Research Article

Online English Language Teaching in the University of Maroua during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Exploring Platforms and Interaction

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Abstract: With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lockdown was imposed on Cameroon in 2019. During the period of the lockdown, the University of Maroua enforced online teaching. The aim of this paper is to examine how English Language courses were taught online in the Department of English Language and Literature in the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences. The objectives are twofold. Firstly, to examine the platforms used for lectures during the confinement and secondly, to investigate interaction patterns employed for online teaching. Data for the study was collected from students and lecturers through convenient sampling technique in the 2019-2021 academic year. Only lecturers and students who actively took part in online pedagogy during the COVID-19 lockdown were involved in the study. The researcher exerted participant observation, 30 screenshots of online teaching, interview with lecturers and 102 copies of a questionnaire administered to Level One and Master's One students. Results show that three platforms were used: WhatsApp (100%), Google classroom (88.76%) and zoom (56.75%). With regard to the method employed in teaching, interaction with the use of text and voice was done on the platforms, especially WhatsApp. The interaction was between Lecturer – learners, human – machine (screen) and Learner – Learner. Lecturers equally placed electronic material such as course synopsis and books on the WhatsApp and Google classroom platforms for students to exploit. The findings of this study offer vigorous acumens to higher education stake holders in Cameroon on the implementation of online teaching and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in teaching. The researcher recommends incessant training for lecturers and students so that they can copiously grasp online pedagogy and go global with ICTs, especially Artificial intelligence (AI) which is one of the fastest growing Information Technologies.

1. Introduction

The rapid modernisation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the 21st century favours advanced e-learning. The importance of innovative technological tools has been attested in numerous fields of studies. Misuraca (2007) underscores that integrating ICTs into governance processes can greatly enhance the delivery of public services to all citizens. ICT is equally seen as an essential component in business management, enabling it to operate more efficiently (Kumar et al., 2022). Chavifekr and Rosdy (2015) examine the effectiveness of integrating ICTs in school. Other researchers (Esather & Amam, 2024; Fomkong & Dulan, 2022; Warschauer, 1996) accentuate the use of ICTs in English language teaching and learning. Kornum (1993); Osuna and Meskill (1998) highlight the role of multimedia and the world wide web in the integration of foreign languages and cultures like Spanish. In a more recent study, Warschauer and Xu (2024) emphasize the function of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language learning. Some of the advantages of technologies to language pedagogy given by the scholars include the effective evaluation of teaching and learning strategies, improvements of students' writing, specifically, fluency and organisation,

increased participation in classroom discussions and greater autonomy for learners. For Holley and Dobson (2008), virtual platforms have been shown to enhance student-teacher interaction. Considering this usefulness, many countries and universities around the world have actually made good progress with online teaching and learning.

Before the COVID-19 lockdown, there was very little use of online platforms in the Department of English Language and Literature in the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences of the University of Maroua. Few lecturers taught online. March 2019 marked a turning point in the world history due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This health crisis affected all the sectors of life. As such, the education sector experienced a sudden shift from face-to-face teaching to online lectures since people had to stay indoors. The University of Maroua was not left out of this move. It is within this background that the present study aims at exploring how English language courses were taught online in the Department of English language and Literature in the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences of the University of Maroua. The research specifically seeks to answer the following research questions:

1) What platforms were used during online pedagogy, and what were students' level of mastery of these platforms?

2) What were the online interaction methods employed during the COVID-19 lockdown?

2. Literature Review

Many studies have been carried out on e-learning both in and out of Cameroon. Research that examines online teaching/learning before, during and after COVID-19 lockdown pandemic will be discussed subsequently.

Research in online teaching dates back as far as 1800s (Shafaei, 2012:108). It was further developed through mail, printed matter, telephone and/ or audio recordings; television and/or video recordings, computer-assisted instruction (Kentnor, 2015: 22), group communications, the web and multimedia materials (Hiltz & Turoff, 2003: 59), simulation and gaming as well as collaborative learning (Shafaei, 2012:108). Kentnor for instance, explores the evolution of distance education beginning with correspondence and the use of parcel post, to radio, then the television, and finally to online education. For Shafaei (2012), the transformation of education and its changing role in society also includes asynchronous learning networks, collaborative knowledge systems, immersive simulations, and wired and handheld devices. According to Shafaei, online learning is a relatively new social process that is beginning to act as a complete substitute for distance learning and the traditional face-to-face class.

The elaboration of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) by Warschauer (1996), Warschauer and Healey (1998) and their followers (Bax 2003, Garrett, 1991; Mikel Petrie & Avery 2011, Tabe, 2013: 84) had been of significant importance to online teaching/learning. Its history suggests that the computer can serve a variety of uses for language teaching. It can be a tutor which offers language drills or skill practices; a stimulus for discussion and interaction; or a tool for writing and research. With the advent and rapid growth of the internet, it can also be a medium itself of global communication and source of limitless authentic materials (Warschauer, 1996: 25). The scholars hold that the computer is a medium in which a variety of methods, approaches, and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented. The above researchers distinguish three types of CALL: behavioural (from 1970s to 1980s), communicative 1980s to 1990s) and integrative (from 2000 onwards). They aim at getting appropriate teaching method or approach that better responds to the learners' needs.

