

## Flipped Classrooms in Higher Education in Algeria during Period of COVID19: Challenges and Difficulties

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### ABSTRACT

Nowadays in Algeria, the recent trend to decentralize educational powers has wheeled an increasing need for innovation in classrooms and at universities and because of Virus Corona too. As a result, one recommendation was proposed that higher education should make greater use of technology and each teacher should use a projector in his lectures, each student should have access to a portable computer and all the teachers are obliged to post their lectures on the site of their universities from March 15th, 2020 to their students. In this period all the universities and institutes are closed. Therefore, students must take and understand their lectures from universities' sites. In the South of Algeria exactly in Bechar where the department of foreign languages fails to address the needs of students properly in learning languages and many inspectors of education criticize students of English for their lack of professional training and the resulting inability of students to discharge professional duties that lie ahead because most of the students find it difficult to attend classes and there seems to be a need of Flipped Classrooms for greater flexibility in the course delivery. Since the flipped classroom is a hot topic not only among educators but also among the general public especially in this period of the universal virus which is COVID-19. Hence, this study aims to reflect on the use of Flipped Classrooms in higher education in Algeria by investigating its current status, assessing its pedagogical viability in higher education; exploring its different forms; identifying different options to implement the Flipped Classroom concept and related advantages and disadvantages, and considering technical and cost-related constraints of the Flipped Classroom. To fulfill this objective, the researcher used a questionnaire addressed to students and conducted an interview with the teachers of Bechar University. The finding of the research revealed that all the students are against technology; they prefer the handout (copies) which is the primitive way. They are against closing universities; they think it is just political ideas and they believe that Corona Virus cannot reach the Sahara of Algeria.

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### 1. Introduction

Nowadays in Algeria, the recent trend to decentralize educational powers has wheeled an increasing need for innovation in classrooms. As a result, one recommendation was proposed that higher education should make greater use of technology and each teacher should use a projector in his lectures and each student should have access to a portable computer. In the South of Algeria, the department of foreign languages fails to address the needs of students properly in learning languages. Many inspectors of education in Bechar criticize students of English for their lack of professional training and the resulting inability of students to discharge professional duties that lie ahead. However, the major argument in favor of Flipped Classrooms is the perceived learning flexibility because many students find it difficult to attend classes and there seems to be a need for greater flexibility in the course delivery.

Since technology has innovated the modes of how information is disseminated and changed the way of teaching and learning cultures, students of all disciplines in Bechar are digital nowadays and they grow up surrounded by technology. They use laptops, tablets, mobile phones, MP3, the Internet, Wi-Fi, YouTube, IM, Facebook; blogs to the extent that almost everything they do depends on technology. Technology has changed the way modern students learn, in other words, they learn by doing, not by reading the instruction manual or listening to lectures. The Becharian students often rely on online resources rather than printed materials in their research. They are very different from some educators who have not experienced a digitalized socialization. These educators are still using the traditional methods in their lectures and predominantly focus on the reading of printed textbooks. Consequently, "one major argument in favor of Flipped Classrooms is that the Flipped Classroom concept only mirrors the learning style of modern students" (Chan, 2016).

The use of technology can improve both learning experience of students and flexibility according to a number of academics. Today, students are not obliged to be at a particular place at a particular time to receive education. Instead, it is possible to allow them to choose between a synchronous setting, where participants are present at the same time but not at the same location as Hrastinski (2008) said: "Synchronous e-learning, commonly supported by media such as videoconferencing and chat, has the potential to support e-learners in the development of learning communities. Learners and teachers experience synchronous e-learning as more social and avoid frustration by asking and answering questions in real time. Synchronous sessions help e-learners feel like participants rather than isolates: Isolation can be overcome by more continued contact, particularly synchronously, and by becoming aware of themselves as members of a community rather than as isolated individuals communicating with the computer», or an asynchronous setting when the participants are not present at the same time, or place ,i.e. "Asynchronous e-learning, commonly facilitated by media such as e-mail and discussion boards, supports work relations among learners and with teachers, even when participants cannot be online at the same time. It is thus a key component of flexible e-learning. In fact, many people take online courses because of their asynchronous nature, combining education with work, family, and other commitments. Asynchronous e-learning makes it possible for learners to log on to an e-learning environment at any time and download documents or send messages to teachers or peers. Students may spend more time refining their contributions, which are generally considered more thoughtful compared to synchronous communication". (Hrastinski, 2008). In addition, due to technology, different online e-learning tools are available to deliver education in various modes, for example, webcasts, video feeds/video links, podcasts, discussion forums, dialogues, chats, blogs, wikis, quizzes, and student's online assessment. These e-learning tools allow teachers to upload digital teaching materials to the web for around the clock availability resulting in an increased and flexible access to education. As Hrastinski said "It is necessary for educators to understand the benefits and limitations of the available tools, including the Flipped Classroom concept, for the benefit of improved teaching strategies" (Hrastinski, 2008).

