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**Students' Hindrances and Constraints in Understanding Online Contents:  
First-Year Master's EFL Students at Dr. Moulay Taher University of  
Saida as a Case Study**

A thesis submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Master* in  
Didactics.

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## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that it contains no material previously published or written by another person or material that has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution.

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this humble work to.*

### ***My father***

*My ultimate role model and the embodiment of perseverance, always pushing forward and never giving up, and for his continuous teachings*

### ***My mother***

*For her patience, understanding, support, and affection. No amount of dedication or words can truly express my respect, my admiration, or my deep feelings towards my parents. I pray to **Allah** to bless them and watch over them, and I hope that they will always be proud of me.*

*To my dear sister and brother **Fatiha** and **Abdel Karim**, for their boundless encouragement, and to all the members of the "**Mahmoudi**" family, may **Allah** protect you and grant you a long life.*

*And to my friends and colleagues in the field.*

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## **Abstract**

The integration of online learning platforms in educational institutions has opened new avenues for knowledge dissemination. However, it has also presented challenges for students to understand online contents. The current study aims at investigating the hindrances and constraints experienced by first-year Master's EFL students at Dr. Moulay Taher University of Saida in understanding online contents. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform administrators and educators about the obstacles students face when engaging with online contents, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of online learning in Algerian institutions. A mixed-methods approach was employed for data collection and analysis. A questionnaire was administered to 23 first-year Master's EFL students, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with four students. The research findings indicate that technical issues, complexed learning platforms, and limited interaction hinder students' understanding of online materials. Additionally, students struggle due to limited clarification opportunities, and reduced motivation and engagement in self-paced learning. Based on the research findings, several recommendations are proposed. Students are advised to establish structured study schedules, seek assistance when needed, and make use of interactive learning tools. Educators should provide clear instructions, offer academic support, and incorporate real-world examples to enhance comprehension. Administrators are encouraged to address equity issues, provide sufficient technological resources, and continuously update online learning programs to meet the evolving needs of students.

**Keywords:** Constraints, EFL, hindrances, Master's students, online content, online learning.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**CMI:** Computer-managed Instruction

**CML:** Computer-managed Learning

**COVID-19:** Corona Virus Disease 2019

**DR:** Doctor

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**E-Learning:** Electronic Learning

**EMAIL:** Electronic Mail

**ICT:** Information and Communication Technology

**IBM:** International Business Machines Corporation

**MOODLE:** Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment

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## **General introduction**

In recent years, the rapid development of technology has transformed the educational landscape, with online platforms and resources playing an important role in knowledge dissemination. Online contents provide students with convenient access to a wide range of educational materials, ranging from scholarly articles and textbooks to multimedia presentations and interactive modules. The governments and educational institutions have acknowledged the potential of technology to improve access to education and enhance learning outcomes. As a result, they have taken significant steps to integrate online learning into the education system. However, despite the numerous advantages offered by online contents, there are also significant challenges associated with understanding and comprehending this material. To improve infrastructure and design effective instructional strategies, it is crucial to understand the hindrances and constraints faced by students in comprehending online contents.

The main aim of this research is to investigate the hindrances and constraints experienced by first-year Master's EFL students when trying to comprehend online contents. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of these challenges, we aim to identify potential solutions that can improve students' comprehension and enhance their overall learning outcomes.

This study focuses on understanding the hindrances and constraints faced by students in comprehending online contents. In educational institutions, the implementation of online learning systems has presented various barriers and difficulties for learners, teachers, and administrators. However, there is limited knowledge regarding students' challenges with online learning. By identifying these hindrances and constraints, this study can provide valuable insights for university administrators and teachers, enabling them to address the challenges students face in understanding online contents. Additionally, the findings may promote the adoption of more effective online learning tools and techniques, fostering a better learning experience for students.

In this regard, this study attempts to pursue the following research objectives:

1. Identify the specific challenges encountered by first-year Master's EFL students when engaging in online learning.
2. Explore the factors contributing to the difficulties experienced by first-year Master's EFL students in understanding online course materials.

3. Explore strategies and interventions that can help overcome these difficulties and improve students' comprehension of online contents.

The research will address the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by first-year Master's EFL students in online learning environments?
2. What are the reasons behind first-year master's students' difficulties understanding online course materials?

Based on the questions stated above, it is hypothesized that:

1. First-year Master's EFL students encounter difficulties in online learning due to issues like technical problems, complexed learning platforms and limited interaction.
2. First-year Master's EFL students struggle to understand online course materials because they limited opportunities for clarifications, and may have lower motivation and engagement in self-paced learning.

The research population is composed of first-year Master's EFL students from Dr. Moulay Taher University of Saida. To accomplish the work's objectives and the research questions, a questionnaire was given to 23 first-year EFL Master's students, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with four students.

The current research begins with a general introduction and finishes with a general conclusion. It consists of three chapters: The first chapter is the literature review chapter. It covers various topics, such as the concept of learning, its different formats, the definition and types of online learning, its advantages and disadvantages, educational tools, the development of online courses, the comparison between face-to-face and online learning, barriers to understanding online contents for students, and the importance of online learning and electronic technologies in education, it also examines the state of online learning in Algeria. The second chapter discusses the research questions, hypotheses, and the main aim and objective of our research study, It also describes the research methods and instruments used in this study. Furthermore, it presents the sample population that was involved in the research and addresses the limitations encountered during the research process. As for the third chapter, it represents the practical part, which analyses the results obtained from the student questionnaire and the students' interviews. Moreover, interprets and discusses the overall results. Finally, it provides some recommendations.

# ***1. Chapter One: Literature Review***

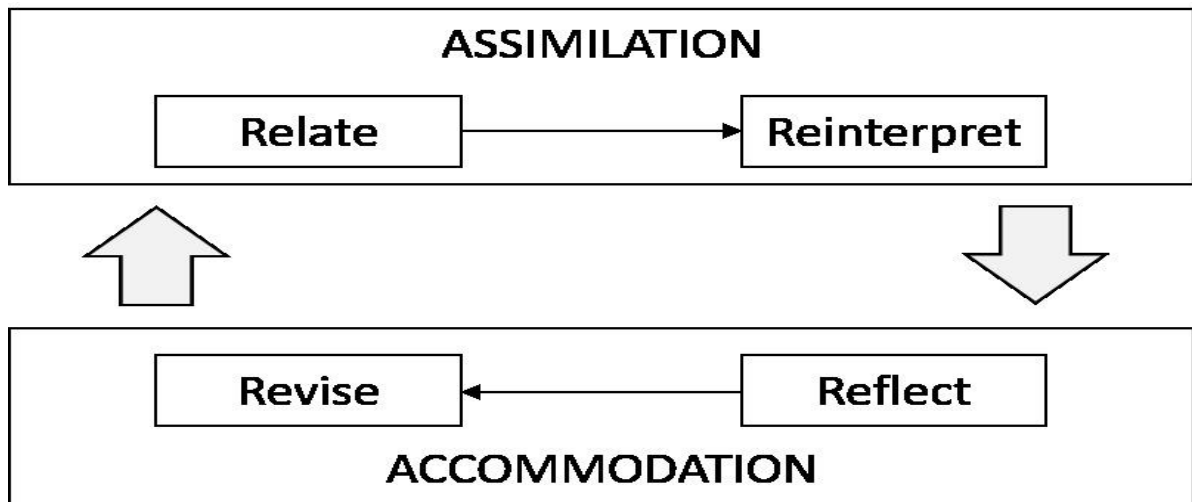
## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter delves into the theoretical aspects of a study focused on the hindrances and constraints that first-year Master's EFL students at Dr. Moulay Taher University of Saida, face in understanding online contents. It covers various topics, such as the concept of learning, its different formats, the definition and types of online learning, its advantages and disadvantages, educational tools, the development of online courses, the comparison between face-to-face and online learning, barriers to understanding online contents for students, and the importance of online learning and electronic technologies in education. The chapter also examines the current state of online learning in Algeria.

## **1.2 Learning definitions**

Many psychologists and education experts have tried to define what learning is from different perspectives, considering different factors that can influence the learning process and its results. These factors include social interactions, psychological aspects, the learning environment, tools used, motivation, and teaching methods. Because of the complexity of these factors, defining what learning is can be difficult. Additionally, the definition can change depending on the context in which it is used.

Some definitions of learning have been submitted by experts. Jean Piaget defined learning as the process of constructing new knowledge and understanding through the assimilation and accommodation of new information with existing mental structures (Piaget, 1952). Piaget's cognitive theory emphasizes that learning involves the construction of new knowledge and understanding through the assimilation and accommodation of new information with existing mental structures.



**Figure 1: Piaget's process of assimilation and accommodation (1952)**

Fagin (1958) asserted that the process of learning is characterized by a sequence of mental events or conditions that result in alterations in the learner's state of awareness. This suggests that certain cognitive and mental abilities are employed in the learning process, leading to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

Additionally, according to Hurlock (1942), learning is a process that involves exercising and making efforts to develop one's skills and potential. Through learning, individuals acquire competence in utilizing the abilities that they have inherited or gained from previous experiences by practicing and engaging in assigned tasks. In other words, learning reinforces and enhances existing skills and potential.

Overall, these definitions illustrate how different theoretical perspectives and research fields have conceptualized learning as a complex process that involves cognitive, behavioural, social, and emotional factors.

### **1.3 Learning Formats**

Beyond the traditional formal learning structure, there are many different learning formats that differ in terms of communication, instructional strategies, and information delivery platforms. These standards can help differentiate between different learning formats.

#### **1.3.1 Face-to-Face Learning**

This is a traditional form of learning in which learners physically attend classes and communicate with instructors. This type of learning incorporates instant assessments, in-class involvement, and direct synchronous communication and feedback. No course materials or



activities are provided online in this format. "Course with no online technology used" (Allen & Seaman, 2003, p. 6).

### **1.3.2 Online Learning**

This represents an online learning environment where students use web-based technologies to obtain course materials and participate in virtual interactions with classmates and instructors. It is often defined as "a course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically, there are no face-to-face meetings" (Allen & Seaman, 2003, p. 6).

### **1.3.3 Blended Learning**

Blended learning refers to applications that blend traditional face-to-face classroom teaching with online learning (Park & Shea, 2020, p. 256). According to Graham (2006), this concept refers to the combination of face-to-face learning methods with learning with computers.