Other scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Dumford and Miller (2018) and Stern (2020) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. For Stern (2020), online pedagogy enhances learning. Here, there is an increased depth understanding and retention of course content. There are more meaningful discussions. Emphasis is laid on writing skills, life skills like time management, independence and self-discipline. Students can take more time to think and reflect before communicating; shy students tend to thrive online. There is increased student- teacher and student- student interactions and discussions, a greater sense of connectedness, as well as synergy. There is also an increased variety and creativity of learning activities. Online pedagogy addresses different learning styles and changes. It maximizes physical resources, that is, it lessens demands on limited campus infrastructure. It decreases congestion on campus and parking lots. However, for Young and Burdman (as

cited in Dumford & Miller, 2018: 457), the most frequent condemnation is the complete absence of vital personal interactions, not only between learners and the instructors, but also among learners. This lays emphasis on the method used online. Moreover, Tabe and Aissatou (2018) look at how English language pedagogy in Cameroon can be enhanced through Facebook and WhatsApp. Drawing Data from lecturers and student teachers of the English Department of the Higher Teacher Training College Maroua as well as trainers of Government Bilingual High School Maroua, the researchers found that WhatsApp and Facebook are vital tools and materials in the teaching and learning of English.

The authors so far discussed are those who carried out research on online teaching before the outbreak of COVID-19. So, the following paragraphs will closely examine works that deal with online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The works can be grouped into three categories: those that discuss the preventive measures, those that deal with the impacts of the pandemic in higher institutions of learning, the experiences of teachers in online teaching and the challenges of e-learning during the lockdown.

With regard to preventive measures, Akumbu (2020: 203) looks at legitimizing development and use of Cameroon's national languages to sensitize Cameroonians on COVID-19. For him, the advent of this disease revealed the inability of the Cameroon government to provide information to all citizens in the languages they understand best. This is because a majority of languages are neither developed nor empowered by the language policy of the country. So, it is a necessity to develop and use national languages in official communication particularly when it is health related information. If this is done to reach out to all Cameroonians with vital information for their well-being whenever need be, this measure will be beneficial not only to educational sectors, but also to other fields of life.

Besides, research works like that of Jena (2020a, 2020b), Béché (2020) and UNESCO (2020) set out to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs). The International Association of Universities (IAU) for instance, did a survey analysis and concluded that COVID-19 had both negative and positive impacts on HEIs. Negatively, there were going to be drop outs of schools, a drop in enrolment numbers for the following new academic year, the weakening of partnerships with other institutions, the possible cancelling of examinations in HEIs in Europe as well as in Africa (61%), the cancelling of international travel at 83%, the cancelling or postponement of scientific conferences at 81%. Scientific projects risked not being completed at a bit, more than half of HEIs (52%) (Marinoni et al., 2020).

Other scholars have examined positive impacts of online teaching during the pandemic (Mayrink et al., 2021: 135). For instance, it brings the learner back to the centre of the educational process through various platforms. The authors think that online learning is the best solution for continuing education during the pandemic, especially in tertiary education. The authors also focus on the forms of assessment in online pedagogy, that is, how each group of students would be assessed, for example through response papers, video recording, assessment, or interviews with the professor.

In other research, the authors discuss their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown in five continents and 18 universities around the world. In Africa, Kashef (2021), Nkemleke (2021), Nkemleke and Tume (2020), Ope-Davies (2021), Salem (2021) and Uwizeyimana (2021) give insights of teaching languages (e.g. Arabic, English) during the COVID-19 emergency. According to the authors, courses were forced to move online because of the pandemic. The authors worked with students in their various universities and bring out the challenges faced by teachers, students and management. Some of the difficulties include lack of access to the required tools, technical support and training. They equally show that the availability of a range of digital technologies and social media platforms made it possible for them and their students to engage in remote online pedagogy. Nkemleke and Tume (2020) for instance, examine the effectiveness of WhatsApp in teaching Academic Writing at Ecole Normale Supérieure of the University of Yaoundé I which they estimated at 100 per cent.

In the American continent, researchers such as Gastaldi and Grimaldi (2021), Mayrink, Albuquerque-Costa and Ferraz (2021), Ross and Axelrod (2021) describe the changes in the instructional system experienced by language Departments or centers during the COVID-19 health crisis. The authors hold that the main strategy that was adopted was the remote teaching and learning of languages. They used their institutional context and students' feedback to explain how they coped with teaching and learning during the pandemic. The authors affirmed that collaborative work, previous expertise and methodological principles allowed the staff to successfully give quality online lectures.

Some linguists working in Asian institutions of higher education like Heider (2021), Rafiei and Amirian (2021), Zhang and Chen (2021), Zheng and Zhang (2021) affirmed that learning shifted from face-to-face to online as a response to the COVID-19 lockdown. They surveyed students and teachers' responses about the strategies and approaches adopted when learning shifted online. They found that lecturers and students were more motivated during virtual lectures. Rafiei and Amirian (2021) found that most teachers prefer teaching reading and writing skills online than the regular face-to-face classes. They also found low student stress (25%), and that teaching resources and tools were available to 50%. Most of the authors however, noted technical problems and inadequate interaction in virtual learning. Zhang and Cheng found that learners have a positive attitude towards blended online learning. In the same light, Zheng and Zhang noted that online language teacher training can promote learning autonomy and cultural exchange.

In Europe, Atabekova, Belousov and Yastrebov (2021), Bordet (2021), Chodzkiene, Korostenskiene and Medvedeva (2021), Critchley (2021), Freddi (2021), Ghaffari (2021), Martelli (2021), Mentchen (2021), Oliver del Olmo (2021), Radić (2021) and Schmied (2021) share their experiences and findings on how some language university students and teachers in Europe practised remote online pedagogy due to the COVID-19 emergency. They found that the sudden shift to virtual pedagogy was accepted by students and staff who collaborated for better results. It brought new pedagogical possibilities that built on and boost already existing good pedagogical practices. Some of the shortcomings include unstable internet connection and tiresome sitting in front of the computer all day long.

