their needs, profiles, and learning paces. According to student feedback, 68% appreciated the 'explicit teaching' methods. Students highlighted several aspects:

- "The courses and approach align with my interests and level of knowledge."
- "The structure helped me immediately identify my strengths and weaknesses."
- "Compared to classroom lessons, online content is more direct."
- "Breaking down lessons into different formats and recording them for repeated viewing has enhanced my understanding and retention."
- "The project was divided into clear, well-explained stages, which helped me organize and visualize the stages involved in writing and conducting university research."
- "The organization of the online course and weekly activities boosted my motivation and helped establish a work routine."

The added value of blended learning is evident as students express satisfaction with the courses' form and content. They appreciate the flexibility in education and personal organization, the structured content, and the ability to access video content conveniently. The active involvement required by the courses and encouraging interaction and collaborative work, such as creating monitoring sheets or knowledge maps, were particularly beneficial.

Regarding the face-to-face training, which occurs every two weeks for three hours, students noted:

- "The hybrid method deeply engaged me and facilitated discussions with peers during class, which was very helpful."
- "The hybrid format makes my learning more effective and interactive, allowing steady progress in group settings."
- "Knowing the lessons in advance and discussing them step-by-step with the teacher prepared me for what to expect in class."
- "Group activities in class make the sessions less boring and more dynamic."
- "The structured online course naturally complements the in-class work."

These comments underscore the importance of a well-defined organization and structure in online and in-person settings, facilitating a routine that promotes independent work and dynamic classroom interaction.

2.2.2 Mediatization of materials and activities

The goal was to provide materials and activities that help learners identify and adopt learning strategies suited to their profiles, utilizing various references to challenge their preconceptions. According to 68% of students:

- "Online, the variety of media formats enhanced my understanding."
- "If I struggled with a document, an alternative PPT on Facebook or Moodle offered clearer summaries with diagrams, along with video conferences with the teacher."
- "I found learning via video conferences more engaging."
- "Using structured guides helped me follow the course methodically."

Figure 04: Materials and Activities
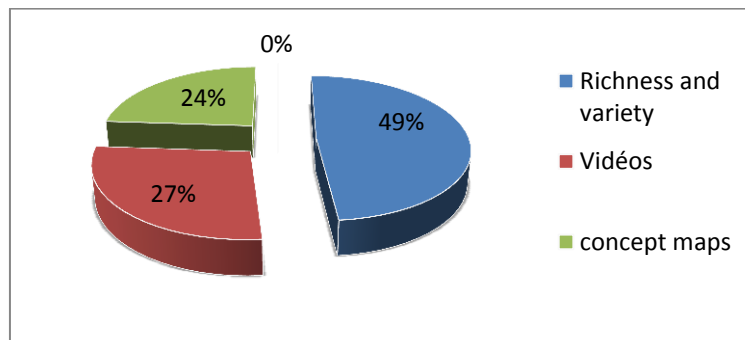
Students felt that the activities and materials were engaging and motivational, enhancing their involvement. They appreciated the diversity in activity types and learning materials available on the Moodle platform and other tools, which aided their understanding, memorization, and content production. Additionally, we utilized AI tools like Quizbot, Getquiz, and Wizardo.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this system is obviously not appreciated by everyone. Several students complained about the lack of information transmission during the face-to-face course. They said: "I'm not entirely convinced by the blended learning system", "the videos are very well done and the exercises are very helpful in assimilating the material, but I'd prefer the

lessons not to be just question and answer sessions and for more information on the different methodologies to be given", "I'd have liked to have had some face-to-face assessment activities as well". We deduce that it is therefore preferable for the teacher to strike a certain balance by providing more opportunities to explain the content in face-to-face lessons, even if this is in the form of a reminder.

## 2.3 Evaluation and self-assessment

In analyzing the results related to the quality of online assessments, we noted that 78% of student responses emphasized the quick and easy online interaction between teaching partners during assessments rather than focusing on the types of activities themselves. This approach significantly reduced perceived distance and enabled better monitoring and continuous assessment of students.

Students commented:
- "Our teacher is much more available to answer questions remotely than in person."
- "I am more motivated because I receive real-time guidance and corrections from my teacher."
- "My questions are answered quickly at any time, allowing me to progress and rectify mistakes effectively."
- "Group support on Facebook and Messenger ensures no questions are left unanswered, motivating me to improve continuously."
- "Rapid correction feedback from the teacher greatly motivates me to keep working."
- "The activities following each lesson help me to self-evaluate easily and correct mistakes promptly."
- "It's rewarding to see tangible outputs at the end of each objective, not just revising for an exam."
- "The quizzes and Kahoot help me understand what I have grasped and what needs improvement."