In higher education in Algeria, course delivery has two formats: the pure online format where the teaching and learning activities take place outside classrooms and traditional face-to-face format where the teaching and interaction take place inside classrooms. The Flipped Classroom is a new approach that promotes learning supported by modern technology (Hess G. F., 2013). This new concept deviates from traditional concepts and emerges in higher education in Algeria in this decade. The Flipped Classroom model has become increasingly popular across various disciplines in higher education in the world, but only to a lesser extent in higher education in Algeria.

This study aims to reflect on the use of Flipped Classrooms in higher education in Algeria by investigating its current status, assessing its pedagogical viability in higher education; exploring its different forms; identifying different options to implement the Flipped Classroom concept and related advantages and disadvantages; and considering technical and cost-related constraints of the Flipped Classroom.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 What is Flipped Classroom?**

The flipped classroom is a hot topic not only among educators but also in the general public, so what is flipped classroom? The origins of this concept refer to 2007 when two high school chemistry teachers in Colorado; Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, helped their students who often missed classes to attend 'competitions, games or other events'. (Hamdan, 2013). These teachers recorded lectures and slide presentations, then posted them on YouTube for students to access (ibid). "Since then Flipped Classrooms have evolved into a number of variations all with video lectures as their key feature. Sometimes the video lectures include embedded questions prepared by the instructor and students are required to read background materials or participate in online quizzes before coming to class." (Davis, 2013). Some Flipped Classroom models use audio recording instead of video recording (Guide, 2013).

## **2.2. Is the Flipped Classrooms a Blended Learning?**

Most definitions describe the flipped classroom as a type of blended learning (Abeysekera, 2015) because the both of them share similar features which are on-and off-campus components (Hess G. F., 2013). Means et al's (Means, September 2010) distinguish between Flipped Classrooms or 'blended learning' on the one hand and online teaching models. They point out that 'blended learning' includes 'face-to-face instruction to provide learning enhancement, unlike online teaching such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which are becoming very popular across the world (Slomanson, 2014-2015). Many Video or audio lectures are often uploaded to the internet to facilitate learning in the Flipped Classroom and 'blended learning' modes and in online teaching models too. However, Flipped Classrooms and 'blended learning' modes combine both in-class and out-of-class learning, but online teaching model learning is conducted entirely off-site. Thus, Video lectures are added for the purpose of 'enhancing' or 'supplementing' in-class learning. (Hess G. F., 2013) In contrast, face-to-face learning is unavailable in online teaching settings.

The flipped classroom is not just blended learning re-badged because this latter is a mixture between "online learning" and "on-campus face to face learning" activities. Graham clarifies that 'blended learning' has combined two historically separated teaching and learning systems, i.e. 'traditional face-to-face learning systems and distributed learning systems' with the emphasis on the 'role of computer-based technologies in blended learning' (Graham, 2013). Some authors who have actually attempted to distinguish between Flipped Classrooms and 'blended learning', They said that 'blended learning' models are often more flexible in the choice of technological tools than Flipped Classrooms. According to Hess definition," in Flipped Classrooms students can acquire content online via short video lectures." (Hess G. F., 2013). For Hess Flipped Classrooms do not replace face-to-face teaching with online instruction (ibid). Instead, it is the goal of Flipped Classrooms to free up in-class time for interactive learning activities of different types (ibid). In contrast, in a 'blended learning' model the online learning activity replaces some of the in-class time (ibid). Video lectures are sometimes used as a teaching tool without branding it as Flipped Classrooms or as 'blended learning'. The video lectures and face-to-face tutorials were combined as part of an integrated course of study. (- Educause Learning Initiative, 2012)