More recent studies have examined Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in language teaching and Learning (Ali, 2020; Son et al., 2023; Tseng & Warschauer, 2023; Warschauer et al., 2023; Warschauer & Xu, 2024). Most of the authors provide that the use of AI tools eases language pedagogy. They can make teaching more effective and enjoyable by helping teachers produce dynamic lesson plans and track students' progress. They can also offer personalised learning experiences, enhance language assessment with automated grading and feedback and facilitate language practice through chatbots and language processing tools. However, with AI, there is lack of human interaction and over-reliance on it can lead to plagiarism.

Although this study shares some common points with the ones reviewed above, it differs from them in many perspectives as well. First, all the researchers did their studies in contexts that are different from Maroua, and the realities diverge. In most cases, they discuss the difficulties encountered during the COVID-19- imposed lockdown; they acknowledge the enormous contribution of digital tools/ platforms to learning. Some of them discuss the contribution of individual platforms (e. g. WhatsApp) to online teaching in their universities. Secondly, this work explores platforms and methods used in teaching in the Department of English language and Literature in the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences of the University of Maroua during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Third, the context and our target population are not the same with those of other researchers

3. Materials and Methods

In this research, data came from six lecturers and 102 students of Level One and Masters One in the Department of English language and Literature in the academic year 2019-2021. The choice of Level One and Masters One students was because the researcher wanted a representation of the two cycles (first and second). Another reason is that the two levels chosen actively took part in online classes. The students were both boys and girls though the boys outnumbered the girls. The students are between 20-38 years old. They are from different backgrounds in Cameroon and Chad. Some are from wealthy homes, while others come from very poor families. Most of the students from Chad start learning English at the level of secondary school, while their Cameroonian counterparts begin learning English in nursery/ primary school. All the major courses of the students are taught in English. Each of the Masters one students had a computer offered by the head of state. Few students in Level One had computers. The majority of the participants in this study had smart phones, whereas few did not have. All the lecturers in this study are PhD holders; their professional ranks are: Associate Professors, Lecturer and Assistant Lecturer. All of them have ICT tools like computers. However, some of them do not master some software and online teaching well.

The non-probability sampling technique particularly the convenient sampling was adopted in the selection of participants for this study. Data was collected only from students who were available online; those who took part in online teaching and learning. The data were gathered through questionnaire, interviews, participant observation and 30 screenshots. Two

hundred and twenty-one (221) questionnaires were administered to students of Level One and Masters One of the 2019/2020 academic year, and only one hundred and two (102) were returned (see a copy of the questionnaire in appendix B). The questionnaires were administered physically in the lecture halls of students. The questionnaire aimed at measuring the online platforms used and their effectiveness as well as the interaction patterns employed during the COVID-19 lockdown pandemic. The researcher undertook participant observation. She was part of the sample population. She taught online and equally followed the lectures of her colleagues online. Students carried out all the required activities or tasks assigned to them by lecturers during online lectures. See the checklist used for observation in appendix A.