Driscoll (2002) also described blending learning as the mixing and combining of any form of instructional technology, such as CD-ROM, web-based training, and face-to-face instructor methods. However, Park and Shea (2020) made a comparison between all variations of online learning, suggesting that, in comparison to the other forms of online learning, blending learning provides students with further productive channels through which they may communicate with their partners and instructors.

## **1.4 Online Learning Definition**

As a result of the rapid growth of information and communication technology (ICT), education institutions are increasingly embracing online learning, sometimes referred to as electronic learning. Greater flexibility is provided by this method of learning because it is accessible at any time and from any location.

Various authors have attempted to define online learning, with most describing it as the use of technology to facilitate access to educational activities. Benson (2002) emphasizes that online learning is a contemporary form of distance learning that provides access to educational opportunities for unconventional and underprivileged learners.

Hiltz and Turoff (2005), for instance, consider online learning to be a more developed type of distance learning, while many authors use the terms "e-learning," "computer-assisted education," "web-based learning," and "internet-based learning" interchangeably with online learning.

Negash and Wilcox (2008) provide a comprehensive definition, describing online learning as a real-time presence where the instructor and the student are together during content delivery, regardless of location.

In summary, while the definitions of online learning may vary, they all agree that it involves the use of online tools to facilitate the learning process and can be considered a subset of distance learning.

## **1.5 Online Learning Types**

### **1.5.1 Synchronous learning**

One of the most popular forms of online learning offered by numerous academic institutions is synchronous classes with the instructor attending the classes via video conference; this simulates the average classroom setting online so they can impart lessons in real-time while using this platform to exchange lecture slides. This type of online learning format is chosen if someone desires the flexibility of scheduling his classes and the convenience of remote distance learning while retaining the orderly and participatory nature of classroom interaction.

### **1.5.2 Asynchronous learning**

While synchronous learning entails a set time for class, asynchronous learning takes the opposite approach with online learning classes that may be completed on one's own time. They can also be pre-recorded lectures or voice recordings mixed with specified outputs that can be given by students to their teachers in order to be graded by them. This type of online learning is appropriate when a learner requires a more adaptable learning structure with more scheduling flexibility, such as when balancing sessions with a job and other responsibilities.

### **1.5.3 Hybrid learning**

Some educational institutions used hybrid learning as their major online education type during the COVID-19 pandemic. A hybrid learning curriculum incorporates both synchronous and asynchronous formats, resulting in an organized learning process in which learners are able to pose questions in real-time at certain times while being left to their own devices and engaging in free learning at other times. This category of online learning must be chosen when someone wants to be able to learn independently and flexibly when the chance of communicating with his classmates and his teachers in person is still present.

### **1.5.4 Fixed time E-learning**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools had to quickly adapt to online learning. Some schools chose to recreate the traditional classroom environment virtually. They used fixed time options with a predetermined class schedule, and students were required to take attendance and clock in and out to show that their school time was completed. This kind of virtual learning is inflexible since it requires logging in and out at specific times. This type of learning can be chosen by students who prefer to closely resemble a regular school environment while being able to manage their calendar around a predetermined block of time.

### **1.5.5 Computer-managed Learning (CML)**

This sort of online learning, sometimes referred to as computer-managed instruction (CMI), depends on computer software or applications to aid a student's online learning experience. Students can access the learning resources they require through the system while also being ranked or evaluated by the computer using pre-set criteria depending on their learning objectives. This type can be used when someone needs a simple, all-in-one way to manage and evaluate his learning objectives while engaging in independent, self-paced learning.

## **1.6 Online Learning Advantages**

Online learning has become more widespread and is being utilized by a variety of educators and learners. Many institutions have adopted online course sharing, which is believed to be the most efficient method of learning. Online learning offers various advantages and benefits.

### **1.6.1 Flexibility**

According to Thomson (2010, p. 667), online learning gives students the flexibility to select a time and location that best meet their learning requirements. This is in line with Klein and Ware's (2003, p. 37) recommendation that each student has the choice to select their convenient time and place. According to many instructors and students, the advantages of online learning include the capacity to focus more on the course material without interruptions connected to parking, traffic, and other challenges that may arise when attending traditional learning classes.

### **1.6.2 Affordability**

Online learning provides a financial benefit when compared to traditional education due to its ability to eliminate expenses that are associated with attending a physical institution. These expenses include transportation, meals, and the cost of purchasing course materials. Moreover, all the study materials are available online, which creates a paper-free learning environment that is not only cost-effective but also environmentally friendly. To study through this mode, students only need a computer and an internet service provider.

### **1.6.3 Self-pacing**

Online learning allows individuals to learn at their own pace and speed, regardless of whether they prefer a faster or slower approach. This self-pacing is made possible by the asynchronous nature of online learning. Furthermore, online learning has been found to enhance satisfaction and reduce stress levels among learners (Codone, 2001).

### **1.6.4 Online Learning Improves Computer Skills**

According to Dhull and Sakshi (2017, p. 33), online learning improves computer skills. They stated that students who study online have an opportunity to acquire specialized technological skills through the process of online learning. These skills may help them in all aspects of their professional lives in the future. Therefore, developing different skills promotes creativity, increases self-esteem, and reduces stress.

## **1.7 Online Learning Disadvantages**

Students must also take into account the disadvantages of online learning as well. Some of them include:

### **1.7.1 Communication Barrier**

Traditional learning offers more interaction and participation than online learning does. When face-to-face methods are used with teachers, the learning process is more successful. Additionally, Dhull and Sakshi (2017, p. 33) claim that there aren't many opportunities for face-to-face interactions between students and instructors in online learning. But according to a global review of research on open and blended learning, misunderstandings between the teacher and the learner can happen online, which can have a big impact on students' learning outcomes and processes.

### **1.7.2 Distractions**

According to Dhull and Sakshi (2017, p. 33), online learning poses challenges for students, such as low motivation caused by the distractions of technology. Students may easily lose focus due to the prevalence of computers and mobile phones, which can divert their attention towards social media and other sites, resulting in a lack of understanding. Additionally, concentrating on the screen for long periods of time can be difficult for many learners. Therefore, to assist students in staying attentive and motivated, teachers must deliver engaging and interactive online classes.

### **1.7.3 Technological Setbacks**

The significant growth in internet penetration over the past few years, a consistent and reliable connection with decent speed remains a problem, particularly in smaller cities and towns. The lack of a stable internet connection can result in a lack of continuity in learning for students and hinder the education process. In addition, problems with technology, such as the unavailability of learning materials or poor-quality network connectivity, can also make online learning frustrating. Therefore, it is essential for both students and teachers to have knowledge of technology to ensure successful online learning. (Ghoshal, 2020, p. 984).

### **1.7.4 Challenges in Preventing Cheating**

According to Veerendra (2023), it can be challenging to prevent cheating in online learning as compared to traditional learning, where teachers can supervise students directly. In online classes, it can be challenging for teachers to evaluate students during exams as they are not physically present to monitor them. So, teachers may not be aware of whether students cheat during the tests or not.

## **1.8 Online Educational Tools**

Online educational tools provide a flexible and accessible approach to education with a range of platforms and applications that facilitate communication, collaboration, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The most common communication tools used in online learning include audio and video materials, e-mail, social networking, and school management programs.

### **1.8.1 Audio Materials**

Audio material refers to anything related to sound and has been used as an educational tool for a long time. The radio is a classic example of this (Patil, 2014, p. 281). Nowadays,

audio materials are widely available through internet streaming, webcasts, and podcasts, making them an essential medium for online learning.

According to Sharp (2005), audio conferencing is an electronic technique that allows a professor (speaker) to connect with numerous independent students using a standard phone and spoken language across phone lines. Audio conferencing is especially suitable for open learning environments where it is necessary to communicate effectively with a large number of students.

### **1.8.2 Video Materials**

Video materials, as defined by Patil (2014, p. 282), are electronic media that record, copy, and broadcast moving visual images. By using YouTube as a source of video materials, as suggested by Dangwal (2018, p. 18), learners can have a more engaging and interesting learning experience. Video conferencing technology is also a useful tool that is becoming more popular in online learning. This technology allows academic supervisors to connect with learners remotely through high-ability TV networks. Each learner can see and hear the specialist and academic advisor with the scientific material, regardless of their location.

### **1.8.3 E-mail**

Email is a widely used system for sending written messages electronically between computers. The term 'email' is an abbreviation of 'electronic mail', and popular email services include Gmail and Yahoo Mail. Utilizing email as a means of communication between learners and instructors has been shown to be an effective method for online learning (Dangwal, 2018, p. 15).

### **1.8.4 Social Networking**

Social networking has gained significant popularity in recent years as an online platform for people to interact and build social connections (Sadiku et al., 2019, p. 126). The terms "social networking" and "social media" have become particularly important in the context of online learning (Weber & Rothe, 2012, p. 1957). Dafoulas and Shokri (2014, p. 222) have noted that social networking sites encourage collaboration, communication, and interaction. College students have increasingly been using Facebook, one of the most popular social networking sites, as an educational tool for communication and feedback.

### **1.8.5 School Management System / Software**

A school management system refers to a software application designed to streamline and automate various administrative and academic processes within an educational institution. To increase the efficiency of administrative services, educational institutions must implement a school management system, which is a computer program capable of storing all relevant information (Gehlawat, 2014, p. 57). According to Demir (2006, p. 33), the benefits of using a school management system are numerous and extend to administrators, teachers, and students alike. For example, the system allows for the creation of a comprehensive database that contains information about student registration, programs, grades, staff, classes, and courses, all of which contribute to improved school management and the learning process.

### **1.9 Developing Online Courses**

Developing course materials, as well as meeting the learning requirements and learning styles of students, are all time-consuming and effort-intensive activities in creating an online course. There are three critical processes involved in developing and implementing an online course.

