

Digital Learning and Student Engagement in English Literature: Evidence from an Algerian University

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Abstract

The growing integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into higher education has transformed how instructional content is delivered, accessed, and assessed. This study investigates students' experiences of online learning in English literature courses at Mustapha Stambouli University of Mascara, Algeria. In particular, it examines students' attitudes toward online lectures, virtual reading activities, and digitally administered assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. A quantitative research design was employed to collect data on students' perceptions of the accessibility, usefulness, and effectiveness of the university's online learning platform. The findings indicate that online learning supported the continuity of instruction and provided students with flexible access to course materials and learning activities. Participants also generally perceived virtual courses as beneficial to the development of their reading skills. Nevertheless, students reported both positive and negative experiences and continued to express a preference for face-to-face instruction. The study identifies three principal categories of challenges affecting the implementation of online learning: pedagogical, technological, and administrative. These findings underscore the need for an integrated institutional strategy that combines appropriate digital infrastructure, effective instructional design, and sustained academic support. The study contributes context-specific evidence to the broader discussion of digital learning in Algerian higher education and highlights the conditions necessary for improving online English literature instruction.

Keywords: information and communication technologies; online learning; English literature; virtual reading; student perceptions; digital assessment

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly reshaped teaching and learning practices in higher education. Learning management systems, virtual classrooms, digital assessment tools, and online academic resources have created new opportunities for institutions to extend access to instruction and maintain educational continuity beyond the physical classroom. These developments became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when universities worldwide were required to shift rapidly from conventional face-to-face instruction to remote and digitally mediated teaching.

In Algeria, universities increasingly adopted electronic learning platforms to facilitate communication between instructors and students, distribute learning materials, deliver lectures, and administer academic activities. Mustapha Stambouli University of Mascara was part of this broader transition. Its institutional platform enabled instructors to provide students with online courses and supplementary materials while creating a virtual environment for learning and assessment. However, the availability of digital infrastructure alone does not ensure

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effective learning. The success of online education also depends on students' ability to access digital resources, engage with virtual content, and perceive online activities as relevant to their academic development.

These considerations are particularly important in English literature education, where learning requires sustained engagement with complex texts, critical interpretation, classroom discussion, and interaction with instructors and peers. Transferring such activities to a virtual environment may increase flexibility and access to learning materials, but it may also create pedagogical and technological difficulties. Students' perceptions therefore represent an essential source of evidence for evaluating whether online learning environments effectively support literary reading and academic engagement.

This study investigates the experiences of first-year License–Master–Doctorate (LMD) students who participated in online English literature courses at Mustapha Stambouli University of Mascara. It focuses specifically on their perceptions of virtual reading activities, online lectures, and digital assessment practices. By examining both the perceived benefits and limitations of online instruction, the research seeks to evaluate the contribution of distance learning to students' reading development and identify the principal challenges affecting its implementation.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does online learning contribute to the development of students' reading skills in English literature courses?
2. How do students perceive virtual reading activities and the broader online learning experience?

The study proceeds from the premise that students' experiences of digital education are multidimensional. Although online learning may promote flexibility, continuity, and independent engagement with course materials, its effectiveness can be constrained by inadequate technological access, limited interaction, insufficient digital competence, and weaknesses in course design. Examining these factors is necessary to determine how online learning can complement classroom-based instruction and contribute more effectively to English literature education in the Algerian university context.

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption across nearly all areas of social life, with education being among the most severely affected sectors. The suspension of face-to-face instruction required educational institutions to adopt alternative delivery methods, accelerating the global transition toward online and distance learning. As a result, virtual education evolved from a supplementary instructional approach into an essential mechanism for ensuring educational continuity.

Online learning environments provide students with access to course materials, recorded or synchronous lectures, reading activities, assignments, assessments, and communication tools beyond the physical classroom. This transformation has also changed the roles of teachers and learners. Teachers are increasingly expected to possess digital competencies and design interactive online content, while students must demonstrate greater autonomy, technological competence, and responsibility for their learning. When appropriately implemented, educational technologies can support active and collaborative learning and strengthen interaction between teachers and students.