The researcher interviewed six (6) lecturers from the Department of English Language and Literature in a bid to have an overall view of online teaching during the lockdown. The responses were recorded and written in a notebook. The interview questions can be seen in appendix C. Some screenshots were equally used as data. For ethical considerations, the questionnaires were anonymous. Faces of people in the screenshots were also blotted out; names on the screenshots that have been used as examples have as well been removed. See samples of the screenshots in figure 1. Appendix D shows other screenshots of online teaching/learning.
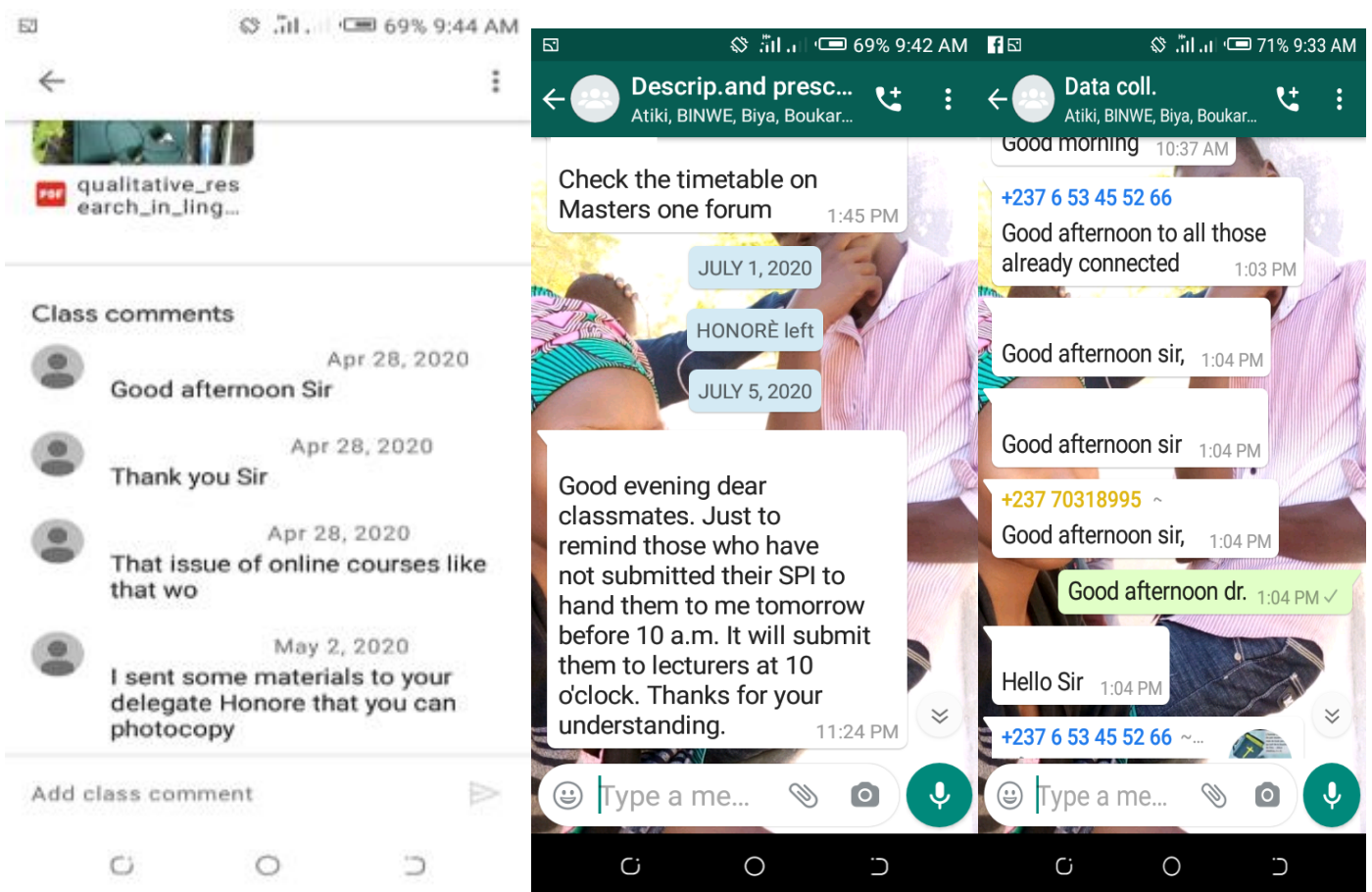
Figure 1. Screenshots of online teaching.
Source: Author's own development.

4. Results and Discussion

This section focuses on the platforms and interaction patterns used in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The data collected from questionnaire indicates that 87.25% students attended online classes whereas 12.75% abstained from it. This abstention may be due to the challenges encountered (e. g. lack of ICT tools, lack of financial means to buy internet data). The platforms used and interaction patterns of those who participated are examined in turn.

*4.1. Platforms Used during the Confinement*

Online platforms are virtual channels, means through which e-learning is carried out. Results show that teaching/ learning during the lockdown were transmitted through WhatsApp, Zoom meeting and Google Classroom. Table 1 presents results from questionnaires on the platforms and their frequencies of use in the two levels.

Table 1. Platforms and their frequency of use during the lockdown period.

Platforms / Levels	WhatsApp	Zoom meeting	Google Classroom
Level One (L1)	73 (100%)	/	70 (95.89%)
Masters One (M1)	16 (100%)	9 (56.25%)	9 (56.25%)
Total	89 (100%)	9 (56.25%)	79 (88.87%)

Table 1 indicates that three platforms (WhatsApp, Zoom meeting and Google classroom) were used in the department of English Language and Literature for online teaching. WhatsApp was the most used platform with the rate of 100%. It is followed by Google Classroom with 88.87%. Zoom meeting was the least used with a rate of 56.25%, and was used by Masters One only.

Considering the lecturers' view, out of the six (6) interviewed, three (3) lecturers used WhatsApp only, one (1) used both WhatsApp and Google Classroom and another one used WhatsApp and Zoom meeting. Below are two screenshots illustrating some of the platforms used during the COVID lockdown.
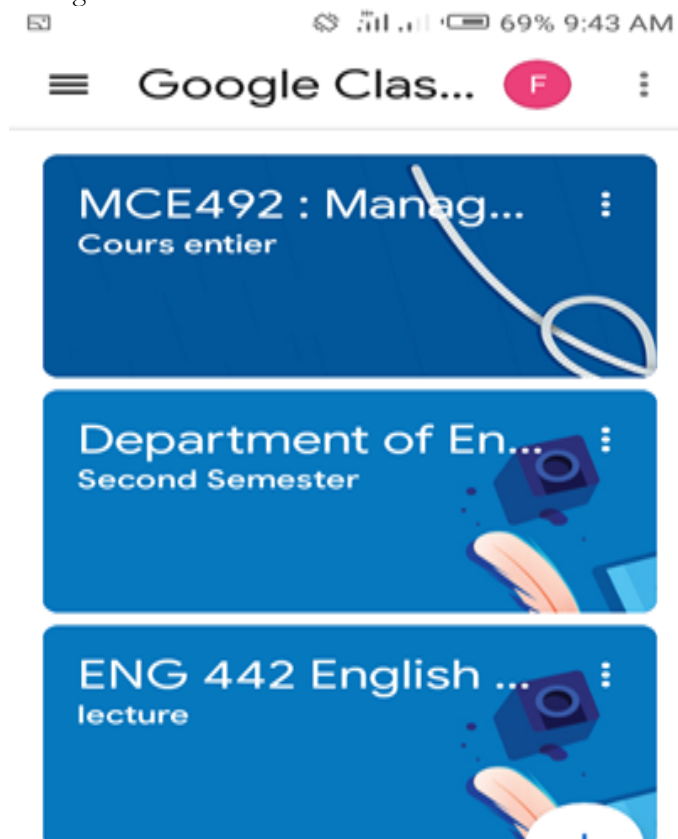

Figure 2. Usage of Google Classroom platform.
Source: Author's own development.

