

Investigating the use of e-learning as innovative strategy to improve beninese efl learners' linguistic performance: case study of flash adjarra

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of e-learning as innovative strategy to improve Beninese EFL learners' linguistic performance : case study of FLASH Adjarra, University of Abomey-Calavi. In other words, the study examines the impacts of e-teaching-learning process of English as Foreign Language on learners' linguistic performance. Through a mixed-method, the data have been collected from questionnaires addressed to both lecturers and Year 1 learners of the English Department of FLASH Adjarra. The results show that e-learning provides opportunities for learners to practise repeatedly listening and speaking activities where and when they want as there is no geographical and spatial barriers for them to learn English. E-learning impacts positively learners' linguistic performance. Moreover, it is contended that e-learning enables an immediate and a rapid assessment of learners as well as an immediate correction of errors or mistakes. Consequently, e-learning is viewed as an innovative and useful strategy particularly for French speaking country like Benin where learners do not have the opportunity to be exposed to a natural English learning environment. Thus, it is relevant to adopt e-learning especially for EFL learners due to its valuable advantages.

Keywords : e-learning, linguistic performance, listening, speaking skills

Résumé

Cette étude examine l'utilisation de l'apprentissage en ligne comme une stratégie innovante pouvant améliorer la performance linguistique des étudiants Béninois en Anglais Langue Etrangère : étude de cas de la FLASH Adjarra de l'Université

d'Abomey-Calavi. En d'autres termes, l'étude examine les impacts du processus enseignement-apprentissage en ligne de l'Anglais comme langue étrangère sur la performance linguistique des apprenants. A travers une approche mixte, les données ont été collectées à partir des questionnaires adressés à la fois aux enseignants et aux étudiants de la 1^{ère} année du Département d'Anglais de la FLASH Adjara. Les résultats ont montré que l'apprentissage en ligne donne aux étudiants des opportunités de s'exercer à plusieurs reprises sur les activités d'écoute et du parler où et quand ils le désirent puisqu'il n'y a aucune barrière géographique ni spatiale d'apprendre l'Anglais. L'apprentissage en ligne influence positivement la compétence linguistique des étudiants. De plus, il a été soutenu que l'apprentissage en ligne permet l'évaluation immédiate et rapide des étudiants de même que la correction immédiate des erreurs et fautes. En conséquence, l'apprentissage en ligne est perçue comme une stratégie innovante et utile particulièrement pour les pays francophones comme le Bénin où les étudiants n'ont pas l'opportunité d'être exposés à un environnement d'apprentissage naturel de l'Anglais. Ainsi, il s'avère utile d'adopter l'apprentissage en ligne spécialement pour les étudiants en Anglais langue étrangère du fait de ses précieux avantages.

Mots clés : l'apprentissage en ligne, performance linguistique, habileté d'écoute et du parler.

Introduction

Beninese EFL learners' language proficiency is getting lower and lower. This is due to many factors : learners are living in French speaking country added to the rich dialectal environment of Benin characterized by more than 56 languages. Moreover, the limited contact hours in face to face classes as well as the absence of audiovisual materials do not enable learners to develop their language skills. Thus, e-learning may appear to be useful since it is an interactive tool that can help increase EFL learners' language skills. Indeed, e-learning offers the possibility to learners to be exposed to the language outside the classroom.

It is in this sense that Meloni (1998) views e-learning as 'an interactive and appealing mode of instruction and learning. It motivates students and increases their global awareness' (Meloni, 1998). As for Diamond and Irwin (2013), 'it increases human sustainability as students acquire skills, attitudes and attributes that benefit themselves and others and lasts in the long-term future' (Diamond & Irwin 2013). According to Wu et al. (2012) 'e-learning

encourages learners to work independently as each student can work on different tasks with the integrated learning environment' (Wu et al., 2012).

It appears that the above quotations stress the importance of e-learning and indicate how it improves learners' language skills as they practice reading, listening, speaking and writing via the different e-learning resources and tasks. In line with the preceding arguments, this research work investigates the use of e-learning as innovative strategy to improve Beninese EFL learners' linguistic performance : a case study of FLASH Adjarra, University of Abomey-Calavi. It aims to examine the impacts of teaching-learning process of English as Foreign Language via the use of new multimedia technologies and the internet on learners' linguistic performance. The study is relevant as it seeks to highlight the impacts of e-learning on learners' linguistic performance. It is also relevant particularly in this context of Covid-19 as the use of e-learning helps avoid physical contact of diseases.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section deals with literature review and theoretical framework.