The first step is to define the objectives of the course and the main objectives of the course design. The second step involves effective course design, which requires finding a careful balance between synchronous and asynchronous teaching strategies. The final step involves offering a first-class online course that takes into account students' educational requirements and preferences as well as the academic policies of the college. (Adrian, 2002)

### **1.10 Comparing Face-to-Face Learning and Online Learning**

Online learning has many characteristics that differ from traditional face-to-face learning, as detailed in the table below:

**Table 1: Face-to-Face Learning and Online Learning Comparison**

<b>Face-to-face Learning</b>	<b>Online Learning</b>
1. Emphasizes knowledge creation with teachers as the foundation of the learning process.	Emphasizes digesting knowledge with learners at the centre of the educational process.
2. Lower infrastructure costs and simpler technical competency practices	Higher costs of computer infrastructure, software creation, and educator and learner training
3. Learners receive education at the same location and time.	Education is not limited to a specific location or time.
4. Learners are negatively dependent on obtaining information from the instructor.	Promotes self-learning and learning abstraction
5. Students must attend school on a set schedule, making it difficult to combine with work.	Provides flexibility for learners to balance work and study.
6. Learning materials typically consist of written texts.	Learning materials are more engaging with multimedia elements.
7. Communication with the instructor is limited to class time.	Learners can contact the instructor at any time through various channels.
8. Instructors serve as the main source of information.	Instructors act as mentors, consultants, and learning assistants.
9. The language of instruction is typically that of the learner's country.	Learners come from all over the world, making the language diverse.
10. A limited number of students can attend in person.	Allows for unrestricted admission of global learners
11. Emphasizes information retention and memorization	Emphasizes critical and creative thinking skills.



## 1.11 Barriers to Understanding Online Contents for Students

Although online learning is beneficial, students face some difficulties with it that can affect their understanding of online courses, which will be exactly discussed in the following paragraphs:

### 1.11.1 Course content quality

Course content quality is the major factor that can affect students' understanding of online courses. Poorly designed or outdated course content can make it difficult for students to grasp the material, no matter how well they are able to access it. These are some potential issues with course content quality:

**Outdated or inaccurate information:** If course content has not been updated to reflect current information or practices, it can be difficult for students to understand the material and apply it in real-world contexts.

**Poorly organized / structured:** If course content is not organized in a logical manner, it can be confusing and difficult for students to follow.

**Lack of multimedia or interactive elements:** Online courses can take advantage of multimedia and interactive elements to enhance students' understanding of the material. If these elements are lacking, it can hinder students' comprehension.

**Inconsistency in content delivery:** Instructors who create their own course content may deliver it in different ways, resulting in inconsistencies in presentation and understanding.

### 1.11.2 Lack of structure

Online courses often lack the structure of traditional classroom settings, which can be difficult for some students who thrive on routine and predictability.

### 1.11.3 Technical issues

Technical problems such as slow internet connections, incompatible software, or malfunctioning hardware can disrupt the learning process and lead to frustration and disengagement.

### 1.11.4 Limited interaction

Online courses often have limited opportunities for interaction between students and teachers, which can be a barrier to learning. Students may feel isolated and struggle to stay

engaged with the material. Amadora (2020) has made the observation that because there is little interaction in online classrooms, learners are more likely to become preoccupied with their digital phones, dogs, deliveries, and other activities than with the actual online lesson that is taking place.

### **1.11.5 Distractions**

Online learning can be easily interrupted by distractions such as social media, emails, or household chores. These distractions can make it difficult for students to focus on their studies and absorb the material.

### **1.11.6 Time management**

Online courses require students to manage their own time and stay motivated without the structure of a traditional classroom setting. This can be challenging for students who struggle with time management.

### **1.11.7 Limited feedback**

Online courses may provide limited opportunities for feedback and assessment, which can make it difficult for students to gauge their progress and identify areas where they need to improve.

### **1.11.8 Lack of engagement**

Online courses may not be as engaging as traditional classroom settings, which can make it difficult for some students to stay motivated and interested in the material. This lack of individualized attention can be another obstacle because students prefer two-way communication, which can be challenging to execute.

### **1.11.9 Language barriers**

For students who are not native speakers of the language in which the course is being taught, language barriers can pose a significant challenge to understanding course content.

## **1.12 Online Learning Importance**

Online learning is becoming more common as technology develops and the user experience improves. When compared to traditional face-to-face schooling, it has been shown to be a successful learning technique with numerous benefits.

Language learning is now possible without the challenges of travel. Now students can benefit from education while still at home. Time restrictions used to be a major barrier to learning, but technology has positively affected the situation. Students can now attend any class at any time and from anywhere due to the advancement of online learning and technology. Students can now repeat any course until they understand it. Online learning and integrated education systems are accessible every single day of the week, unlike face-to-face learning.

According to Brush, Glazewski, and Hew (2008), online learning gets past challenges and solves problems that arise during the learning process. Additionally, learners are more likely than ever to use computers in productive ways (Castro, Sanchez, & Aleman 2011).

Learners can engage, and help each other while learning online from anywhere at any time. Learners from all over the world might be invited to engage in subjects' discussions in a teleconferencing classroom; for instance, they might be given the chance to analyse problems, investigate concepts, and develop ideas. In order to express themselves and think critically about their education, learners not only work together to learn but also share a variety of their study experiences.

Eventually, the study sector has benefited from enhanced critical thinking and comprehension because of the internet use. Using reliable and authentic content was extremely difficult before the development of technology (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). Fahad Salim Al-Adi asserts that plagiarism detection software has improved originality, innovation, and the production of new ideas and products. It is now possible to document, think back on, and edit one's work because of archival technology. It has improved communication in both written and spoken form.

### **1.13 The Development of Electronic Technologies in Education**

According to Salama and Abu Raya (2000), John Kemeny and his assistants at Dartmouth University in America improved the first form of the basic schools and institutions of that time, and those academic plans and systems were well accepted in studying. This was claimed in the research study made by Yhya LI and Zakari (2008) as "the starting of the usage of computers in language," and it was also used in writing and improving academic educational systems, which were strongly accepted in education in 1958.

After that, in the early 1960s, IBM created the first comprehensive computer-aided teaching package (Computer Curriculum Corporation) for the primary school curriculum in collaboration with Stanford University, and the Computer Curriculum Foundation was

established to market and maintain it. In order to allow many learners to practice on it, the system was developed five times, worked on in almost four hundred various locations, and spearheaded throughout Europe and the United States. Today, it is used to teach students at all educational levels. In 1972, it had seven hundred terminal endings.

### 1.14 Online Learning in Algeria

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rapid shift towards online education in Algerian universities. This change has brought challenges and opportunities for educators and learners. The incorporation of digital platforms such as Moodle and social media sites like Facebook has provided a safe and effective means for teachers and students to interact and exchange information.

The use of Moodle has allowed for both synchronous and asynchronous learning techniques, which have proven to be highly motivating and effective for students. Learners have the ability to access course materials and a wide range of web resources, enabling them to improve their performance and development. Similarly, the use of social media platforms like Facebook has allowed for increased student engagement and interactions, especially in informal settings. Students can share and develop their reading, listening, and writing skills through the sharing of different texts and videos. While social media sites like Facebook can be helpful in language learning by allowing learners to share and develop their skills, the lack of face-to-face interaction may hinder language acquisition.



**Figure 2: Moodle logo. (n.d.). Moodle. <https://www.logo.wine/logo/Moodle>**

The Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has implemented distance learning as a means of reinforcing education that requires presence while reducing distances and managing the educational process in universities. Additionally, the increasing number of students and the need to approach international standards in terms of quality assurance have also been factors in the adoption of distance learning.

Overall, the shift towards online education in Algerian universities has brought about significant changes and challenges. However, the adoption of digital platforms and distance learning has provided a means for educators and learners to adapt and overcome these challenges while improving the quality of education.

### **1.15 Conclusion**

This chapter was the theoretical part of the current study; it treated different important points that needed to be tackled. Online learning, like other systems, has a positive side and a negative side; that is, the online learner should be intelligent enough to know which path to pave towards reaching the expected goals from learning online.

## ***2. Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Design***

## **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, we will discuss the research questions, hypotheses, and the main aim and objective of our research study. Additionally, we will describe the research methods and instruments utilized in this study. Furthermore, we will present the sample population that was involved in the research. Finally, before concluding the chapter, we will address the limitations encountered during the research process.

## **2.2 Research questions**

The research will address the following questions:

- What are the challenges faced by first-year Master's EFL students in online learning environments?
- What are the reasons behind first-year master's students' difficulties understanding online course materials?

## **2.3 Research hypotheses**

Based on the questions stated above, it is hypothesized that:

- First-year Master's EFL students encounter difficulties in online learning due to issues like technical problems, complexed learning platforms and limited interaction.
- First-year Master's EFL students struggle to understand online course materials because they have limited opportunities for clarifications, and may have lower motivation and engagement in self-paced learning.

## **2.4 Research objectives**

This study attempts to pursue the following research objectives:

- Identify the specific challenges encountered by first-year Master's EFL students when engaging in online learning.
- Explore the factors contributing to the difficulties experienced by first-year Master's EFL students in understanding online course materials.
- Explore strategies and interventions that can help overcome these difficulties and improve students' comprehension of online contents.

## **2.5 The aim of the study**

The main aim of this research is to investigate the hindrances and constraints experienced by first-year Master's EFL students when trying to comprehend online contents. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of these challenges, we aim to identify potential solutions that can improve students' comprehension and enhance their overall learning outcomes.

## **2.6 The Research Methods**

In order to gather data on the hindrances and constraints faced by first-year master's EFL students at Dr. Moulay Taher University when it comes to understanding online content and their overall online learning experience, a mixed-method approach was employed. Firstly, a quantitative research instrument in the form of a questionnaire was distributed among the students, aiming to gather standardized data on the frequency and nature of difficulties encountered. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four students using qualitative methods to gain deeper insights and explore individual perspectives. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by these students, offering statistical data along with rich narratives and individual experiences.

## **2.7 Research instruments**

For the purpose of gathering data, a questionnaire was handed out to first-year master's EFL students at Dr. Moulay Taher University, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with four students. Both research instruments were administered to investigate students' hindrances and constraints in understanding online content and what factors affect their online learning experience.

### **2.7.1 Students' Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consists of 13 questions which, in general, require students to pick up the most appropriate answer from a series of options. The questionnaire is divided into four sections:

The first section, entitled "Background Information," contains three questions. The first question requests the participant's gender. The second question inquires if the participant has access to an internet connection and, if so, how frequently they use it. The third question asks if the participant has prior experience with online learning.



The second section, entitled "The Students' Preferred Way of Studying," consists of three questions. The first question asks about the participant's preferred method of studying. The second question aims to determine the participant's level of comfort with the online learning platform used by their university. The third question inquires if the participant feels that online classes offer the same level of interaction and engagement as in-person classes.

The third section, entitled "Students' Challenges with Online Learning," comprises four questions. The first question asks if the participant has faced any challenges due to a lack of access to appropriate technology or equipment. The second question asks the participant to identify any difficulties they have encountered while trying to access online course contents. The third question asks the participant to rate the overall quality of the online course materials and platform. The fourth question requests that the participant suggest ways in which the online course content or platform could be improved.