This screenshot above (figure 2) indicates the google classroom platform used during the lockdown and the course titles and code that were effectively being taught. ENG 442 and MCE 492 refer to some of the courses studied in Master's One. The titles and names of lecturers were masked for ethical reasons. Below is the WhatsApp platform used by the lecturer of Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar studied in Master's One.

The below screenshot (figure 3) shows usage of the WhatsApp platform at the very beginning of e-learning in the department of English Language and Literature. Many lecturers

opted for WhatsApp which was a well-known platform to students which had more participants. For the creation of WhatsApp groups, the class delegates were asked to create a platform for each course. It is worth mentioning that Google drive and email were also used to submit assignments to lecturers.
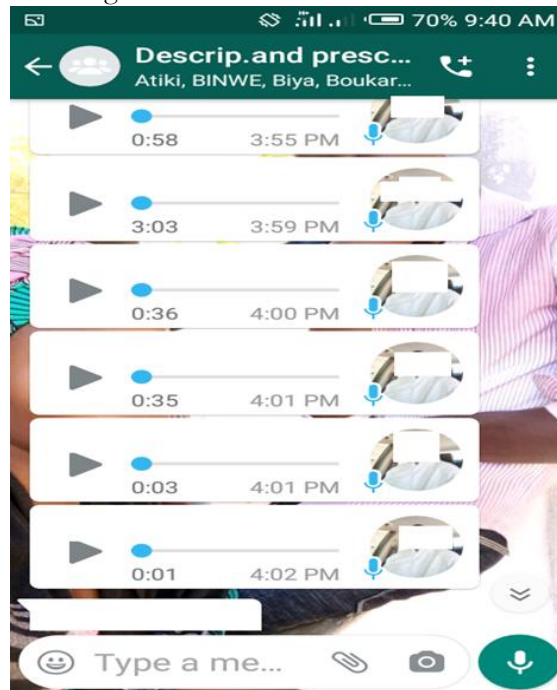
Figure 3. Usage of WhatsApp.
Source: Author's own development.

The question one may ask at this juncture is: did students master online teaching platforms at the beginning of the COVID- lockdown? The data from the questionnaire will be used to show students' level of mastery of online teaching platform and will be presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Students level of mastery of online teaching platforms at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Modality		WhatsApp			Zoom Meeting			Google Classroom		
		L1	M1	Total (%)	L1	M1	Total (%)	L1	M1	Total (%)
Valid	Yes	53	12	65 (73.04%)	/	1	1 (11.11%)	40	5	45 (56.96%)
	No	20	4	24 (26.96%)	/	8	8 (88.89%)	30	4	34 (43.04%)
Total		73	16	89 (100%)	/	9	9 (100%)	70	9	79 (100%)

Table 2 indicates that WhatsApp was known among students (73.04%). This implies that at the beginning of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, students were already using it. They were versed with this platform. This is partly due to the fact that most smart phones come with the application. One does not need to download it. It is one of the simplest applications in telephones. Few students had an idea of Zoom Meeting, that is, 11.11%. For Google Classroom, 56.96 % learners knew the platform. It was with time that students as well as some lecturers got used to it. A timid response of some students and lecturers was observed on Google classroom at the beginning of online pedagogy. Some lecturers guided students on how to get and use the platform as can be seen on figure 4. Gradually, they mastered the platform and were excited to use it.

This screenshot on WhatsApp indicates the steps to follow in order to have Zoom on the personal computer or the smart phone for an effective use of the platform to teach and learn. Worth mentioning is the recommendation of some platforms. At the University of

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Maroua, Google Classroom was recommended by the hierarchy of the institution, but lecturers were not drilled on how it functions, not to talk of students. Some teachers started with Google Classroom, but could not continue because they did not master it well. Others still discovered its limits and wanted a more lively class through audio-visual platform like zoom. Zoom was used to lecture courses like Sociolinguistics and Data Interpretation in Masters One.
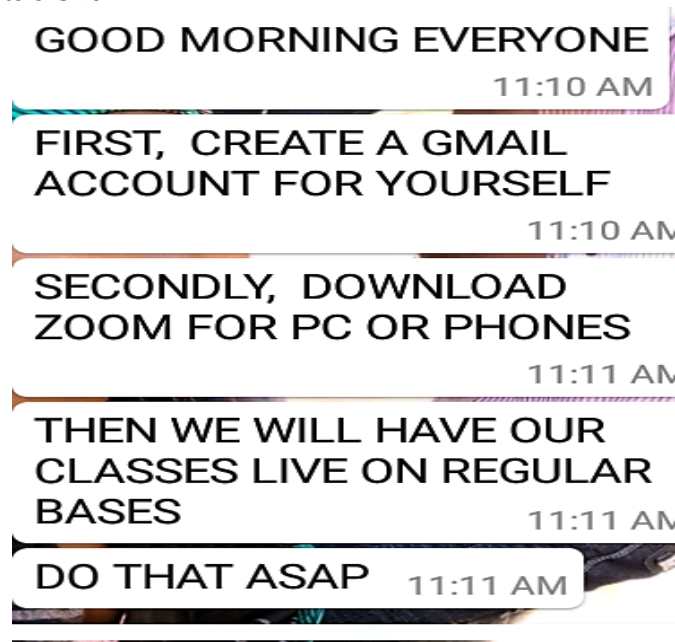
Figure 4. Guide for the creation and usage of Zoom meeting.
Source: Author's own development.