The effectiveness of online education, however, depends on more than the availability of digital platforms. Institutional governance, instructional quality, technological infrastructure, and student support are equally important. Recent research on higher education in Azerbaijan similarly emphasizes the importance of strategic governance and institutional capacity in responding to emerging educational challenges (Mammadzade et al., 2026). Comparative research also indicates that educational quality is closely connected to the effectiveness of pedagogical systems and the ability of institutions to adapt teaching practices to changing social and technological conditions (Ahmadov, 2026a).

Digital learning must also be understood within its broader social and psychological context. Education does not merely transmit knowledge; it shapes students' attitudes, values, behavioral patterns, and social engagement (Najafov, 2025). Although digital environments can increase access to education, reduced personal interaction and limited academic supervision may affect students' motivation, participation, and sense of belonging. Consequently, evaluating online education requires attention to both its technological efficiency and its pedagogical and socio-psychological consequences.

2.1. Principles of Online Learning

Effective online education requires purposeful instructional planning, clearly defined learning outcomes, accessible course materials, appropriate assessment methods, and regular interaction between instructors and students. Online learning is generally defined as instruction delivered primarily or entirely through the Internet (Bakia et al., 2012; Means et al., 2009). Its effectiveness is substantially influenced by course-design characteristics, including content organization, navigation, instructor presence, opportunities for interaction, and the alignment between learning activities and assessment.

Allen and Seaman (2015) classify a course as online when at least 80% of its content is delivered electronically. Courses in which less than 30% of the content is delivered online are generally categorized as face-to-face or web-facilitated instruction. Blended or hybrid courses occupy the intermediate category, with approximately 30%–79% of their content delivered through digital platforms. Although these classifications provide useful distinctions, the quality of a course cannot be determined solely by the proportion of content delivered online. The pedagogical value of digital instruction depends on how technology is integrated into the learning process.

Bakia et al. (2012) identify several important functions of online learning. First, it expands educational opportunities for individuals who are unable or unwilling to participate in conventional classroom-based instruction. Second, it enables institutions to organize and distribute instructional content more efficiently. Third, it may allow educational providers to serve larger groups of students while maintaining learning outcomes comparable to those achieved through traditional instruction. These advantages make online learning particularly relevant during institutional disruption and for students facing geographical, financial, or scheduling constraints.

Nevertheless, flexibility and increased access do not automatically result in effective learning. Students may experience difficulties related to self-regulation, motivation, digital literacy, and limited interaction with teachers and peers. In educational contexts requiring sustained reading and interpretation, such as English literature courses, inadequate feedback and insufficient academic interaction may reduce students' engagement with complex texts. Strong family–school and institutional support can contribute to individualized psycho-pedagogical assistance and improve student development, especially when learners encounter academic or motivational difficulties (Ahmadov, 2026b).

Based on the existing literature, the challenges affecting online learning can be grouped into three interrelated categories: pedagogical, technological, and administrative. Pedagogical challenges concern course design, instructor competence, assessment, feedback, and student engagement. Technological challenges include Internet connectivity, access to appropriate devices, platform reliability, and digital literacy. Administrative challenges relate to institutional planning, technical support, staff training, policy coordination, and the allocation of resources.

2.2. Technological Factors

Technological development has created new opportunities for teaching and learning by providing instructors and students with access to a wide range of digital resources. Teachers can use learning management systems, multimedia materials, online assessment tools, and collaborative applications to design more flexible courses. Students can access academic materials beyond the classroom, organize their learning independently, and participate in digitally mediated communication and collaborative activities.