Students appreciated the dynamic and varied nature of assessment activities and valued regular, dynamic interactions with the teacher. According to student feedback, distance learning brings knowledge closer and significantly reduces the spatial and emotional distance between students and teachers, enhancing guidance and fostering greater autonomy in learners.

Figure 05: Evaluation and Self-assessment
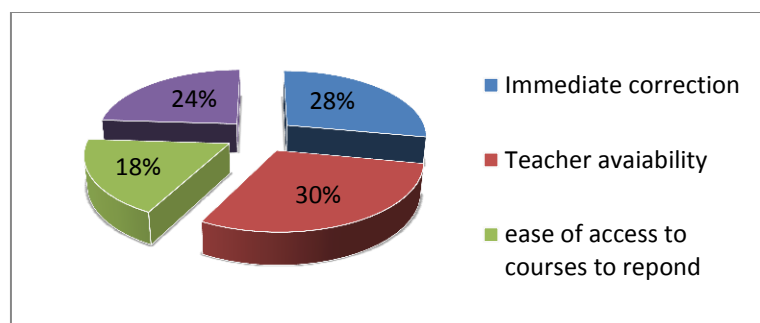
Regarding activity types, students appreciated individual support for specific issues and rapid feedback on their work. Testimonials included:
- "Having a choice among various themes for assignments, resources, course pathways, and support types allowed us to self-assess more effectively."
- "Access to methodological resources like guides and glossaries made self-assessment straightforward."

The students also expressed their appreciation for the dynamic and diverse assessment activities, as well as their interest in the regular and interactive exchanges with their teachers. Based on the students' perceptions, we can confirm the theory proposed by Deschênes and Maltais (2006), which suggests that distance learning brings knowledge closer to the learner. Additionally, it significantly reduces the spatial and emotional distance between the educational partners, thereby fostering greater autonomy in learners through better guidance.

Regarding the types of activities utilized, students highly valued the provision of individual support for specific issues and the prompt feedback on their work. According to some testimonials: "Offering us a choice between several themes for the assignments, various resources, different routes through the course, and multiple types of support enabled us to assess ourselves better in one way or another." Another student stated, "By providing us with methodological resources for carrying out the activities (guides, glossaries, etc.), my self-assessment became very easy."

The results indicate that diverse assessment activities encourage students to become more autonomous in their learning and personal development, boosting self-confidence and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, varied self-assessment activities, such as practical projects and case studies, ensure comprehensive assessments that allow students to demonstrate their skills concretely, adhere to research standards, and develop critical reflection on their progress. Tutorial evaluations show positive developments, as evidenced by data from the Moodle platform, which indicates regular and repeated engagement with course materials by the entire cohort.

3. Discussions

Reflecting on our experiences with the hybrid learning system, which was well-received by the students, we identified several key insights:

1. Increased Student Satisfaction and Motivation: There was a notable overall satisfaction among students with the distance learning components of the course. This satisfaction was linked to an increase in student motivation, suggesting an improvement over the experiences from previous years.

2. Technical Challenges for Some Students: While the response was largely positive, a minority of students reported less favorable conditions regarding the technical aspects of the training. These issues primarily related to the accessibility and functionality of the required technology. Addressing these technical challenges could lead to further enhancements in the pedagogical effectiveness of the course.

3. Appreciation for Flexibility: The flexibility of the hybrid system was particularly appreciated by students. It allowed them to adjust the pace of the course to suit their individual learning needs. This flexibility was facilitated by the option to revisit lectures and utilize various digital tools, which contributed to a more personalized learning experience.

4. Enhanced Instructor Accessibility and Support: Another significant advantage noted by the students was the increased availability and support provided by remote instructors compared to traditional face-to-face interactions. Students found communication with instructors to be easier and quicker in the online setting, which they valued highly. This enhanced level of collaboration and support was cited as one of the most satisfying aspects of the hybrid training approach.

These observations underscore the potential of hybrid learning systems to enhance educational outcomes by combining the strengths of both traditional and digital pedagogical approaches. However, they also highlight the need for continuous improvements in technical support and infrastructure to maximize the benefits of such systems.

We can therefore conclude that distance learning relies heavily, even before considering programs, content, and methods, on the goodwill and proactive engagement of both educational participants. The integration of new technologies in language teaching is perceived as highly beneficial, as these technologies facilitate learners' ability to acquire knowledge at their own pace and foster greater autonomy in their learning processes. For teachers, these technologies are invaluable in maintaining regular contact with students and effectively monitoring their real-time progress.