This section has focused on the platforms used during the COVID-19 lockdown in the department of English Language and Literature, FALSH in the University of Maroua. Results show that three platforms namely WhatsApp, Google Classroom and Zoom Meeting were for online pedagogy. Google drive and Gmail were used to submit assignments. The most used platform was WhatsApp (73.04%). But one needs more to ask: which method was used for online lectures?

4.2. Online interaction during the COVID-19 lockdown

By interaction the researcher means communication or direct involvement with someone. Findings show that the interaction pattern most lecturers used for online teaching depended on the platform. There are some platforms which are more interactive than others. WhatsApp and Zoom Meeting, for example, are more interactive than Google Classroom. Results from observation, questionnaire and interview show that there was interaction between teacher-learners and learner-learner. The following sub section give details on this from students' and lecturers' perspectives.

4.2.1. Students' appraisal of online classroom interaction between teacher-learners and learner-learner

The section of the study examines one of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) principles: there should be high level of interaction between human-human and human- machine. The table below (table 3) presents students' view on the interaction.

Table 3. Online interaction between teacher-learners and student-student during the COVID-19 lockdown (students' view).

Interactions	Response	Frequency
Teacher-learner	Yes	73 (82.02%)
	No	16 (17.98%)
Learner-learner	Yes	29 (32.58%)
	No	60 (67.42%)

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This table shows that 73 respondents out of 89 said "Yes" for the existence of interaction between teacher- students. Those who said "No" were 16. This means that there was high level of interaction between lecturer- learners. Concerning student- student interaction, the results indicate that 60 informants refused the fact that there was interaction among learners. Only 29 respondents acknowledged the presence of interaction among students.

The research also sought to find out students' degree of satisfaction with the interaction that took place online. The questionnaire administered to students highlights the rate of satisfaction with interaction in online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown. The table 4 vividly represents their point of view.

Table 4. Students' rate of satisfaction with online interaction during the lockdown.

Platforms / Satisfaction	WhatsApp		Zoom Meeting		Google Classroom	
	Number	Cumulative percentage	Number	Cumulative percentage	Number	Cumulative percentage
Fully satisfied	5 (5.62%)	5.62%	/	/	4 (5.06%)	5.06%
Very satisfied	29 (32.58%)	38.2%	1 (11.11%)	11.11%	8 (10.13%)	15.19%
Satisfied	22 (24.72%)	62.92%	1 (11.11%)	22.22%	28 (35.44%)	50.63%
A bit satisfied	30 (33.71%)	96.63%	7 (77.78%)	100%	33 (41.78%)	92.41%
Not at all satisfied	3 (3.37%)	100%	/	/	6 (7.59%)	100%
TOTAL	89 (100%)		9 (100%)		79 (100%)	

This table indicates that the interaction on WhatsApp and Google Classroom was generally satisfactory, but on zoom Meeting, a bit satisfactory. Students were more satisfied with WhatsApp than the other platforms. This is clearly seen with the cumulative percentage. Students were satisfied with WhatsApp (62.92%) and Google Classroom at 50.63%, they were just a bit satisfied with Zoom Meeting at 77.78%.

4.2.2. Lecturers' Appraisal of Online Classroom interaction between teacher-learners and learner- learner

Having observed and interviewed lecturers on online interaction between teacher-learner and learner-learner, the researcher got the following results presented on the table 5.

Table 5. Online interaction between teacher-learners and student-student during the COVID-19 lockdown (Lecturers' view).

Interactions	Response	Frequency
Teacher-learner	Yes	5 (83.33%)
	No	1 (16.67%)
Learner-learner	Yes	2 (33.33%)
	No	4 (66.67%)

From Table 5, it is clear that there was interaction between teachers and their learners. A lecturer maintained that there has not been any interaction between him and the learners because he sent the course outline, the synopsis and the task, but no student reacted, though they were connected. Consequently, he gave up and continued his lessons after the lockdown using the traditional face-to-face method. The same attitude is seen in WhatsApp where some students willingly refused to attend classes on the assumptions that when they get connected they will get everything the lecturer did with the other students. The screenshot below (figure 5) illustrates interactions between teachers and the learners.

From this screenshot, the lecturer asks a question. Students attempt to answer the questions through written messages (the case of student A) and voice recording the case of students D and L. Since the lecturer is not satisfied with the answer of students, he asks for a

last attempt. This interaction is completed in the next screenshot.