While other academics agree that "a flipped classroom generally provides pre-recorded lectures (video or audio) followed by in-class activities. Students view the videos outside the classroom before or after coming to the class where the freed time can be devoted to interactive modules such as Q&A sessions, discussions, exercises or other learning activities" (Guide, 2013). Since Flipped Classrooms 'invert' activities inside the classroom with activities outside the classroom, they are sometimes also referred to as 'inverted' classrooms (Lemmer, 2013). In the flipped classroom, instructors ask their students to engage in some form of preliminary learning online in preparation for a structurally aligned learning activity at the university with their peers. In the flipped mode, students learn the topic for the first time online usually via videos, rather than through attending a lecture as has been traditionally the case. As a result, flipping in higher education became an attractive proposition and most universities now in Europe and U.S.A provide online recordings of lectures and some of European and American students have decided that attending lectures is an optional preference, they can watch them later. In addition to that, by the flipped classroom the students learn to prepare their activities in advance of the direct involvement of lectures with their instructors. The acceptance of flipped classrooms varies according to age, year of study, previous curriculum experiences and current institutional practices.

The traditional teaching from the lectern is very challenging. With the flipped model, instructors will face a room full of students who are well prepared for intellectual battle, and taking well responsibility for their learning, and are coming armed with clear expectations that their effort should be rewarded. Therefore, in the flipped classroom, the students will no longer be a passive audience and they will rightly expect something more than a didactic lesson. Flipping the classroom not only alters the traditional role of the student but also necessitates an equal commitment to change from the academic. This then is another important difference between the flipped classroom and blended learning.

The evidence suggests that students learn in flipped mode better than they do if they are simply attending a lecture, listening, watching, asking questions and taking notes. Hence, all these activities can be replaced by doing things and thereby engaging in the practice. Therefore, flipping the classroom allows us to be able to cover both the theory and the practice. To sum up, there is no unified definition of Flipped Classrooms and 'blended learning'. Both models take a variety of formats. The term 'blended learning' appears to stand for models across a wide spectrum and may or may not include video lectures. Flipped Classrooms are normally seen as blending e-learning with classroom learning. From this viewpoint Flipped Classrooms could be categorized as one branch of 'blended learning'. (Lemmer, 2013).

## **3. Methodology**

Today, students in Bechar cannot attend all the lectures during the whole semester because of COVID19 and personal reasons while some teachers obliged them to attend their lectures. Thus, this research on Flipped Classrooms is an original work. Firstly,

to obtain a clear understanding of the terminology and conceptual underpinnings of the Flipped Classroom concept and the use of modern technology in higher education in Algeria during COVID19 Pandemic, a huge data is collected from many sources in the literature review. Secondly, to understand how Flipped Classrooms are used in the daily practices of T.M. University of Bechar in Algeria. Therefore, a questionnaire is addressed to students and an interview with teachers of this university.

### 3.1. The Sample Population

The populations of these samples are teachers and students at Tahri Muhammed University of Bechar(south-west of Algeria). The sample consists of 100 students (girls and boys) and 20 teachers from the English department; the overall of the students is from license degree for the academic year 2019/2020.