The fourth and final section, entitled "Students' Hindrances in Understanding Online Contents," contains three questions. The first question asks if the participant is able to concentrate fully during online classes and, if so, to explain why. The second question asks the participant to identify the reasons they are unable to concentrate fully during online classes. The third and final question asks if the participant has faced any difficulties in understanding the online contents due to a language barrier and, if so, to explain the language barriers they have encountered.

### **2.7.2 Students' interview**

The interview was conducted with four first-year Master's EFL students. It consisted of eight questions aimed at gathering their background information, identifying obstacles they faced, and understanding their experience with online content.

To begin, the participants were asked about their duration of participation in online learning and how it compared to traditional, in-person classes. This section aimed to gather information about their experiences in both modes of learning and explore any differences or preferences they might have.

Next, the participants were asked to identify the problems they faced while learning online. The purpose was to understand the specific challenges they encountered and how these obstacles affected their overall learning experience. This section aimed to shed light on the difficulties faced by students in comprehending online contents.

Lastly, the participants were asked a series of questions related to their understanding of online contents. They were asked whether they believed grasping virtual courses was impossible without the help of their teachers, if they sought assistance from teachers for understanding online content, and their experience in doing so. Additionally, they were asked about the importance of a quiet and distraction-free environment for effective online learning. The section concluded with a question seeking their opinions on how the quality of online learning could be improved in terms of understanding the content.

## **2.8 Population and Sampling**

The study aims to focus on first-year master's EFL students at Dr. Moulay Taher University, Saida. The reason behind selecting these students as the target population is due to their familiarity with online learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting this study can help these students in the next few years with studying and using online learning.

## **2.9 Limitations of the study**

- The attempt to deal with a larger sample of participants failed. Unfortunately, only 23 students were present on the questionnaire day.
- The sample of twenty-three (23) Master One students is not enough for generalization.
- Students' inactive participation in the questionnaire; many of them did not answer the open-ended questions.
- The inaccessibility of some sources, like books and articles that are not free of charge
- Due to the supervisor's sickness, most of the time it was impossible to meet with the supervisor; consequently, the researcher was obliged to work remotely from home, especially in the second chapter (practical part).

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has introduced the research questions, hypotheses, and objectives of our study. We have outlined the research methods, instruments, and sample population involved. Additionally, we have acknowledged the limitations encountered during the research process, which provide opportunities for future research. This chapter sets the stage for the subsequent chapters where we will present and analyse our findings.

### ***3. Chapter Three: Data Analysis and Interpretation***

### 3.1 Introduction

The present chapter is devoted to the field work of the current study, which investigates the students' hindrances and constraints as first-year master's EFL students at Dr. Moulay Taher University in understanding online contents. It aims to analyse, and discuss the findings of the investigation.

### 3.2 Students questionnaire

The student questionnaire serves as a valuable tool for gathering insightful data. Through a careful analysis of the questionnaire responses, we can uncover patterns, identify trends, and extract meaningful insights. This section focuses on the comprehensive analysis of the collected data, shedding light on key findings that emerged from the questionnaire.

#### 3.2.1 The Analysis of the Questionnaire

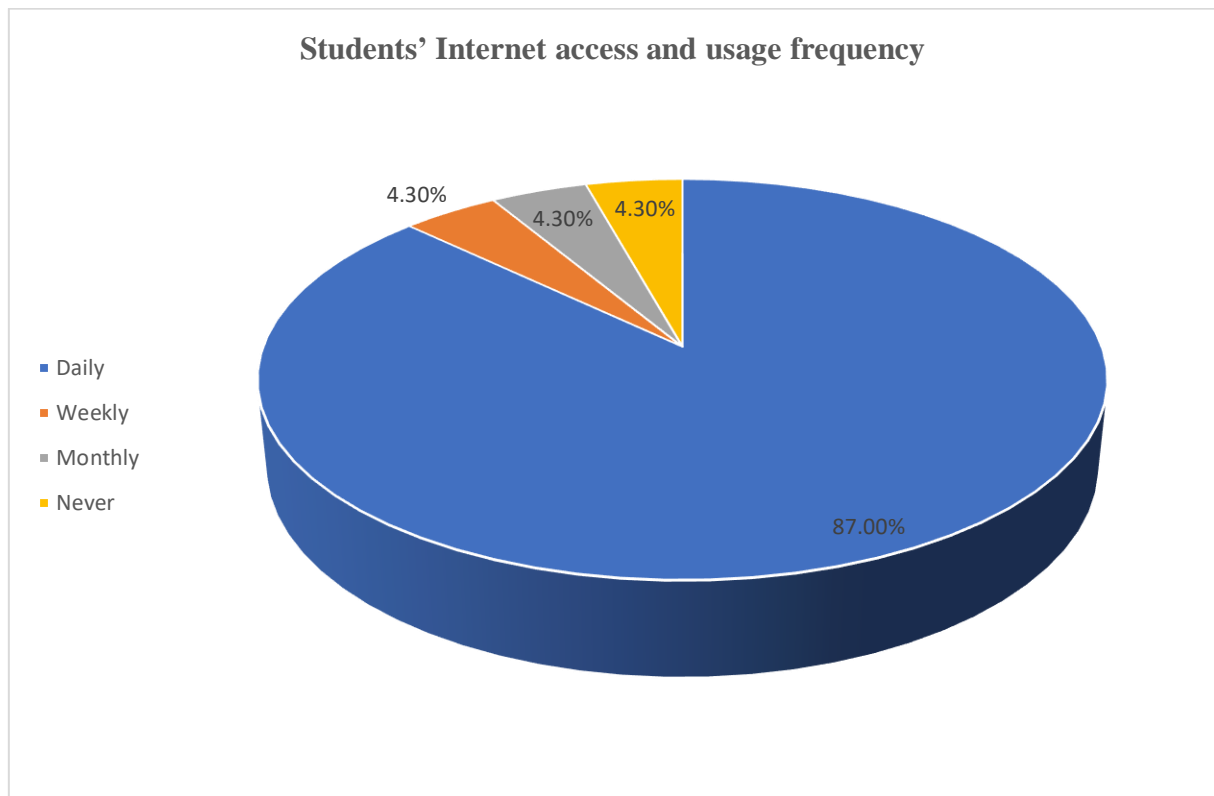
##### Section one: Background information

##### Question 1: State your gender

**Table 2: Students' Gender**

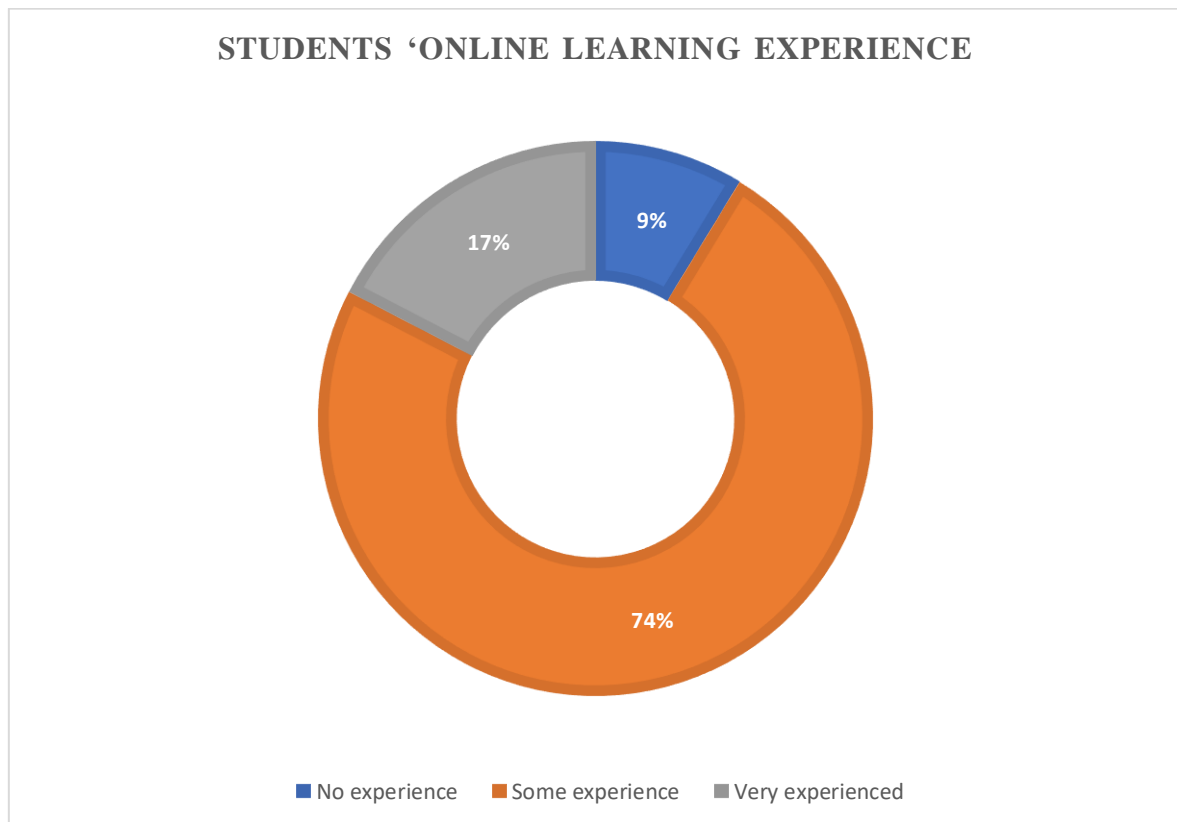
Gender	Number	Percentage %
Male	9	40 %
Female	14	60 %
Total	23	100 %

Table 2 shows that of the 23 questionnaires collected from the target population, Females represented 60% of the participants, while males represented 40%.