However, the educational effectiveness of technology depends on the quality of both the system and the information it provides. Bailey and Pearson (1983) conceptualize system quality in terms of the operational characteristics that affect users' interaction with an information system. In an online learning environment, system quality may include accessibility, reliability, response time, ease of navigation, technical stability, and compatibility with different devices.

The DeLone and McLean (2003) information-systems success model further distinguishes system quality from information quality. System quality concerns the technical performance of the platform through which educational resources are delivered. Information quality refers to the characteristics of the platform's output, including its accuracy, relevance, completeness, timeliness, reliability, and accessibility. Both dimensions are essential: even academically valuable content may have limited educational impact if it is delivered through an unstable or inaccessible system.

Digital service providers such as Microsoft, Google, and Yahoo offer tools that can support email communication, scheduling, document sharing, cloud storage, website creation, and collaborative work.

Nevertheless, the mere availability of such tools does not guarantee their pedagogically effective use. Institutions must select technologies according to specific learning objectives and provide both teachers and students with appropriate training and technical support.

Multimedia design represents another important technological consideration. The cognitive theory of multimedia learning proposes that students can develop deeper understanding when words and visual materials are meaningfully integrated and designed in accordance with human cognitive-processing capacities. Poorly organized multimedia content may create cognitive overload, whereas coherent combinations of text, images, and audio can facilitate attention, comprehension, and knowledge retention. Therefore, effective online English literature instruction requires not only functional digital platforms but also carefully structured content that encourages active reading, reflection, interpretation, and sustained engagement.

2.3. Online Learning Implementation

E-learning is viewed as the ability to focus on the necessities of individual learners. Focusing on the needs of individual learners, for instance, knowledge is brought in a digital way effectively when compared to traditional educational needs (Huang & Chiu, 2015). Nowadays e-learning gains a considerable importance since its implementation during the period of Corona virus pandemic in different educational settings and all over the world. This paper investigates the impact of e-learning and its challenges considering the learning and teaching processes. This study is perceived to comprise one among the diverse teaching skills resumed in the use of the electronic learning platform established by the scientific authority at the level of Mascara Mustapha Stambouli University.

The research highlights students' position towards the use of the electronic platform generates multiple courses provided by their teachers, and the importance of virtual readings proposed to first year LMD students. The service located at the department of technology (Mascara University) collects and organizes data concerning the Moodle (stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) use as shown in Table 1 (univ-mascara.dz).

Since learning comprises a variety of skills in information and communication technology (ICT) (Aithal & Aithal, 2016), the Moodle Platform is one of the Learning Management Systems (LMS) which is a free and open source system available for all. The origin of the word (Moodle) is an abbreviation for the phrase (Modular Objective Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), which is one of the most important e-learning platforms today (Cambridge.com). Likewise, Schmidt underlines that teachers can benefit from combining both traditional and online teaching Schmidt (2002). Subsequently, Aithal & Aithal (2016) added that teachers should plan, control, and direct online teaching process all the time. Thus, the procedures of making an online course in the department of Computers sciences are designed into three parts:

- a) Input system
- b) Course
- c) Output system

Relatively, results from earlier studies demonstrate a strong and consistent association between posted courses via Moodle and the number of users. Table 2.2 below shows the obtained statistics of Mascara University Moodle, regarding the whole seven faculties. It is noticed that a considerable number of 24.374 scholars joined the platform which contained approximately more than 6.000 courses are posted on the platform.

In contrast, it is noticed that the number of posted courses via Mascara University e-learning platform has considerably decreased after the end of the covid-19 pandemic. There are only 123 posted lessons and this can be explained by the return of classroom (face to face) teaching (univ-mascara.dz).