### 3.2 Instrument

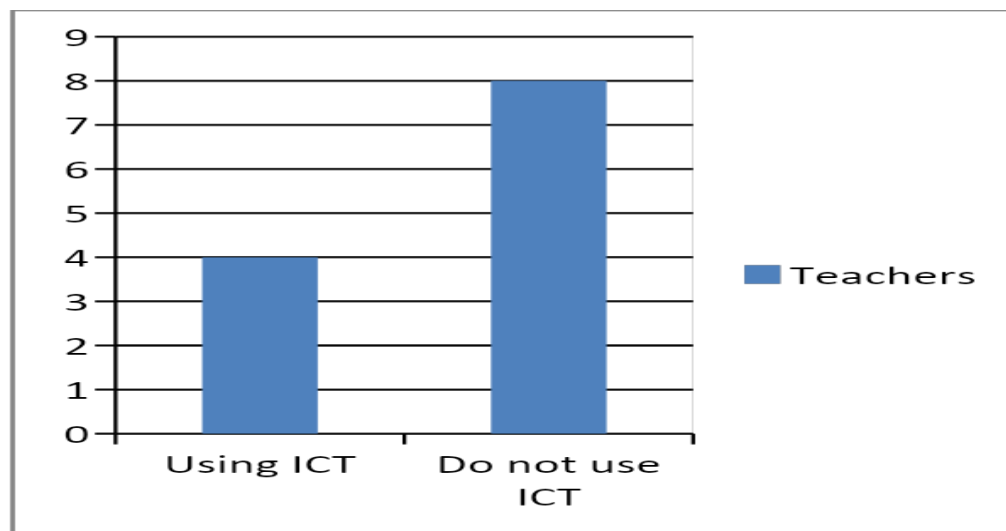
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### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

This paper investigates the Flipped Classrooms at TM University of Bechar in March 2020. It includes two different data collections: a questionnaire submitted to the students of 2nd and 3rd year English language LMD and an interview with the teachers. The teachers' interview aims at investigating the teachers' opinions about the flipped classroom to help students to understand easily their lectures. The students' questionnaire aims to figure out the acceptance of this new method to avoid their absence and to ameliorate their level in EL.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The students have twelve modules but only four teachers use the data- show in explaining their lectures, they are: a teacher of translation, reading, literature, and phonetics as explained in the first below graph:



**Fig.01**

In the second figure (02), the question is about recording the lecture before coming to the classroom if it is a good way or not. Most of the students agreed with the idea (65%) whereas a few of them disagreed (20%). Others were neutral (5%) and the absences were (10%).

In figure 03, the students were asked if they will attend the lecture after receiving the recording one in advance; but the answers to this question varied from one student to another. As it is shown in the graph 50%, they are with the attendance of the lecture, 34% are against, 6% are neutral and 10% are absent.

The graph below (fig.04) explains if the students prefer their teachers sending them the recorded lectures in advance or after their attendance. The majority of the students with 72% prefer the recorded lectures in advance whereas 28% said later on.