**Question 2: Internet access and usage frequency**

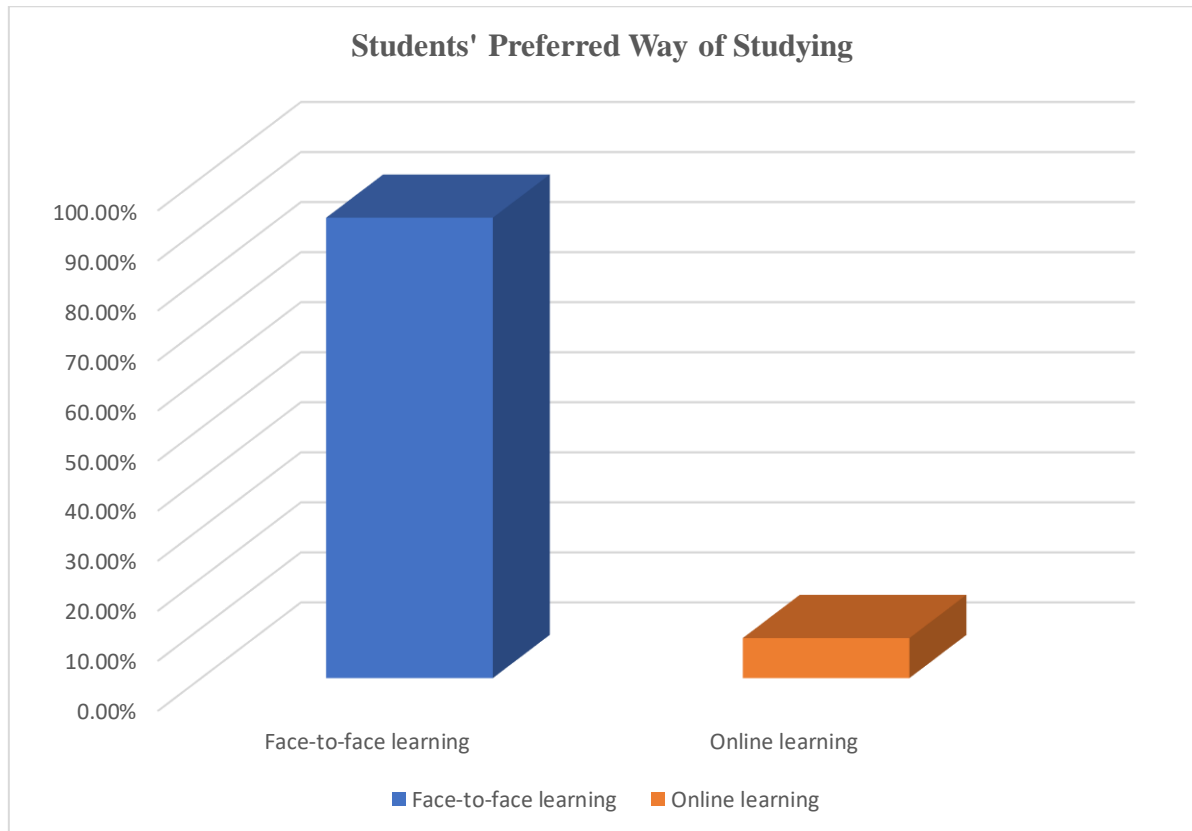
**Figure 3: Students' Internet access and usage frequency**

Figure 5 indicate that the majority of the participants, specifically 20 students out of 23 (87%), use the internet every day. Only a few participants access the internet weekly (1 student, 4.3%) or monthly (1 student, 4.3%), and one student (4.3%) does not have internet access at all. These results give us an idea of how often the participants use the internet, with most of them using it daily.

**Question 3: Prior experience with online learning**

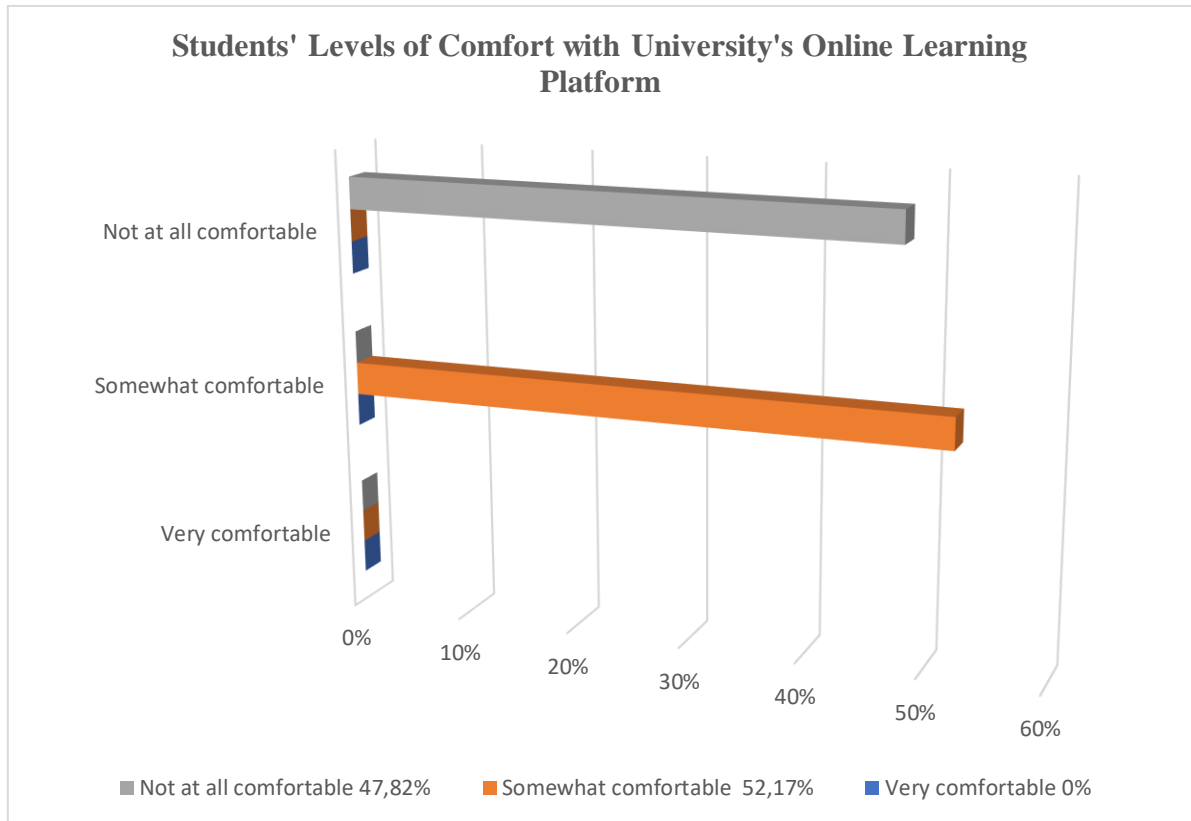
**Figure 4: Students' Online Learning Experience**

Figure 6 presents data on students' experiences with online learning. 74% of the students have some experience with online learning, while 17% are classified as "very experienced" with online learning. This suggests that the majority of the students in the sample are familiar with online learning environments. However, 9% of the students have had no experience with online learning at all.

**Section Two: The Students' Preferred Way of Studying****Question 4: What do you prefer the most?**

**Figure 5: Students' Preferred Way of Studying**

Figure 7 shows that 91.30% of the students in the target sample prefer face-to-face learning as their preferred mode of studying. Only 8.69% of the students indicated a preference for online learning.

**Question 5: How comfortable are you with the online learning platform used by your university?**

**Figure 6: Students' Levels of Comfort with University's Learning Platform**

Figure 8 shows that the majority of students are not fully comfortable with the online learning platform used by their university. Specifically, 48% of students responded that they were "not comfortable at all" with the platform, while only 52% of students responded that they were "somewhat comfortable". No students responded that they were "very comfortable" with the platform, which suggests that there may be some room for improvement when it comes to the online learning experience.



**Question 6: Do you feel that online classes provide the same level of interaction and engagement as in-person classes?**

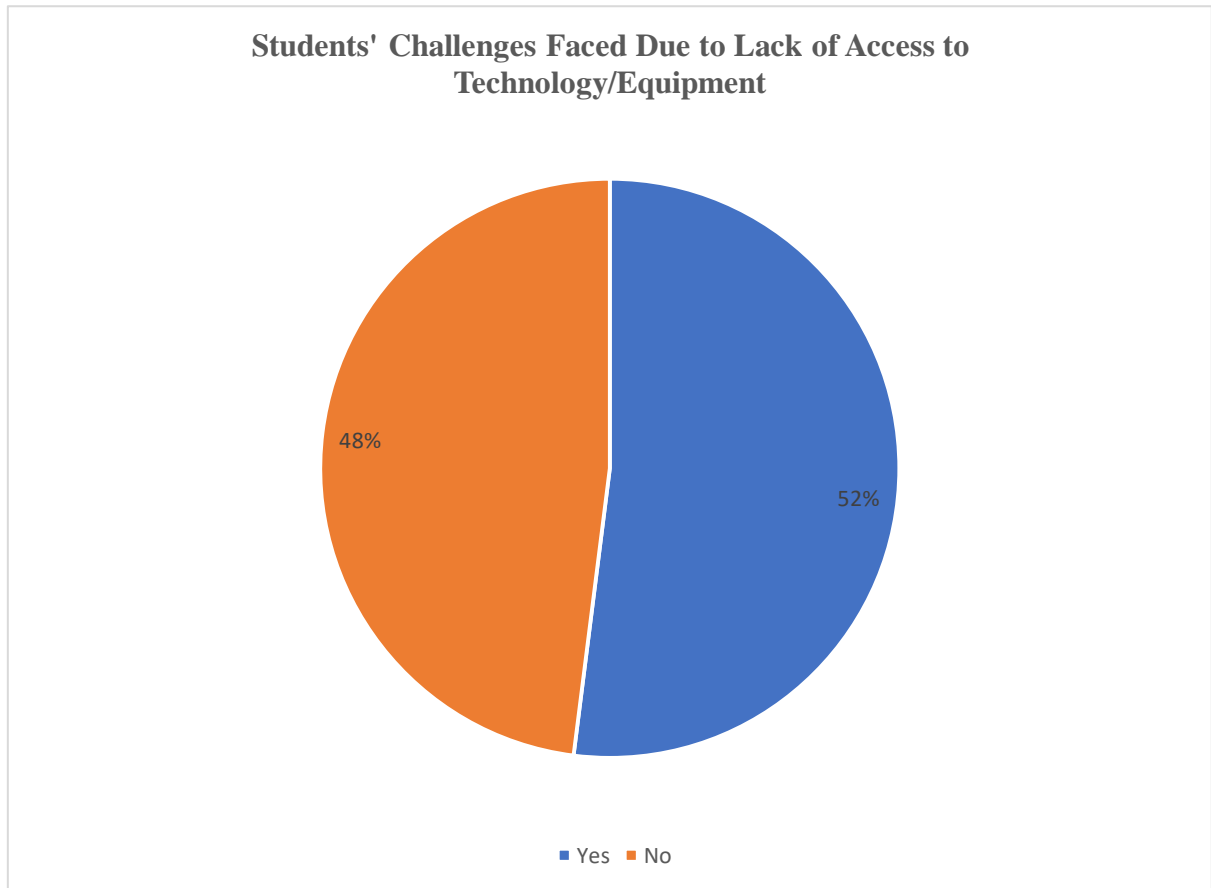
**Table 3: Students' Online Class Engagement Levels**

Option	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	0	0%
Agree	6	26.08%
Disagree	10	43.47%
Strongly disagree	7	30.43%
Total	23	100%

Based on table 3 data, it seems that a significant proportion of students do not believe that online classes provide the same level of interaction and engagement as in-person classes. This is evident from the fact that 43.47% of students disagreed and 30.43% strongly disagreed with the statement, while only 26.08% agreed and no students strongly agreed. indicating that they do not feel that online classes offer the same level of interaction and engagement as in-person classes.