Table 1. University of Mascara Moodle Statistics

	Teaching Type	
Moodle release		3.9
Numbers of lessons	Lectures	6,068
Numbers of users		24,374
Number of recently active users		1,963

Number of role assignments	Directed Tasks (TD)	36,844
Number of messages		671
Number of questions		276
Number of resources	Network Bibliography	14,154
Average number of participants		6.62
Average number of recently active participants		3.83
Average number of course modules		3.67
Mobile services enabled		Yes
Mobile notification enabled		No
Number of users with registered mobile devices		324
Number of enabled prediction models		4

Source: Network service (University of Mascara, May 10, 2021)

3. Research Methodology

A narrative analysis guided this study. The aim is to explore the student's perspectives on the use of e-learning based on reading lectures they received at Mascara University via the online platform during covid-19 pandemic, and aims at analyzing students' reading perception. This study employs a quantitative research tool. The data is collected by providing a questionnaire to a number of first year students at Mascara University. These students were actively involved in online learning reading activities during the corona virus pandemic.

3.1. Participants

In order to obtain an authentic feedback in this study, data is collected by providing a questionnaire administered to a number of 125 first year students (77 females and 58 males) as samples at Mascara University. At that moment, the researcher had the responsibility to be in charge of the Research Methodology Module through an online learning experience in form of lectures presented during the pandemic.

3.2. Instrument Design

The questionnaire is the instrument used in this study. The researcher designed the questionnaire according to the objective of the study. The respondents were asked to provide their background information and their view of this first e-learning use. The questionnaire adopted close-ended scale in order to provide scoring data. The types of questions reflect the real students' view of e-learning. To this extent, the researcher aims at developing the types of questions to ensure a validity instrument.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher also collected some scoring statistics concerning students' answers as shown according to table 1. One would argue that this first e-learning experience give floor to different interpretations such as what is provided by the respondents. Using e-learning system affects the degree of learner acquisition and tends to replace the traditional teaching/learning processes.

4.1. The Questionnaire Students' Responses

The questionnaire administered to a number of 125 L1 students is about the e-learning during corona virus pandemic. This questionnaire investigates the students' perceptions concerning their e-learning. Findings from this questionnaire yield interesting results. Since the teaching approach is the learner's centered one, the focus was exclusively on students' responses towards online learning.

Henceforth, it might be discovered that this type of learning through the university's e-learning platform is a new teaching strategy due to a crucial situation characterized by the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, both teachers and learners were not accustomed to e-learning. Table 2 below illustrates well students' position toward this transition from traditional to online learning.

Table 2. Students' Responses towards Virtual Readings

Questions	Yes Answers	No Answers
1	85 in the city	40 in a rural area
2	50	75
3	96	29
4	105 students used their I-phones	20 students used their PC
5	125	00
6	00	125
7	90	35
8	65	60
9	125	00
10	20	105

4.2. Discussion

Question 1:

There is a certainty that most of first year students studying at the department of the English Language (68 %) are coming from cities. This can explain that their access to internet is easier if compared to their friends (72%) who live in rural regions.

Question 2:

Only forty per cent (50 respondents) said they prefer learning through ICT's. They claim that they would rather favour traditional teaching methods relying on the teacher's unique role. However, seventy-five students (60 %) are in favour of Information and Communication Technology, hoping that the adequate ICT materials should be available at their university.

Question 3:

96 participants declared they had internet device at home and they could have access to it at any time they wanted. On the other side, 29 of them did not have internet facility at home due to their dwelling on farms or remote regions of Mascara.

Question 4:

It is noticed that the majority of students (84 %) used their I-phones to open the online lectures files. This technique is well spread inside the younger generation which prefers using their sophisticated mobiles instead than computers. As a matter of fact, their learning interaction is mechanically reduced. The rest (16 per cent) use their homes' computers and they justify their choice by being more comfortable in front of a PC which provides them a better learning condition.

Question 5:

All participants (100 %) declare they met great difficulties in using their university's online platform. They were not guided and this platform was experienced for the first time. Students noticed one positive feature: they were not obliged to look for a password to join the platform as it was a free access.

Question 6:

No satisfaction with this kind of ICT learning.