Regarding the evaluation of the distance learning system, feedback from both questionnaires and interviews revealed a high degree of overall satisfaction among participants. This satisfaction was particularly evident in several key areas. First, the modeling and mediation of learning were praised for their effectiveness in making educational content more accessible and engaging. Second, the support provided to teachers was recognized as crucial in

helping them adapt to and excel in the digital learning environment. Lastly, the evaluation process itself received positive feedback, with participants appreciating the clarity, fairness, and comprehensiveness of the assessment methods used.

Conclusion

Distance learning can effectively develop responsibility and autonomy in learners. While student engagement is crucial for success, teaching remotely requires informative, motivational, and interactive approaches. However, these efforts can be supported and enhanced by various technological tools. Our findings underscore the benefits of hybrid training, which has proven to improve language exposure, promote active learning, and offer flexibility and individualization.For optimal results, providing students with affordable, high-speed internet connections is essential to facilitate access to course materials and documentation. Additionally, varying digital learning tools and opting for more engaging methods like videoconferencing can improve content quality and learning engagement. Planning interactive sessions and creating forums for student interaction are also recommended to foster more autonomous learning.

In the future, training on hybrid devices and technological tools could better facilitate online teaching sequences. The insights gained from our research should inform future course offerings, enhancing the use of digital technology in education. Moreover, these findings should guide the development of digital training for teachers and students of French as a foreign language in Algeria, preparing them more effectively for blended learning challenges.It is for these reasons and many others that we propose as perspectives and resolutions, and this depending on the technical and educational difficulties encountered by the majority of students, some reflections on which we must make modifications and developments, namely: provide free or reduced-cost connections to students and improve the speed in order to facilitate access to courses and the necessary documentation, further improve the quality of content and vary the objectives by adapting them to clear and realistic expectations according to the needs of the students. learners and their understanding and assimilation profiles, vary the digital learning tools and choose the best sources of help, offer lessons via video conferences which is more attractive and engaging for the student than a simple delivered course on the platform, foster interaction through asynchronous discussions on online forums where learners can think and exchange ideas at their own pace, plan question and answer times in advance or create a forum with students to react to content and make learning more autonomous as learners take responsibility for their learning themselves, organize group collaboration activities where learners work together on collaborative projects online using tools such as Google Docs and project management platforms, use a variety of online assessments such as multimedia presentations and creative projects to assess students' skills and knowledge holistically and provide individual support to learners by delivering sessions online tutoring. Finally, it would

also be interesting to offer training days to students on the use of hybrid devices and technological tools to better facilitate the progress of online educational sequences.

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Author's biography

Dre KHERRA Nawal, maître de conférences, habilitée à diriger des travaux de recherche, enseigne au département de langue et littérature françaises de l'université Mohamed Lamine DEBAGHINE- Sétif 2.
Elle compte dans son effectif plusieurs participations à des manifestations scientifiques nationales et internationales, des publications d'articles et participation à des ouvrages collectifs à l'international, portant sur le français à visées professionnelle et universitaire. Ses domaines de recherche s'intéressent au FOS, à la didactique professionnelle, à la formation des formateurs et les pédagogies innovantes. Cheffe de l'unité de recherche ,"l'enseignement des langues à visée professionnelle" dans le laboratoire ADDLC, éditrice associée et experte dans quatre revues algériennes.

Fouzia Rouaghe is Associate Professor of English at the University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine-Sétif 2. She has been teaching for more than 15 years several modules such as Oral Expression, English for Specific Purposes, Grammar, Phonology, Cross Cultural Communication and pragmatics. She is CELTA Qualified Teacher Trainer and a journal reviewer in national and international journals in Algeria, Turkey and KSA journals. She also successfully chaired a series of virtual webinars about ESP issues in class in which several eminent guest speakers did take part.

David D. Perrodin is a distinguished professional with a multifaceted career, currently serving as an English Language Specialist and Journal Manager at Mahidol University. Completing his Ph.D. in Development Education at Silpakorn University, his research addresses disparities in recruiting extralocal teachers of English (ETEs) and promotes sustainable development education practices in Thailand. With nearly 100 scholarly publications and over 300 keynote presentations globally, his contributions to English language teaching are substantial. David's expertise spans senior consultancy roles, ESL/EFL teacher training, and international research, highlighting his commitment to advancing global education and promoting innovation in English language education.

Dr. Mobina Rahnama has been an educator since 2002 and holds a Ph.D. in TESOL. Her previous experience includes teaching General, ESL, ESP, and Business English at university and colleges. She currently holds CPD workshops and IELTS teacher trainings as well as being a faculty at University Canada West. Her writing credits include authoring a number of papers and a book on English language teaching and feedback. Her main areas of professional interest are motivation, feedback, teacher education and teacher development.