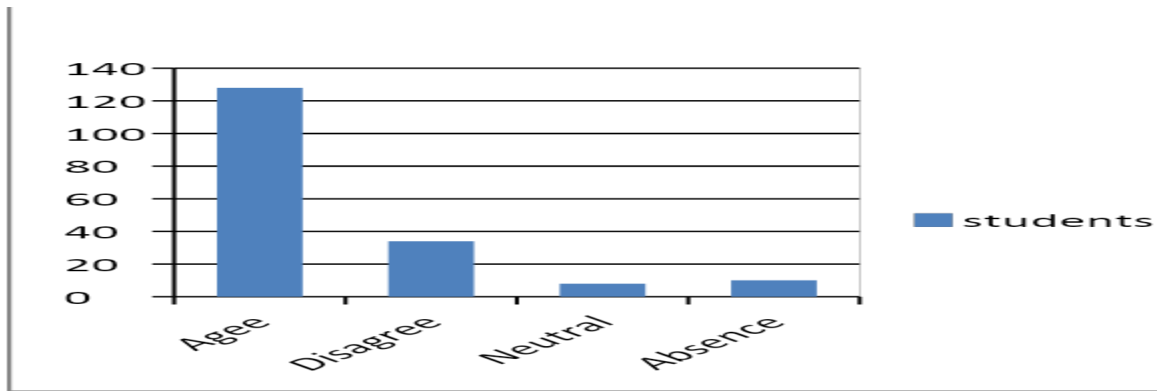


Fig.02

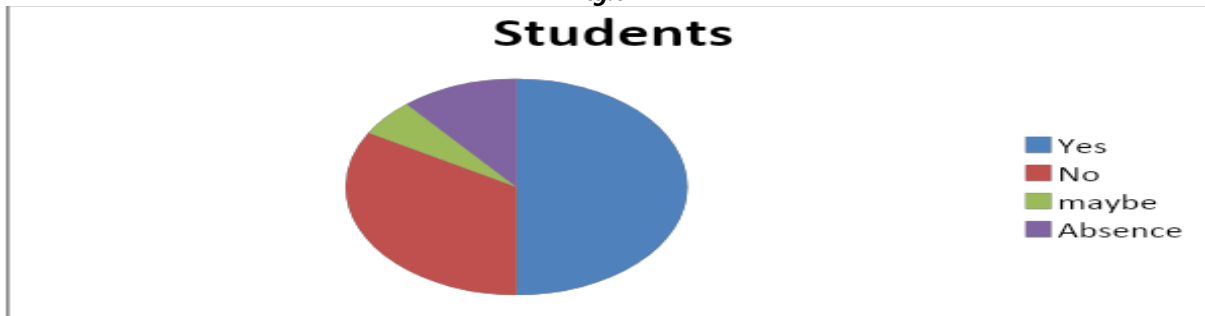


Fig.03

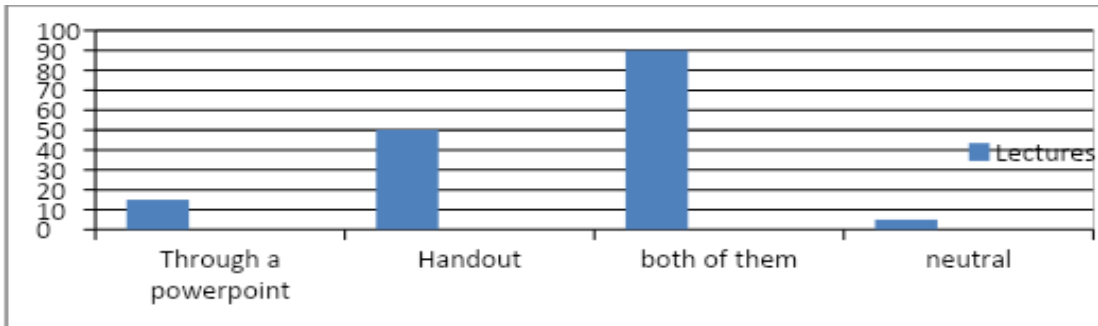


Fig.04

In fig.05 above the students were asked how they prefer their teacher to explain the lecture by using data show, or by using the handout. As a result, 6% are neutral, 10% are absent, 9% are with the use of data show, 30% prefer handout and 45% handout and PowerPoint.