With regard the question for interview on the teaching method used and on whether there was interaction between teacher-students, and student-student, the researcher got the following: five (5) lecturers out of the six (6) effectively used the platforms. The interactive method was used. Lecturers sent course outline and synopses on the platforms. They introduced the lesson through voice recording and expected reactions from students. They often asked questions in written form or voice recording. There was interaction between teacher- students, but student-student interaction was too limited. One lecturer however, sent the course outline and synopsis. He asked questions, but students did not react. He ended by giving up online classes. In Google Classroom, lecturers most often sent the synopsis ahead of time on the platform, ask few questions to students to see whether there is a section they do not understand. Students ask questions to clear up their doubts. This is done through written messages. The interaction is mediated by a third element, that is, a screen.
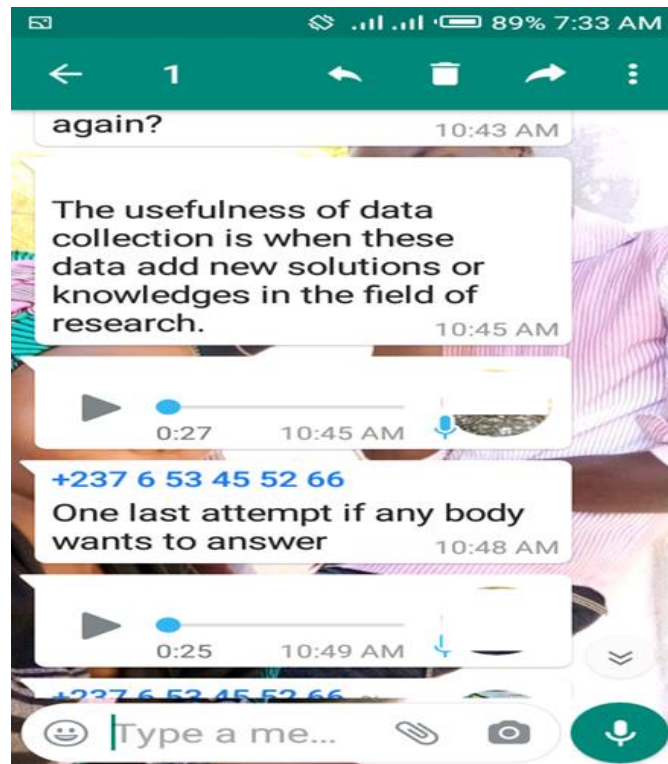
Figure 5. Interaction between teacher and learners.
Source: Author's own development.

On Zoom meeting, lessons are lively carried out. The lecturer and the students see each other. Students see what is written on the board if at all the lecturer uses it. Many learning styles and strategies are taken into consideration. On WhatsApp, lecturers send the course outlines, the objectives in written forms or through recording. The lecturer introduces the courses by voice recording, sends the synopsis, explains the lessons through voice recording, finds out about students' worries and answers their questions in written messages or voiced messages.

The interaction between learner- learners is limited (33.33%) as Table 5 shows. It appears when a student says something and his classmate does not share his/ her point of view, he proposes something else. There are instances where a student asks a question and his mates give the answer. Concerning the interaction between human and machine, the researcher's experience of online lectures proves that fact. This was mostly seen in Google Classroom where there is no direct discussion between the teacher- student or learner- learner. For WhatsApp and Zoom Meetings, although lectures are lively conducted, there is still the interference of the screen.

This section discussed the interaction method used for online pedagogy during the COVID-19 lockdown pandemic in the Department of English Language and Literature. A close look at the data collected shows that there was interaction between teacher- students, human- machine (screen), but the interaction between learner- learners was so limited.

5. Conclusions

This study has examined platforms and interaction in online English Language Teaching in the Department of English language and Literature of the University of Maroua during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. After the analysis of data, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that the Department and University of Maroua as a whole perceived this abrupt change as an opportunity to innovate since in principle, it meant opening to new teaching tools and methods. However, lecturers had to think on what the main objectives of their lectures were in terms of contents and competencies and how to proceed by using the most suitable platforms and activities. Presently, there is no lockdown, but the Department continues to put timetables and course synopses online. We also publish test marks and some Examination results online. In addition, some courses are still being done both online and face-to-face. We just completed a course on English Language teaching methods with Masters Two students of ENS Maroua which was done fully on WhatsApp.

It is worth noting that there was some training for lecturers in the form of seminars on how to prepare and deliver an online lecture even before COVID-19 in the various schools and faculties of the University of Maroua. However, lecturers and students need more training in order to fully embrace online pedagogy and also to go global with the advent of AI. The cost of digital devices and internet data should equally be reduced. In addition, the government should provide solar energy to make up for the constant power failure being experienced in the country.

Further studies can be carried out on how to improve interaction between learner-learner using other platforms. Other researchers can equally focus on the acquisition of each language skill using the online platforms. Research can also be done on distance learning at the secondary level.

Appendix A. Checklist for observation.

At the beginning of the lesson
The course title:………………………………………………………...……
The period: ……………………………………………………….………….
The number of student at the start: ………………………………………..
The platform used: …………………………………………………………...
In the course of the lesson:

No	Questions	Yes	No
1	Is the lesson student-centered?		
2	Does it promote student autonomy?		
3	Is it the input comprehensive?		
4	Is there sufficient level of stimulation (cognitive and affective)		
5	Did the lecturer use modalities that support the learning styles and strategies?		
6	Is there high level of interaction between teacher- students?		
7	Is there high level of interaction between student- student?		
8	Did the lecture go on without interruption?		
9	Was there any meaningful purpose?		
10	Did the lecturer integrate the four main language skills?		
11	Did the lecturer give an assignment?		

Appendix B. Questionnaire to students

Tick (√) the correct answer.
Did you attend online classes during the lockdown period?   Yes   No
Which of the following platforms do you use during the COVID-19 lockdown?

WhatsApp	Zoom meeting	Google classroom	My Moodle	Skype

Indicate if any other………………………………………………

How effective was the interaction on the platform during the lockdown period? Indicate the percentage under the various platforms.