### **Section Three: Students' Challenges with Online Learning**

**Question 7: Have you faced any challenges due to lack of access to appropriate technology or equipment?**



**Figure 7: Students' Challenges Faced Due to Lack of Access to Technology/Equipment**

Figure 9 shows that that majority of the students, 52% to be precise, have indicated that they have faced some difficulties or challenges due to a lack of access to appropriate technology or equipment. On the other hand, the remaining 48% of the students reported that they had not faced any such challenges.

**Question 8: what difficulties have you faced while trying to access online course content?**

- a. Slow internet connection
- b. Difficulty navigating the platform
- c. Technical issues with platform or device

**Table 4: Students' Difficulties Faced While Accessing Online Course Contents**

Option	Number	Percentage
A	6	26.1 %
B	1	4.3 %
C	4	17.4 %
Combination of difficulties	12	52.2 %
Total	23	100 %

Table 4 shows the difficulties that students have faced while trying to access online course content. The majority of students, 52.2%, reported having multiple difficulties. Slow internet connections were the most commonly reported difficulty, with 26.1% of students having this issue. Technical issues with the platform or device were reported by 17.4% of students. Finally, difficulty navigating the platform was reported by only 4.3% of students.

**Question 9: how would you rate the overall quality of the online course materials and platform?**

**Table 5: Students' Rating of Online Course Materials and Platform**

Option	Number	Percentage
Excellent	00	00 %
Good	03	13.04%
Average	11	47.82%
Poor	6	26.08%
Very poor	3	13.04%
Total	23	100%

Table 5 presents the opinions of students about the quality of the online course materials and platform. The data shows that none (0%) of the students rated the quality of the online course materials and platform as "excellent". A small percentage of students, 13.04%, rated the quality of the online course materials and platform as "good". About half of the students, 47.82%, gave it an "average" rating. In contrast, 26.08% of the students rated the quality as "poor", also, 13.04% of students gave the online course materials and platform a "very poor" rating, meaning that they had a negative experience with online learning.

**Question 10: do you have any suggestions on how the online course content or platform could be improved**

Out of 23 students, 18 have provided their suggestions on how the online course content or platform could be improved. From their answers, we have picked up the following:

1. "I suggest establishing synchronous learning platforms and actually using it"
2. "They should be more modern and well designed the user experience also needs to be smoother and user friendly"
3. "Maybe it is better to rebuild another platform more convenient and easier to access to the courses"
4. "Yes, it should be available all the time specially the platform since we have difficulties to access"
5. "The addition of more visual content to engage our eyes and ears which makes a difference"
6. "The online course should be an addition only, there must be a face-to-face interaction in classroom and discussion of the course then no matter if it is put online since it has been already discussed and understood"
7. "Universities must develop better servers. And choose a good time for students"
8. "Universities should hire professional web developers and pay them well in order to have a good platform"
9. "The administration should fix the technical issues related to platform because sometimes we can't get access to the platform due to the technical problems"
10. "The online content and platform could be improved by to make the internet available from any student"

According to answers from 18 out of 23 students, there are different ways to make the online course content and platform better. Students say that the platform should be easier to use, have a more modern design, and have more videos and pictures to keep them interested. There are also some technical problems that need fixing, like making the platform work better and making sure the internet works well for everyone. Some students say that it would be better to have live discussions with teachers and classmates using a synchronous learning platform. Students also think that online courses should be an addition to in-person classes, not a replacement for them. Finally, some students think that universities should pay more for good web developers to make the platform better.

**Section Four: Students' Hindrances in Understanding Online Contents****Question 11: Are you able to fully concentrate on online classes****Table 6: Students' Ability to Concentrate during Online Classes**

Option	Number	Percentage
Always	02	8.69 %
Sometimes	18	78.26%
Rarely	03	13.04%
Never	00	00 %
Total	23	100 %

From the data provided in the table 6, a significant proportion of students, accounting for 78.26% stated that they were able to concentrate on their online classes "sometimes". In contrast, only 8.69 % of students claimed that they were "always" able to concentrate fully during online classes. Moreover, 13.04% of students reported that they were "rarely" able to concentrate during online classes. None (0%) of the students responded with "never" being able to concentrate during online classes.

**Question 11 (Pt2): If not, can you explain why?**

Only 6 out of 23 students have provided their explanations:

1. "You can never be fully concentrating on the online class since you're going to be disturbed by some external factors unlike when you are in the classroom and in front of the teacher"
2. "Gets easy distracted"
3. "Due to technical issues, the teacher's speech is often interrupted. Also, usage of internet for long periods of time is tiring"
4. "Sometimes we need to ask questions for more clarity other colleagues just waste time"
5. "Frankly speaking, I can't concentrate on online classes simply because I find it just waste of time"
6. "Due to the fact that I am comfortable at home so I can do whatever that I want"

Based on the responses of 6 out of 23 students, there are different reasons why students find it hard to focus on online classes. Some students say that they get distracted more easily when they're not in a classroom with their teacher. Others say that it's hard to stay focused when they're working on a computer for a long time. Technical problems, like when the teacher's voice cuts out or the internet doesn't work well, can also make it hard to concentrate. Some students don't think online classes are very useful, so they don't try to focus on them. Finally, some students say that they feel too comfortable at home and don't have enough discipline to focus on their classes.

**Question 12: You are not able to fully concentrate on online classes because of:**

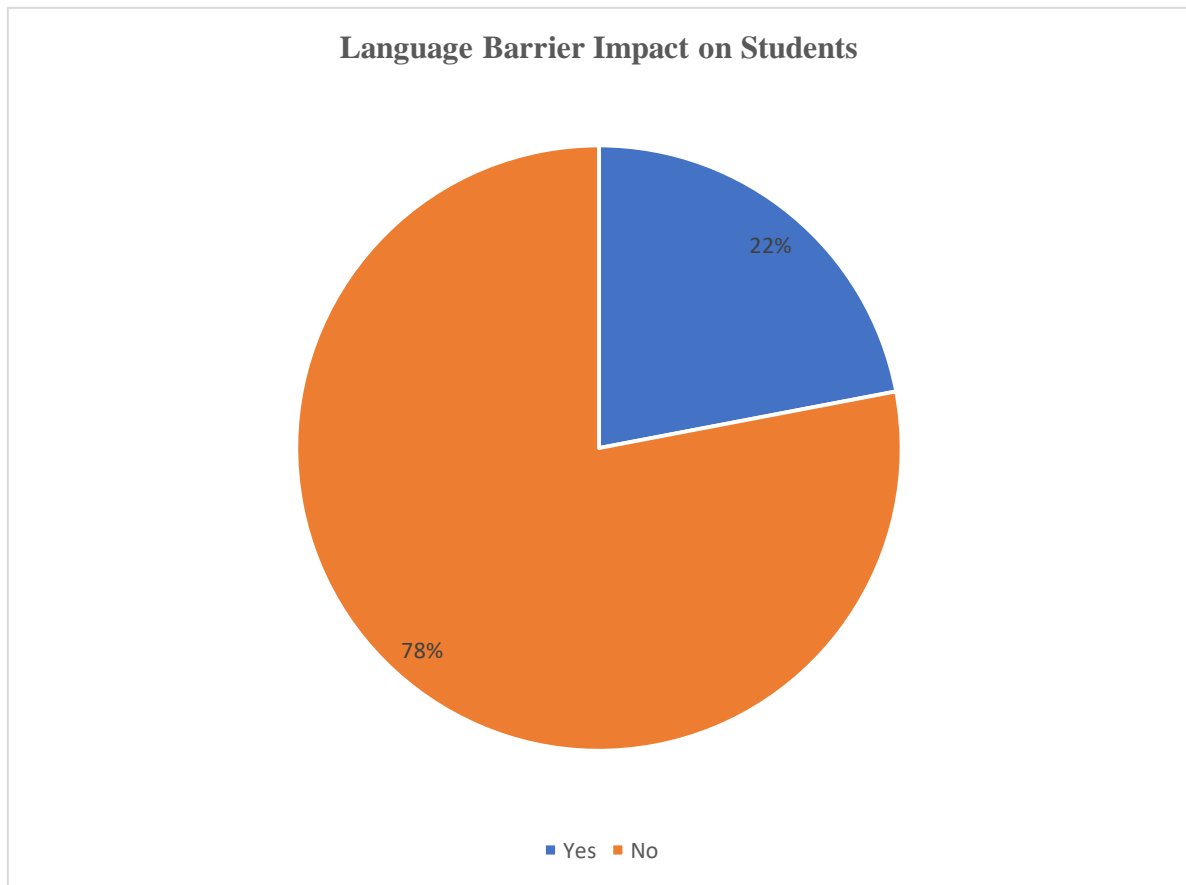
- a. Difficulty in finding a quiet place to study
- b. Distractions
- c. Lack of motivation
- d. Lack of interaction and engagement

**Table 7: Factors Affecting Students' Ability to Concentrate During Online Classes**

Option	Number	percentage
A	3	13%
B	1	4.3%
C	3	13%
D	3	13%
Combination of distractions	13	56.5%
Total	23	100 %

As shown in table 7, out of 23 students, 56.5% reported having difficulty concentrating during online classes due to multiple reasons. Specifically, 13% reported difficulty in finding a quiet place to study; 4.3% reported distractions as the reason; 13% reported a lack of motivation; and 13% reported a lack of interaction and engagement as reasons for their difficulty in concentrating. The majority of students, 56.5%, chose multiple options, indicating that concentration during online classes may be affected by multiple factors.