2.1 Literature Review

Many researches deal with e-learning as an effective tool or strategy in teaching. Chua et.al (2020) suggest using the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as a technical tool for promoting the process of teaching and learning. According to them, 'teachers should be innovative in developing such an analytical learning atmosphere that will best fit the needs of today's generation of students' Chua et.al (2020)

Khan and Setiawan (2019) work on the impact of E- learning on higher education perception, skills, critical thinking and satisfaction. The three-step review process composed of articles searching and retrieval, filtering and sorting, and final inclusion has helped them contend that the use of e-learning in education improves the quality of practical education, student perceptions, communication, critical thinking and self-learning.

Jawad et al (2020) deal with the Impact of E-Learning Strategy on Students' Academic Achievement : Case Study of Al- Quds Open University. The results of their study indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the students' Grade Point Average according to the academic level. The study recommends the application of E-learning strategy in the higher education institutions so as to enhance the academic achievement of the students taking into account the specific features of some programs such as the Arabic Language and the Social Studies.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Defining E-Learning

E-learning is part of the new dynamic that characterises educational systems nowadays. It is viewed as is the use of technology to deliver learning and training programs. The concept of e-learning is subject to constant change. Many scholars and institutions have suggested different definitions for this concept. Among them, it is relevant to mention the following definitions :

- “E-learning is distance education through remote resources” (Marquès, 2006).
- “E-learning is an on-line education defined as the self-paced or real-time delivery of training and education over the internet to an end-user device” (Lee & Lee, 2006).
- “E-learning is education that uses computerised communication systems as an environment for communication, the exchange of information and interaction between students and instructors” (Bermejo, 2005).
- “E-learning is learning based on information and communication technologies with pedagogical interaction between students and the content, students and the instructors or among students through the web” (González-Videgaray, 2007).
- “E-learning is the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services, as well as remote exchange and collaboration” (Alonso et al., 2005).

- “E-learning is defined as information and communication technologies used to support students to improve their learning” (Ellis, Ginns & Piggott, 2009).

As it appears, the above definitions stress technological, communicational as well as educational paradigms.

E-Learning is viewed as a medium of computer technology that is used to develop the application of learning and teaching. It is the use of new multimedia technologies and the internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources. In other words, it is viewed as an online course using a modem, wireless, or cable connection to access academic course material from a computer, phone, or handheld device.

E-Learning in this paper refers to the E-Learning Moodle that is used by institutions to enhance teaching and learning and to motivate students' independent learning.

2.2.2 Types of E-Learning

They are five types of e-learning that includes learner-led, instructor led, embedded, facilitated, and telementored (Horton & Horton, 2003 ; Gulbahar, 2009).

While learner-led e-learning provides course material to students (Horton, 2006), instructor-led e-learning focus on instructors' presentations via real-time webcast technology which could include audio and video conferences, speaking, screen sharing and whiteboard applications. Students' direct participation here is via audio, video or instant messages. As for embedded e-learning, it is when teachers embed videos and web pages to enhance students' learning. Facilitated e-learning allows students' discussion via forums and chats that are related to an assignment. Telementored e-learning involves a combination of distance learning and the use of technology. For example, students are given printed material, and then instructors provide them with extra guidance and information about this material via video conferences, instant messages and internet phones (Gulbahar, 2009).

E-Learning in this paper refers to the E-Learning Moodle. The word MOODLE was originally an acronym for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. It includes a mixture of learner-led, facilitated and embedded types of E-Learning as explained below in the components of the E-learning Moodle.

2.2.3 The Components of E-Learning Moodle

The E-learning Moodle has two main components, namely activities and resources. The activities include chat, choice, database, external tool, forum, glossary, hotpot, lesson, quiz whereas the resources include book, file, folder, label, page, URL

- **E-learning Activities**

The following E-learning activities could be used to enhance students' language proficiency and independent learning.