Question 7:

It is measured that about 72 % (90 students) of participants declare they have benefited from the virtual posted readings. They had more liberty and easiness unlike what they feel inside class. This type of reading helped them in gaining a more concentration and a permanent contact with internet, allowing them to do an extra home research. Even if students did not have physical contacts with their teachers, their learning feedback was consistent.

Question 8:

Here, students' answers are almost equal and those who still think that e-learning is not so important, justify their answers by the lack of synchronous teacher-student interaction.

Question 9:

Again, all participants strongly prefer face to face learning rather than the online one.

Question 10:

Sixteen per cent students only are regularly consulting their university's e-learning platform, while the majority rather consults learning documents available at internet.

5. Online Reading Results

Table 2 shows a succinct view of my students scoring results obtained last year from the online teaching/learning processes when ministerial instructions were given during the covid-19 pandemic situation. In the same vein, the results denote a better reading effectiveness when we give the opportunity to our students to read in a more comfortable situation (rather than being stressed with the classroom environment, added to overcrowded first year groups often beyond 50 students and more per group).

Table 3. Students' Scoring Results

From 00 to 04,99	From 05 to 9,99	From 10 and more
11	35	80

6. Findings

The respondents showed a certain anxiety for the e-learning platform established just after their university closing during the covid-19 pandemic. The following findings indicate students' claim more logistic elements in using online learning such as internet room at university to facilitate their e-learning. The following findings justify students' anxiety.

- In a nutshell, the obtained results from the students' questionnaire indicate a need for a more effective use of ICTs in general, and the online learning precisely.
- It is important for teachers to embrace the advanced technology throughout their teaching career process of teaching and therefore, learning has a range of skills in information and communication technology (ICT) (Aithal and Aithal, 2016).
- Teachers also complained about the difficulties they met in placing their lectures at the university platform.
- Our students have the habitual reaction to use their mobile phones while learning. A tool which limits their perception since they are not totally concentrating because they declared that while reading their lectures, they are also occupied in manipulating their social media profiles.
- It is also observed that e-learning systems did not allow enhancing communication between students and their instructors.
- The young generation no longer favours traditional classroom-based instruction. Therefore, teachers are obliged to cope with the blessings of the new technologies Dudeney and Hockly (2007)

7. Conclusion

The present research was designed to determine the students' arguments of exercising the virtual readings. They would rather prefer face to face teaching-learning model but the study has identified that their reading test scoring through online tool show a positive reaction towards distant learning. The challenge is undoubtedly boosting the online learning perspectives since it was the first time that both teachers and their students used an electronic platform.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The Questionnaire

1. Where do you live, in a city or in a rural area?
2. Are you comfortable with ICTs?
3. Do you have access to internet at home?
4. How (by which means) did you receive your Research Methodology Module lectures?
5. Did you find any difficulties through this online learning? Explain?
6. Were you satisfied with this online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic?
7. Did you really benefited from the online courses readings implemented by your teachers?
8. Do you think that e-learning is important?
9. Do you prefer face to face learning rather than the virtual one?
10. Are you still consulting your university's e-learning platform?

Appendix 2

An Online Course posted at Mascara University E-learning Platform

Course Two: (January, 04th, 2023)

Title:

Using the Library

Objective: My students should be able to know the principals of a university library and the its related key concepts.

Course Plan

I- Introduction

For some students, one of the biggest differences between high school and college is the amount and depth of research that is required for research papers. College professors expect students to be quite adept at researching, and for some students, this is a big change from high school. This is not to say that high school teachers do not do a great job of preparing students for college level research, quite the contrary!

Teachers fill a tough and essential role in teaching students how to research and write. College professors simply require students to take that skill to a new level. For example, you may soon discover that many college professors will not accept encyclopaedia articles as sources. Encyclopaedias are great for finding a compact, informative accumulation of research on a specific topic. They are a great resource for finding the *basic facts*, but they are limited when it comes to offering interpretations of the facts. Professors require students to dig a little

deeper than that, accumulate their own evidence from broader sources, and form opinions about their sources as well as the specific topics. For this reason, college and university students should become familiar with the library and all its terms, rules and methods. A library is like a room full of gold. Reading books will help you to improve your English and learn more about the world. It is said that, "Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."