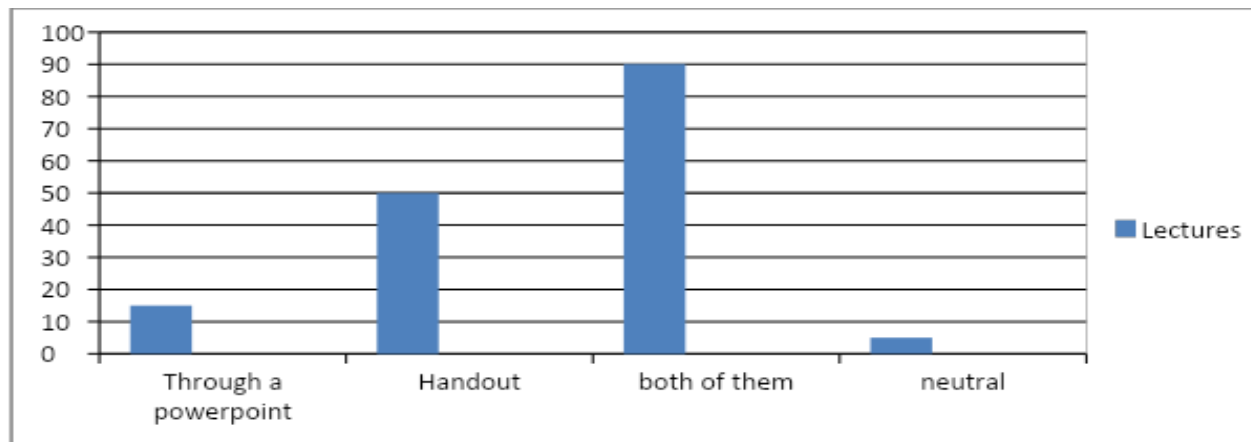


Fig.05

#### 4. Results and Discussion

After dealing with the interview of the teachers at Tahri Muhammad University of Bechar, it is noticed that most of the teachers did not use the ICT in their lectures because of a lack of materials as the data show, sockets of electricity in the classrooms. The teachers are against recorded lectures because it may empty the university from students and encourages them to neglect their duties and activities. Besides this, the new system LMD in Algeria obliged the students to attend to get marks of attendance. However, on 15 March 2020, the minister of higher education in Algeria sent an official letter to all rectors of universities in order to create a site for posting lectures to their students because the country is in a medical containment.

Before March 2020, most of the students were against flipped classrooms, even their teachers. Some students said that they need the recorded lectures just for having an idea in advance, to enlarge their knowledge before their attendance, to get marks of participation and to understand better with their teachers. While others disagreed, they said the internet is not available on the campus so they cannot access their lectures. They added that even the lecture will lose its value. Besides, the students said sending the recorded lectures can help the students to be lazy and to be absent and this will lead them to miss their practical activities. They said also that they feel they are studying by correspondence and they do not want a virtual lecture but they want a real lecture. Because the students think that attending a lecture can help students to have more explanations, ideas, and discussions with their lecturers. The students agree with the idea of recorded lectures just if they are workers, or ill and in the case of exams because this way can help them to revise. According to the students flipped classroom encourages absence but can motivate students to attend. In the end, we can conclude that both students and teachers were against the idea before the period of COVID19.

#### 5. Conclusion

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the power to complement, enrich and transform positive education. Technologies can facilitate universal access to education, fill learning gaps, support teacher professional development, improve the quality and relevance of learning, and improve the administration and governance of education. A great debate arises on the need for ICTs in education everywhere in the world especially after the appearance of COVID19 this year. Thus, most countries have programs for the integration of ICT in education. However; the integration of ICT in education involves challenging the traditional teaching-based methods that rely on teacher-provided knowledge. The integration of ICTs to improve the quality of teaching and learning presupposes "regular and regular use of ICT in the classroom by students and teachers, in a context of active, real and meaningful learning" (Raby, 2004).

This paper highlighted primarily the use of ICTs for active pedagogies in an Algerian University which is the Muhammed Tahri University of Bechar in the south West of Algeria on the one hand and viewing the current status of flipped classrooms on another hand. From the research methods, it is found that most of the teachers of this university have basic computer tools with Internet access, unlike students who still suffer from the lack of internet on campus and at home. Some students have computers but have no easy access to the Internet, they can access just through their mobiles. It is noticed that there was ignorance of the recorded lectures by lecturers and their students; they are against the flipped classroom completely before the Coronavirus period. They are against the flipped classroom and the using ICTS during lectures because of the lack of materials like connexion of internet, electricity sockets, and projectors are often insufficient or even absent in some departments although they are the basic tools in higher education. Finally, some learners claim that they like handouts better than using ICT in the lectures. They think it is a boring way and their lecturers rarely send them the recorded lectures or the PowerPoint until the upcoming exam. Finally, the flipped classrooms at higher education in Algeria are completely absent and a rejected way. However, today the problem of Covid19 forces the whole world, not only the Algerian government, to call for using the Internet, staying at home, sending lectures to students, and encouraging virtual lecturers in all levels of education. Not higher education is concerned alone but all the fields and all the ministries are concerned too in order to limit the spread of the virus COVID19.

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