- **Chat** : The chat activity module enables participants to have text-based, real-time synchronous discussions. These discussions develop students' fluency. Thus, students' independent learning develops as they are engaged in acquiring information from others without the help or intrusion of instructors.
- **Choice** : The choice activity module enables a teacher to ask a single question and offer a selection of possible responses. It is useful when teachers want to stimulate students' thinking via a poll or would like to test their understanding. This again allows them to use the language and to be exposed to their peers' views. Independent learning here is acquired through students' accessing these polls and being able to analyze their results outside class whenever it is convenient and at their own pace.
- **Database** : The database activity module enables participants to create, maintain and search a collection of entries. The structure of the entries is defined by the teacher as a number of fields (checkbox, radio buttons, dropdown menu, text area, URL, picture and uploaded file)

- **External Tool :** The external tool activity module enables students to interact with learning resources and activities on other web sites. For example, an external tool could provide access to a new activity type or learning materials from a publisher. This interaction has a positive effect on students' language skills as it makes them read the available resources independently.
- **Forum :** The forum activity module enables participants to have asynchronous discussions (discussions that take place over an extended period of time). The Forum effect is similar to the chat in its allowing students to share and exchange their ideas and experiences independently, with or without their instructor's participation.
- **Glossary :** The glossary activity module enables participants to create and maintain a list of definitions, like a dictionary, or to collect and organise resources or information. Students can compile new vocabulary which could be shared with others.
- **Hotpot :** The Hotpot activity allows teachers to distribute interactive learning materials to their students via Moodle and view reports on the students' responses and results. The e-learning exercise may be a static web page or an interactive web page which offers students text, audio and visual prompts and records their responses. This motivates independent learning as students get to attempt the exercises and get instant feedback. The prompts push them to use the language as they read, watch and listen. Teachers could ask students to write after going through the text, audio and visual prompts. Thus they practise the four language skills which improve their proficiency and simultaneously, motivates their independent learning.
- **Lesson :** The lesson activity enables a teacher to deliver content and/or practice activities in interesting and flexible ways, such as, multiple choice, matching and short answer questions. The

activity could be done by students independently and it will test their understanding of the content.

- **Quiz** : The quiz activity enables a teacher to create quizzes comprising questions of various types, including multiple choice, matching, short-answer and numerical. The teacher can allow the quiz to be attempted multiple times. A time limit may be set and the students could access the quiz independently and learn from their mistakes if the teacher provides them with answers.

- **E-learning Resources**

The following E-learning resources could be used by students independently at their own pace to enhance their language proficiency as they access information in different forms.

- **Book** : The book module enables a teacher to create a multi-page resource in a book-like format, with chapters and subchapters. Books can contain media files as well as text.
- **File** : The file module enables a teacher to provide a file as a course resource. It could be used to share presentations given in a class.
- **Folder** : The folder module enables a teacher to display a number of related files inside a single folder.
- **Label** : The label module enables text and multimedia to be inserted into the course page in between links to other resources and activities. It could be used to split up a long list of activities with a subheading or an image, to display an embedded sound file or video directly on the course page and to add a short description to a course section.
- **Page** : The page enables a teacher to create a web page resource using the text editor. A page can display text, images, sound, video, web links and embedded code, such as Google maps. The page could be used to present the terms and conditions of a

course or a summary of the course syllabus and to embed several videos or sound files together with some explanatory text.

- **URL** : The URL module enables a teacher to provide a web link as a course resource. Anything that is freely available online, such as documents or images, can be linked to the students.

2.2.6 Linguistic Performance

Chomsky (1965) contrasts linguistic competence with linguistic performance. As for him, linguistic competence is the unconscious knowledge of grammar that allows a speaker to use and understand a language whereas linguistic performance refers to the ability to produce and comprehend sentences in a language. It must be noted that most often, speakers' actual speeches are full of false starts, hesitations, speech errors, and corrections. Linguistic performance deals with what a speaker actually does with his/her knowledge of a language. In this perspective, this study seeks to investigate the use of e-learning as innovative strategy to improve EFL learners' linguistic performance. A number of factors influence linguistic performance according to Botha (1981). Such factors include:

- the linguistic competence or unconscious linguistic knowledge of the speaker-hearer,
- the nature and limitations of the speaker-hearer's speech production and speech perception mechanisms,
- the nature and limitations of the speaker-hearer's memory, concentration, attention and other mental capacities,
- the social environment and status of the speaker-hearer,
- the dialectal environment of the speaker-hearer,
- the idiolect and individual style of speaking of the speaker-hearer,
- the speaker-hearer's factual knowledge and view of the world in which he lives,
- the speaker-hearer's state of health, his emotional state and other similar incidental circumstances.

3. Methodology of the Study

This section focuses on the methodology of the study. It includes target population, sampling as well as research instruments

3.1 Target Population

The target populations involved in this investigation are Beninese EFL learners and lecturers of FLASH Adjarra (University of Abomey-Calavi) More precisely, it focuses on learners in English Year 1 and lecturers of English Department of Adjarra University Centre for the purpose of investigating the use of e-learning as innovative strategy to improve learners' linguistic performance.