II- Call Number

Each book in the library has a specific number, called a call number. Public libraries contain many books of fiction and books relevant to general use. The call number is something like an address which facilitates the librarian's task to situate any document available at the library. There are, of course, different call numbers sorts, we can so far, rely on two worldwide types used in most libraries, even if librarians use their own techniques. *Again, a call number, used as the book's address, is:*

- organized on the subjects.
- the shelf sections or bays are read from left to right and from top to bottom.
- a call number is a combination of letters and numbers (alpha numeric) and it is usually on the spine of the book, video or CD.

a) Library of Congress system: Public libraries often use the Dewey Decimal System, the preferred system for fictional books and general use books. Research libraries use a very different system, called the Library of Congress (LC) system. Under this system, books are sorted by topic instead of author. Library shelves are usually labelled on each end, to indicate which call numbers are contained within the particular aisle. *What do the letters and numbers mean?* LC separates the world of knowledge into 20 major categories, each represented by a letter. For example: J = political science, Q = Education and so. These 20 major categories are further divided by a second letter. For example: QA = Maths, QC = Physics... These letters are further divided by numbers. For example: QA 71 - 90 = Instruments and Machines, QA 150 - 272 = Algebra and so.

A Library of Congress model (LC, alpha numeric):

TX } → broad subject, e.g. Asian cookery
724.5 }

T5 → narrow subject, e.g. Thailand

B 64 → author

2003 → publication date

C.1 → copy

b) The Dewey Decimal System: Books are arranged according to the **Dewey Decimal System** (*Melvil Dewey*, an American librarian, 1851-1931). Every book has a 3-digit number which indicates the topic. The most important number is the first one because it determines the section in which the book belongs. The main sections are as follows:

- 100 Philosophy and Psychology
- 200 Religion
- 300 Sociology (politics, economics, education, culture)
- 400 Language (especially grammar)
- 500 Science
- 600 Business & Technology
- 800 Literature (collections of famous stories, poetry, and drama)

Each one of these sections can be broken down further. For example, under science we have: 510 Maths, 520 Astronomy, 530 Physics, 540 Chemistry, 550 Geology, 560 Palaeontology, 570 Biology, 580 Botany, and 590 Zoology. In a large library, codes will include a decimal point (e.g. - 581.3464).

III- The ISBN

It is a unique numeric commercial book identifier based upon the 9-digit Standard Book Numbering (SBN) code created by Gordon Foster, an Emeritus Professor of Statistics at Trinity College, Dublin. The 10-digit ISBN format was developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and was published in 1970.

IV- The Card Catalogue

For years, the card catalogue was the only resource for finding much of the material available in the library. Now, of course, much of the catalogue information has become available on computers. But not so fast! Most libraries still have resources that have not been added to the computer database. As a matter of fact, some of the most interesting items, the items in special collections, for instance, will be the last to be computerized. There are many reasons for this. Some documents are old, some are hand-written, and some are too fragile or too cumbersome to handle. Sometimes it is a matter of manpower. Some collections are so extensive and some staffs are so small, that the collections will take years to computerize. For this reason, it is a good idea to practice using the card catalogue. It offers an alphabetical listing of titles, authors, and subjects.

Appendix 3

TD Exam (*First Semester, Using the Library*)

I- Classify these titles into broad and narrow subjects (3 pts)

Teaching – Grammar testing – American literature – Cooking – Linguistics – Art – Algerian dishes – British literature – Algerian revolution (1954-1962) – Literature – Philosophy – Correcting pupils' errors.

Broad subjects	Narrow Subjects

II- Make your book's reading note-card (3pts)

III- What do you know about the Library? Write a short essay of no more than 10 lines (6 pts)