**Question 13: Have you faced any difficulty in understanding the online content due to a language barrier?**



**Figure 8: Language Barrier Impact on Students**

Figure 10 shows the responses of students to the question about having difficulty understanding online content due to a language barrier. Out of the total students, 22% reported facing difficulty, while 78% reported not facing any difficulty. This indicates that a minority of students have faced language barriers while trying to understand online content.

**Question 13 (Pt 2): If yes please explain the language barrier(s) faced**

Only 3 out of 23 students have provided their explanations:

1. "New technical terminology"
2. "Due to the lack of vocabulary acquired"
3. "The complicated words"

Out of the 23 students who were asked if they faced any difficulty understanding the online course content due to a language barrier, 78% answered that they did not have any such difficulty. However, 22% of students answered and provided their explanations. The reasons cited by these students included encountering new technical terminology, having a lack of acquired vocabulary, and struggling with complicated words.

### 3.3 Students interview

Students' interview serves as a valuable tool to delve deeper into their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions. In this section, we present the analysis of the student interviews, aiming to extract meaningful insights and understand the nuances of their perspectives. By carefully examining the interview transcripts, we can identify common themes, highlight significant points raised by the students, and gain a deeper understanding of their challenges.

#### 3.3.1 The analysis of the interview

##### **Question 1: How long have you been participating in online learning?**

The responses of the students indicate that the period of online learning for most of them is relatively short, and the pandemic was a factor that forced them to participate in it. Student A and Student B both started participating in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they didn't have much experience with it before that. As Student A puts it, *"it was only the period of the pandemic that was very needed in that period. Other than that, I haven't used online learning for too much."*

Student C also mentioned being obliged to participate in online learning due to the pandemic. As Student C stated, *"We were obliged because we couldn't go to the university and all, so we were obliged to go to the online learning."*

Overall, the students' answers suggest that the pandemic had a significant impact on the shift towards online learning, the sudden change in the mode of education has affected some students negatively.

##### **Question 2: How does online learning compare to traditional, in-person classes?**

Student A expressed a preference for traditional learning, stating that it is more efficient than online learning, as they stated, *"you see the person, you are present, though there are some obstacles, but I find it very unique and better than the online learning."*



Student B had a more mixed response, acknowledging the convenience of online learning but also recognizing the value of in-person classes. They mentioned that online learning allows for more flexibility and saves time on commuting, but also noted that face-to-face interaction can be helpful in understanding course material. As Student B stated, *"attending the in-person classes is where you can see people's face and contacting them directly... since I'm a busy man and I have work to do, I do prefer online learning."*

Student C was more unequivocal in their preference for traditional, face-to-face learning. They stated that it is "more effective" because of the connection with the teacher and the ability to receive direct feedback.

Student D also acknowledged the benefits of traditional learning, such as being able to see people's faces and have physical contact, but preferred online learning due to its convenience. As they explained, *"Online learning in some way is a lot easier than in person classes."*

Overall, the students' responses suggest that traditional, in-person classes are generally preferred over online learning, particularly for the close interaction and feedback they provide. However, they also recognize the benefits of online learning, such as its convenience and flexibility. It's important to note that each student has their own preferences and needs.

### **Question 3: Which kind of problems students are facing while learning online?**

Student A mentioned that the quality of the internet connection and access to certain areas of the online platform can be hindrances to learning online. This is a common issue faced by many students, particularly in areas with poor internet connections or limited access to technology. However, the student noted that overall, they did not face many problems with online learning.

Student B emphasized the importance of a reliable internet connection for successful online learning. They also noted that the environment in which one studies can impact their ability to learn effectively. This includes having a quiet and distraction-free space.

Student C also identified internet connectivity as an issue in online learning, particularly when it comes to connecting with teachers and classmates on video conferencing platforms such as Google Meet.

Student D discussed two main challenges with online learning in Algeria. Firstly, they mentioned that poor internet connectivity can be an issue, with internet outages lasting for hours

or even days. Secondly, the student noted that studying from home can be difficult due to background noise and distractions.

Overall, the responses from the students suggest that internet connectivity is a significant obstacle to online learning, particularly in areas with poor infrastructure. The importance of having a quiet and distraction-free environment for studying was also highlighted.

**Question 4: How did these obstacles affect your learning experience?**

Students A and C have highlighted problems with the online platform and internet connection, which can result in missing out on important course material and struggling to connect with teachers.

Student B has also pointed out that missing online classes due to these obstacles can lead to being considered absent and falling behind in the coursework. This shows how these obstacles can have a compounding effect on students' ability to keep up with the pace of the course and stay on track with their learning goals.

However, Student D seems to have a different perspective, noting that these obstacles are not significant enough to affect their learning experience. It is worth noting that this response may be unique to this student's personal situation and may not reflect the experiences of other students.

Overall, the responses highlight the importance of addressing technical difficulties and connectivity issues to ensure that students have equal opportunities to access course materials and participate fully in online classes.

**Question 5: Do you think that grasping virtual courses is somehow impossible without your teacher's help?**

Student A believes that online learning is not impossible without a teacher's help. They acknowledge that the teacher is the main person who delivers the course, but they also see that eLearning is dependent on platforms that are easy to use for course delivery.

Student B recognizes the importance of a teacher's help in online learning in cases where students may misunderstand the lesson or need additional explanations.

Student C simply states that they find it easy to grasp virtual courses and that they do not require a teacher's help to learn effectively.

Student D disagrees with the notion that virtual courses are impossible to grasp without a teacher's help. They emphasize that virtual courses offer benefits such as engaging multiple senses and providing opportunities for student participation.

Overall, while there is some disagreement among the students, it seems that virtual courses can be grasped without a teacher's help, but the presence of a teacher can be valuable in providing additional guidance and support.

**Question 6: Have you ever sought help from teachers for understanding online content? If so, how was that experience?**

The students have varying experiences seeking help from teachers to understand online content. Student A hasn't sought help but thinks it's possible. Student B has needed help before when they and their classmates didn't have a clear understanding, and the teacher was able to explain and give the right solution. Student C hasn't sought help and has found it easy to understand. Student D sought help once when they were confused about the meaning of a course, and the teacher was able to clarify and explain it.

Overall, it seems that some students have sought help from teachers when needed and have had positive experiences with it.

**Question 7: Do you think a quiet and distraction-free environment is necessary for effective online learning?**

According to the students' responses, the majority agree that a quiet and distraction-free environment is necessary for effective online learning.

Student A states that it is "*absolutely*" necessary to have a quiet environment in order to process the information perfectly fine. Student B agrees and emphasizes the need for a quiet environment to listen carefully to the teacher's explanation. Student C agrees and simply says, "*Of course. We need a quiet place to learn.*" However, student D has a slightly different view, stating that while it's necessary, it's not mandatory. They acknowledge that a distraction-free environment can make online learning more effective, but they also note that it's not impossible to learn with noise and distractions around.

Overall, the students' responses suggest that a quiet and distraction-free environment can be beneficial for effective online learning, but it is not necessarily a requirement. Other factors, such as the physical environment and individual learning styles, play a role in the effectiveness of online learning.

**Question 8: In your opinion, what can be done to improve the quality of online learning for students in terms of understanding the content?**

The students had varying opinions on what can be done to improve the quality of online learning for students in terms of understanding the content.

Student A emphasized the importance of timing and keeping it brief and understood. It is crucial for the online learning sessions to be scheduled at a time that suits the students' daily lives. Additionally, the professor should make sure that the content is clear and easy to understand to aid the students' learning process.

Student B had a different approach and suggested the need for a delegate to manage the online sessions. This person would be responsible for sharing the link to the online sessions, sending reminders to the participants, and addressing any issues or concerns. It would eliminate the confusion and chaos caused by students who are not able to join the sessions. Having a fixed schedule for the online sessions would also encourage students to attend the sessions, making it more like an in-person class with set timings.

Student C believed that the government has a significant role in improving the quality of online learning by focusing on improving internet infrastructure. Poor internet connectivity and accessibility to online learning platforms can negatively impact students' learning experiences, hindering their ability to understand the content.

Finally, student D suggested a clear and organized schedule for the online sessions, making them accessible to everyone, including outsiders who have the desire to learn but do not have access to the required passcode or password. This would ensure that online learning is open to all and that the students can attend the sessions without any hindrance.

Overall, these suggestions highlight the need for a well-organized and structured online learning environment that caters to the students' needs and ensures their ability to understand the content. Clear communication, accessible learning platforms, and reliable internet connectivity are crucial factors that contribute to a successful online learning experience.

**3.4 Discussion of the findings**

The results of the research tools conducted among students showed that a majority of them have daily access to the internet. However, there are variations in their online experience. Most of the students indicated limited experience with online learning due to its introduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. They expressed a preference for traditional learning over online learning, citing benefits such as face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers and the

development of interpersonal skills. They also feel they get more motivation and help from teachers in traditional classes. Similarly, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) found that students felt more engaged and motivated in traditional learning environments than in online environments.

The findings suggest that the shift to online learning has its challenges. And students' preference for traditional face-to-face learning was justified because of the difficulties they faced in adapting to the new learning environment. Starting with their university's online learning platform, they either find it difficult to navigate or experience technical problems within the platform. Previous studies have identified technical problems and platform usability issues as significant barriers to online learning (Chen & Jones, 2007; Compeau & Higgins, 1995).

The results further indicated that half of the students faced challenges due to a lack of access to appropriate technology or equipment, suggesting that a proportion of students experienced negative consequences due to inadequate tools for academic success.

Other factors that hindered students' comprehension of online content included difficulties in concentration, a lack of motivation, and distractions. Students cited other factors such as finding a quiet place to study, uncomfortable or noisy environments, and a lack of discipline as distractions. These findings are consistent with previous research that has identified connectivity issues, a lack of motivation, and distractions as significant barriers to online learning (Chen & Jones, 2007; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Additionally, language barriers were also reported by a small proportion of students who found it difficult to understand online content due to unfamiliar technical terminologies, a lack of acquired vocabulary, and complicated words.

A minority of the students acknowledged the benefits of online learning. They recognized the convenience and flexibility that online learning provides; it allows them to learn at their own pace and on their own schedule. The students also recognized the value of having a teacher's guidance and support in online learning. While they agreed that virtual courses can be grasped without a teacher's help, they emphasized the importance of having a teacher to provide guidance and support when needed. Furthermore, the students highlighted the need for a well-organized and structured online learning environment that is accessible to all students. They also emphasized the importance of clear communication, accessible learning platforms, and good internet connectivity for a successful online learning experience.