WhatsApp	Zoom meeting	Google classroom	My Moodle	Skype

a.   100%   a. Fully satisfied
b.   75%   b. very satisfied
c.   50%   c. Satisfied
d.   25%   d. a bit satisfied
e.   0%   e. not at all satisfied

Was there any interaction between

a. learner- learner?   Yes   No
b. learners- teacher?   Yes   No

Appendix C. Questions for interview to lectures

1.   Which platforms did you use for online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

2.   Which teaching approach/method did you use? Was there any interaction between you and the learners, and student –student?

Appendix D. Screenshots of online teaching/learning.
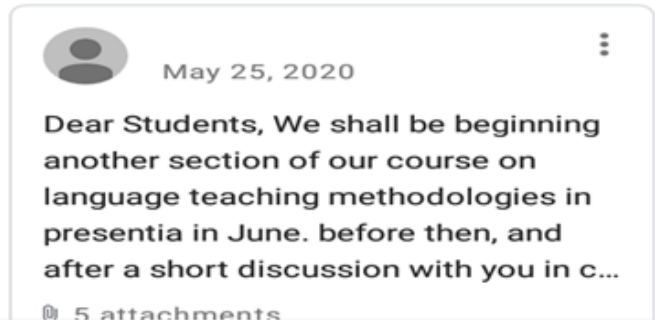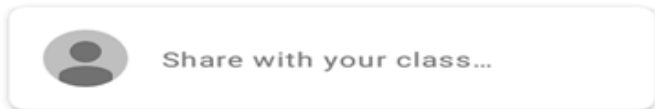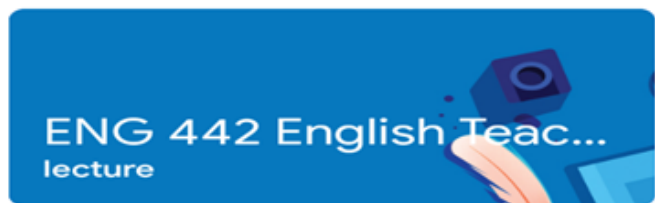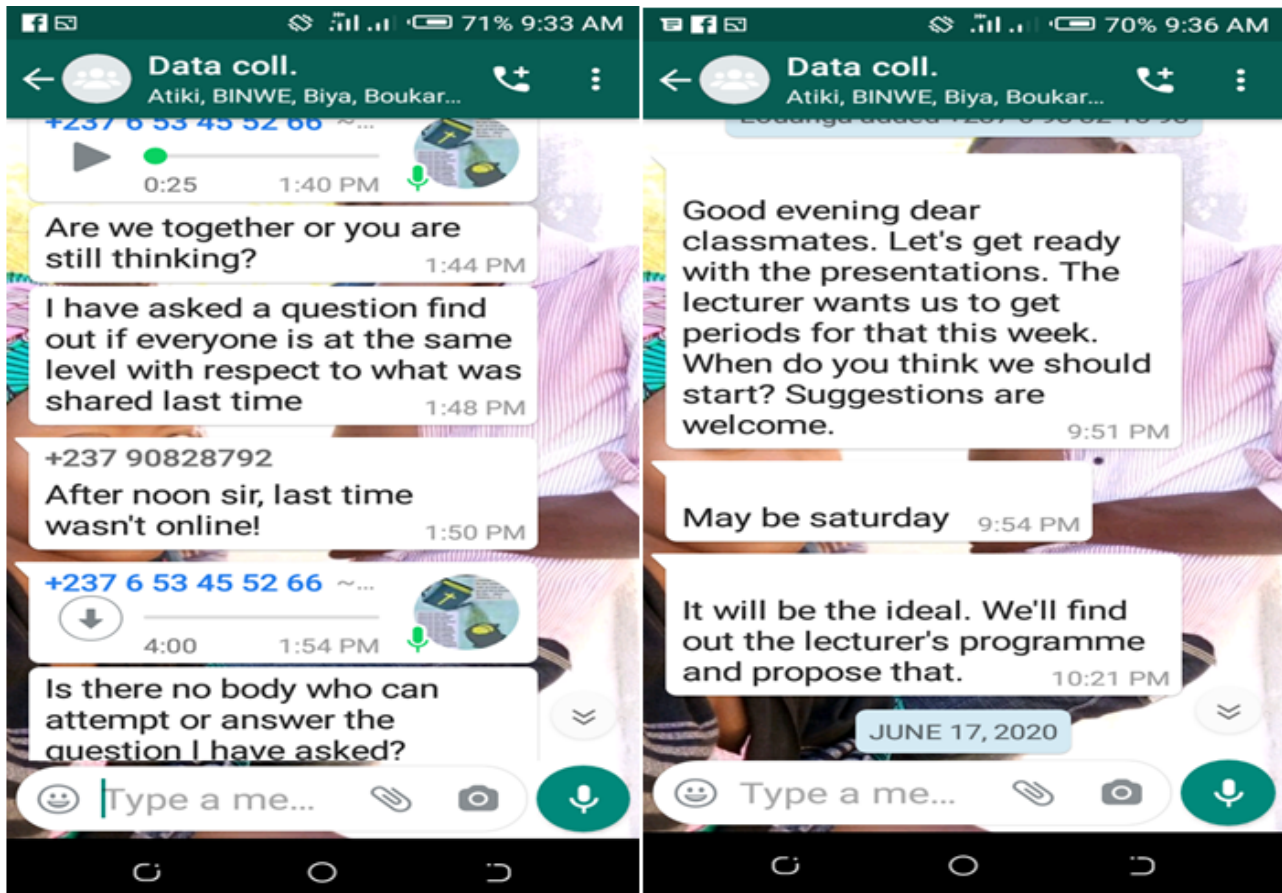
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