3.2 Sampling

This research work is limited to Beninese EFL learners and lecturers of Adjarra University Centre. More specifically, it takes into account 113 learners in English Year 1 and 24 lecturers of English Department. Questionnaires have been addressed to both lecturers and learners.

3.2.1 Lecturers

Lecturers represent the main actors in improving learners' linguistic performance. The key roles they play in guiding and facilitating learners are fundamental as this study focuses on using e-learning as innovative strategy to improve learners' linguistic performance. It is important to note that the use of e-learning creates a relax atmosphere that provides the opportunity to learners to feel free to learn where or when they want on the one hand and represents an efficient means to avoid contact disease particularly in this context of Covid-19 on the other hand. All this has led lecturers to willingly contribute to the collection of the data relevant to this study.

3.2.2 Learners

Learners are important in teaching-learning process. Their presence and reaction toward e-learning programs are highly important. The way their lecturers explain the course reflects on them. Their

contribution to this investigation is very useful as their point of views help confirm or not the validity of the data collected from their lecturers.

3.3 Research Instruments

As far as research instruments are concerned, questionnaires are very important to draw reliable information. Thus, two questionnaires have been addressed respectively to lecturers and students. It must be noted that they include both open ended and close ended questions. Close ended questions and their corresponding responses are displayed in two recapitulative tables in section 4 related to the presentation of data. The open ended questions and their corresponding responses are summarized below the tables in section 4.

4. Data Presentation

As mentioned above, each questionnaire consists of two types of questions addressed to lecturers and learners. The data collected from close ended questions addressed to lecturers and learners are displayed respectively in Tables 1 and 2 below :

Table 1 : Responses to Close Ended Questions Addressed to Lecturers

Close Ended Questions to Lecturers	Answers + percentages between square brackets			
	High	Low	Yes	No
1. How could you describe the level of your motivation in English teaching ?	24 [100%]	00 [0%]		
2. Do you practice online teaching?			00 [0%]	24 [100%]
3. Do you think that e-learning can help learners improve their linguistic performance ?			24 [100%]	00 [0%]

4. Have you received an additional training on e-learning by CPUAQ or any other training Centre?			08 [33.33 %]	16 [66.66 %]
5. Could you devote one week time to attend a training on e-learning ?			24 [100%]	00 [0%]
6. Will you, if equipped and trained, practice online teaching ?			24 [100%]	00 [0%]

(Source : Dadjo, Yokossi & Koutchadé, 2022)

As for open ended questions related to the advantages of e-learning for learners, lecturers provide the following responses :

- E-learning provides opportunity for repeated listening and speaking activities
- E-learning provides opportunity for ease reviews
- E-learning provides opportunity for learners over place and time
- E-learning enables learners to enrich their learning experiences through virtual environments
- E-learning avoids physical contact of diseases
- E-learning helps save time

As for open ended questions related to the disadvantages of e-learning for learners, lecturers provide the following responses :

- Learners can only get online guidance and direction, and this leads to the lack of lecturers' supervision
- Lack of face to face interaction may favor distractions
- Technological problems may discourage learners
- Lack of financial means may constitute obstacles for learners to have access to lessons

On the other hand, the data collected from open ended questions addressed to learners are displayed in Table 2 below :

Table 2 : Responses to Close Ended Questions Addressed to Students

Close Ended Questions to Students	Answers + percentages between square brackets				
	High	Middle	Low	Yes	No
1. How could you describe your interest in English language learning ?	19/113 3 [16.81%]	58/113 3 [51.32%]	37/113 [32.74%]		
2. Have you ever attended online classes?				36/113 13 [31.85%]	77/113 [68.14%]
3. Do you think that e-learning can help improve your proficiency ?				95/113 13 [84.07%]	16/113 [14.15%]
4. Are you ready to attend online classes?				86/113 13 [76.10%]	29/113 [25.66%]
5. Do you have a personal computer or smartphone ?				79/113 13 [69.91%]	32/113 [28.31%]

(Source : Dadjou, Yokossi & Koutchadé, 2022)

As for open ended questions related to the reasons why learners are interested in e-learning they provide the following responses :

- E-learning can help improve language skills
- E-learning can help increase knowledge
- E-learning can help solve geographical problems

As for open ended questions related to the reasons why learners are not interested in e-learning they provide the following responses :