In conclusion, the findings of the study suggest that despite having daily access to the internet, the majority of students still prefer traditional learning methods over online learning. Several challenges were identified that contribute to the difficulties students face with online

learning, including technical and equipment issues, complicated learning platforms, a lack of interaction and engagement, limited opportunities for clarification, lower motivation and engagement in self-paced learning, and other factors such as distractions and language barriers. These findings highlight the need for universities to address the barriers to online learning and provide students with the necessary support and resources to succeed in online environments.

### **3.5 Recommendations and suggestions**

To improve the online learning experience and make it easier for students to understand online contents, the researcher has suggested some recommendations:

#### **For Students:**

1. Create a daily schedule to stay organized and motivated.
2. Find a quiet study area without distractions to focus better.
3. Take regular breaks to prevent burnout and take care of your mental well-being.
4. Use interactive tools like group activities to make online learning more interesting.
5. Seek help from teachers and peers when you need extra support.

#### **For Administration:**

1. Ensure all students have access to the necessary resources, like computers and the internet, for online learning.
2. Address equity issues like technology access to ensure equal learning opportunities.
3. Update online learning programs to meet the changing needs of students, teachers, and administrators.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Through the analysis and discussion of the results, we have tried to provide answers to our research questions throughout this chapter. The results of the questionnaire and interview revealed that students encountered numerous challenges when attempting to study online, negatively affecting their educational experience.

## **General Conclusion**

The rapid development of technology and the integration of online learning platforms in educational institutions have presented both opportunities and challenges for students. Understanding and addressing these obstacles is crucial for optimizing the online learning experience and enhancing students' comprehension.

The main aim of this study was to investigate the hindrances and constraints experienced by first-year Master's EFL students in comprehending online contents. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of these challenges, the study aimed to identify potential solutions that could improve students' comprehension and enhance their overall learning outcomes.

The relevance of the findings of this study lies in the potential impact they can have. University administrators and teachers can benefit from the insights provided to address the challenges students face in understanding online contents. Additionally, the findings may promote the adoption of more effective online learning tools and techniques, fostering a better learning experience for students.

By addressing the research problem and research questions, this study has shed light on the specific challenges faced by first-year Master's EFL students in online learning environments. It has identified the factors contributing to their difficulties in comprehending online course materials. Furthermore, the study explored strategies that can help overcome these difficulties and improve students' comprehension of online contents.

The first hypothesis stating that first-year Master's EFL students encounter difficulties in online learning due to issues like technical problems, complicated learning platforms, and limited interaction has been confirmed. The second hypothesis, proposing that first-year Master's students struggle to understand online course materials due to limited opportunities for clarification, and lower motivation and engagement in self-paced learning, has also been confirmed. In summary, both hypotheses accurately reflect the challenges that first-year master's students face during their online learning experience, as supported by the available evidence from research and studies.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the hindrances and constraints faced by first-year Master's students in understanding online contents. They emphasize the importance of providing clear explanations, guidance, and support to students while also

fostering interactive and engaging learning experiences. Adequate technological support is also crucial for enhancing students' comprehension. Additionally, continuous evaluation and improvement of online learning tools and techniques should be pursued.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Students' Questionnaire

You are kindly requested to provide us with your significant answers to the following proposed questions concerning the investigation of "students' hindrances and constraints in understanding online contents." Your answers will be of great help in accomplishing the goals of the present study. Additionally, all your answers will be kept confidential and only used for academic purposes.

Thank you beforehand.

##### Section One: Background Information

Please choose the correct answer.

1.State your gender

a. male ☐ b. female ☐

2.Internet access and usage frequency

a. daily ☐ b. weekly ☐ c. Monthly ☐ d. Never ☐

3.Prior experience with online learning

a.no experience ☐ b. some experience ☐ c. very experienced ☐

##### Section Two: The Students' Preferred Way of Studying

1.What do you prefer the most?

a. Face-to-face learning ☐ b. Online learning ☐

2.How comfortable are you with the online learning platform used by your university?

a. Very comfortable ☐ b. Somewhat comfortable ☐ c. Not at all comfortable ☐

3.Do you feel that online classes provide the same level of interaction and engagement as in-person classes?

a. Strongly agree ☐ b. agree ☐ c. disagree ☐ d. Strongly disagree ☐

### Section Three: Students' Challenges with Online Learning

1. Have you faced any challenges due to lack of access to appropriate technology or equipment?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

2. What difficulties have you faced while trying to access online course content?

a. Slow internet connection ☐

b. Difficulty navigating the platform ☐

c. Technical issues with the platform or device ☐

3. How would you rate the overall quality of the online course materials and platform?

a. Excellent ☐ b. Good ☐ c. Average ☐ d. Poor ☐ e. Very Poor ☐

4. Do you have any suggestions on how the online course content or platform could be improved?

Please specify: .....

### Section Four: Students' Hindrances in Understanding Online Contents

1. Are you able to fully concentrate on online classes?

a. always ☐ b. Sometimes ☐ c. Rarely ☐ d. Never ☐

If not, can you explain why?

2. You are not able to fully concentrate on online classes because of:

a. difficulty in finding a quiet place to study ☐

b. distractions ☐

c. lack of motivation ☐

d. lack of interaction and engagement ☐

3. Have you faced any difficulty in understanding the online content due to a language barrier?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

If yes, please explain the language barrier(s) faced:

.....  
.....

## **Appendix B**

### **Students' Interview**

Thank you for letting me know that you are taking this time off. I am Mahmoudi Hakim, a master's-level EFL student in didactics. This interview is designed for the sake of collecting data about Master's One EFL students' hindrances and constraints in understanding online contents. I would be grateful if you could aid in answering the following questions to ensure the authenticity of this research study: Our interview will take around 15 minutes; it will also be recorded in order to save all your answers and not miss any of them. Additionally, all your answers will be kept confidential and only used for academic purposes.

#### **Questions:**

1. How long have you been participating in online learning?
2. How does online learning compare to traditional, in-person classes?
3. Which kind of problems are you facing while learning online?
4. How did these obstacles affect your learning experience?
5. Do you think that grasping virtual courses is somehow impossible without your teacher's help?
6. Have you ever sought help from teachers for understanding online content? If so, how was that experience?
7. Do you think a quiet and distraction-free environment is necessary for effective online learning?
8. In your opinion, what can be done to improve the quality of online learning for students in terms of understanding the content?

## Résumé

L'intégration des plateformes d'apprentissage en ligne dans les établissements d'enseignement a ouvert de nouvelles voies pour la diffusion des connaissances. Cependant, cela a également présenté des défis aux étudiants pour comprendre le contenu en ligne. La présente étude vise à enquêter sur les obstacles et les contraintes rencontrés par les étudiants de première année de maîtrise EFL dans la compréhension du contenu en ligne et de proposer des interventions pour améliorer leurs résultats d'apprentissage. L'importance de cette étude réside dans son potentiel d'informer les administrateurs et les éducateurs sur les obstacles auxquels les étudiants sont confrontés lorsqu'ils s'engagent dans le contenu en ligne, améliorant ainsi l'efficacité globale de l'apprentissage en ligne dans les institutions algériennes. Une approche à méthodes mixtes a été utilisée pour la collecte et l'analyse des données. Un questionnaire a été administré à 23 étudiants de première année de Master EFL et des entretiens semi-directifs ont été menés auprès de quatre étudiants. Les résultats de la recherche indiquent que les problèmes techniques, les plates-formes d'apprentissage complexes et l'interaction limitée entravent la compréhension des étudiants des documents en ligne. De plus, les étudiants éprouvent des difficultés en raison du manque d'explications physiques, des opportunités de clarification limitées et de la motivation et de l'engagement réduits dans l'apprentissage à leur rythme. Sur la base des résultats de la recherche, plusieurs recommandations sont proposées. Il est conseillé aux étudiants d'établir des horaires d'étude structurés, de demander de l'aide en cas de besoin et d'utiliser des outils d'apprentissage interactifs. Les éducateurs doivent fournir des instructions claires, offrir un soutien scolaire et incorporer des exemples concrets pour améliorer la compréhension. Les administrateurs sont encouragés à résoudre les problèmes d'équité, à fournir des ressources technologiques suffisantes et à mettre à jour en permanence les programmes d'apprentissage en ligne pour répondre aux besoins changeants des étudiants, des enseignants et des administrateurs.

**Mots clés :** Contraintes, EFL, freins, étudiants en Master, contenu en ligne, apprentissage en ligne.



## ملخص

أدى دمج منصات التعلم عبر الإنترنت في المؤسسات التعليمية إلى فتح آفاق جديدة لنشر المعرفة. ومع ذلك، فقد قدمت أيضاً تحديات للطلاب لفهم المحتوى عبر الإنترنت. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقيق في العوائق والقيود التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الأولى ماجستير اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في فهم المحتوى عبر الإنترنت واقتراح التدخلات لتعزيز نتائج التعلم. تكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في قدرتها على إعلام الإداريين والمعلمين بالعقبات التي يواجهها الطلاب عند التعامل مع المحتوى عبر الإنترنت، وبالتالي تعزيز الفعالية الشاملة للتعلم عبر الإنترنت في المؤسسات الجزائرية. تم استخدام نهج مختلط لجمع البيانات وتحليلها. تم إجراء استبيان على 23 من طلاب السنة الأولى في ماجستير اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وأجريت مقابلات شبه منظمة مع أربعة طلاب. تشير نتائج البحث إلى أن المشكلات التقنية ومنصات التعلم المعقدة والتفاعل المحدود تعيق فهم الطلاب للمواد عبر الإنترنت. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يعاني الطلاب بسبب نقص التفسيرات المادية، وفرص التوضيح المحدودة، وانخفاض الحافز والمشاركة في التعلم الذاتي. بناءً على نتائج البحث، تم اقتراح العديد من التوصيات. يُنصح الطلاب بإنشاء جداول دراسية منظمة، وطلب المساعدة عند الحاجة، والاستفادة من أدوات التعلم التفاعلية. يجب على المعلمين تقديم تعليمات واضحة وتقديم الدعم الأكاديمي ودمج أمثلة من العالم الواقعي لتعزيز الفهم. يتم تشجيع المسؤولين على معالجة قضايا المساواة، وتوفير موارد تكنولوجية كافية، وتحديث برامج التعلم عبر الإنترنت باستمرار لتلبية الاحتياجات المتطورة للطلاب والمعلمين والمسؤولين.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** القيود، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، العوائق، طلاب الماجستير، المحتوى عبر الإنترنت، التعلم عبر الإنترنت.