- E-learning requires financial means for connection

- Absence of face to face interactions does not favor questions with immediate responses of lecturers
- Lack of guidance
- Problems of network connection
- No smartphone

5. Data Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

The results show that 100% of lecturers are motivated in English language teaching whereas 00% practice e-learning. In the same way, all of them think that e-learning can help improve learners' linguistic competence though only 33.33% of them have received an additional training on e-learning. The results also show that 100% of lecturers are even ready to devote time to attend training on e-learning in order to practice it efficiently. Indeed, e-learning provides opportunities for learners to practice repeatedly listening and speaking sequences where and when they want as there is no geographical and spatial barriers for them to learn English and exchange knowledge. On the other hand, e-learning avoids physical contact of diseases. This is particularly interesting in this context of Covid-19 as it can help fight against the spread of dangerous viruses. In terms of disadvantages, lecturers think that e-learning may lead to the lack of lecturers' supervision and favor distractions. In addition, technological problems as well as lack of financial means may constitute obstacles for learners to have access to lessons on time.

The results displayed in Table 2 indicate that 16.81% of learners have a high interest in English language learning whereas 51.32 % have a middle interest and 32.74% have a low interest. The table also indicates that 31.85% have the opportunity to attend online classes. 84.07% of learners think that e-learning can help improve their proficiency. 76.10 % are ready to attend online classes. It appears that 25.66% of learners are not ready to attend online classes as they think it requires financial means. In addition, they think that the absence of face to face interactions does not favor questions with immediate responses of lecturers. 69.91% of learners do not have a personal computer or a smartphone.

It appears that all the lecturers are highly interested in the use of e-learning and recognize that it has positive impacts on learners' linguistic competence. Indeed, e-learning facilitates communication and enables teaching large numbers of learners without geographical and spatial barriers. Moreover, it enables an immediate and a rapid assessment of learners as well as an immediate correction of errors or mistakes. It provides knowledge from multiple sources. It also enables learners to get information quickly, makes it easy to update content. All these points constitute advantages of e-learning that can help learners increase their linguistic competence.

In addition, e-learning helps lecturers to achieve their goals in the shortest time with least effort. E-learning environments help learners to rely on themselves because lecturers are no longer the only source of knowledge. Thus, lecturers become guides and advisers. As the results indicate, e-learning has positive impacts on listening and speaking skills. It must be noted that both skills are subject to limitations in the context of face-to-face teaching-learning process. Thus, e-learning appears to be a platform through which learners can develop their speaking and listening skills in real-life situations. As a matter of fact, listening as well as speaking are the most important skills when learning English. As e-learning provides audio and video to listen and watch repeatedly, learners develop significantly their linguistic performance. It can thus be contended that e-learning impacts positively learners' linguistic performance. Consequently, e-learning is useful particularly for French speaking country like Benin in which learners do not have the opportunity to be exposed to a natural English learning environment.

On the other hand, the results also mention some disadvantages of e-learning for learners. In fact, 25.66% of learners are not ready to attend online classes as they think it requires financial means. The absence of face to face interactions with lecturers is also viewed as disadvantage by learners since it does not favor questions with immediate responses of lecturers.

Basing on the results and the discussion above, it is relevant to adopt e-learning especially for EFL learners due to its valuable advantages. In this perspective, it is important to reinforce the training of all the lecturers on this specific issue. It is also necessary to provide Adjarra

University Center with a data processing room with the adequate materials as well as unlimited broadband connection so as to facilitate e-learning process for the 28.31% of learners who do not have personal computer or smartphone.

Conclusion

This research work has attempted to investigate the use of e-learning as innovative strategy to improve Beninese EFL learners' linguistic performance : a case study of FLASH Adjarra, University of Abomey-Calavi. It has examined the impacts of teaching-learning process of English as Foreign Language through the use of new multimedia technologies and the internet on learners' linguistic performance. A mixed-method has helped collect the data from questionnaires addressed to both lecturers and Year 1 learners of the English Department of FLASH Adjarra. The results reveal that e-learning provides opportunities for learners to practise repeatedly listening and speaking activities where and when they want as there is no geographical and spatial barriers for them to learn English and exchange knowledge. Moreover, it enables an immediate and a rapid assessment of learners as well an immediate correction of errors or mistakes. It has thus been contended that e-learning impacts positively learners' linguistic performance. Consequently, e-learning is useful particularly for French speaking country like Benin in which learners do not have the opportunity to be exposed to a natural English learning environment.

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