



AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STUDENTS EVALUATIONS OF THE QUALITY OF SELF-PACED ONLINE TESOL COURSES IN MOROCCO: INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract:

The evaluation of the quality of self-paced online TESOL courses is critical for students to determine whether the course is effective and meets their learning needs. The global COVID-19 crisis necessitated the adoption of an urgent learning intervention represented in online education in general and online self-paced learning in particular. The study aimed to examine students' perceptions of the TESOL online course design, delivery, content, and assessment, and the use of technology in enhancing their learning experience. The research used questionnaires and interviews to understand the participants' perceptions towards this modality of education. Overall, students' evaluation of the quality of online self-paced courses revealed that participants generally had positive opinions about this mode of learning. However, some students expressed concerns, especially about the lack of interaction with instructors and peers, the delay in feedback and the need for self-discipline to stay on track. The study highlights the importance of considering the learners' perspectives when designing and delivering online TESOL courses and highlights the need to boost the interactive elements of the course and the quality of the supporting materials.

Keywords: TESOL, evaluation, perspectives, quality, trainees, self-paced learning, online adult learning, teacher education

1. Introduction

The advancement of technology has revolutionized the way we learn, providing new opportunities for education and professional growth. One of the most important developments in online learning is the availability of self-paced online TESOL courses, which have become increasingly popular in recent years, mainly during and after the Corona virus pandemic. These courses offer learners the flexibility to study at their own pace and convenience, making them an eye-catching option for many individuals looking to enhance their English language teaching

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skills. Hence, online learning offers students a healthy and flexible learning environment to develop cognitive and communicative abilities daily (Azzi et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2021). Timothy (2015) noted that self-paced learning creates a sense of autonomy and empowerment, augmenting students' confidence in taking advantage of the ownership of their learning, which increases (Morrison, 2019) their motivation to excel and create constant progress. Several scholars, however, have identified a few drawbacks associated with this self-paced basis learning, ranging from prior knowledge deactivation (Jiang et al., 2015) to scheduling issues. Self-paced learning, no doubt, has genuine gains, but when put into practice without guardrails, it may present considerable challenges.

2. Statement of the problem

Recently, online learning in developing countries has become a necessity to cope with the new technological changes due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Suprianto et al., 2020; Suryaman et al., 2020). Online Self-paced courses have been adopted as an innovative mode of learning gaining popularity in Morocco during and after COVID-19. However, there are very limited resources on how students evaluate the quality experience of self-paced online learning. Therefore, in this era of constant technological development as well as the changes that COVID-19 has made in education, it has become purely evident that the quality of online learning should be given more attention (Zhafira et al., 2020).

2.1 Research objectives

The objectives of this study are to determine and evaluate the quality that students experienced while studying an online TESOL self-paced learning course and further explore the positive and negative influence these experiences have on TESOL participants' performance. The study further determines the students' suggestions to improve the quality of TESOL online self-paced learning in Morocco.

2.2 Research questions

- 1) What are students' overall evaluations of TESOL online self-paced courses?
- 2) What positive and negative impact did the participants have on TESOL online self-paced courses?
- 3) What suggestions should be made to improve TESOL online self-paced courses?

2.3 Significance of the research

The research on students' evaluation of the quality of online self-paced courses has gained increasing importance in recent years as the popularity and usage of online education continue to grow. Understanding the students' perceptions and evaluations of the quality of these courses is crucial for a variety of reasons. The research findings will enable teachers and education policymakers to have an in-depth understanding of what quality means for TESOL students, taking part in online education. The students' feedback on self-paced online education will help educational institutions better learn about the main quality aspects while preparing or designing

an online self-paced course. The research results and recommendations can be used to fully understand how online education influences individual students' learning outcomes. Overall, the significance of this research lies in its ability to advance the quality of online education and ensure that students receive the best possible educational experience.

3. Literature review

As scholars develop an interest in the emerging online self-paced instructional designs, the literature base for the development and success of online self-paced learning programs, as well as student perceptions and experiences, is growing. Much of the available literature, on students' perceptions and experiences in such programs, has focused on motivational beliefs, the student's learning environment, personal contentment, self-efficacy, access to related technologies, computer and internet literacy, and trainer efficacy. Program design factors have been noted to influence all other aspects, such as self-efficacy, student satisfaction, perception, and motivation toward self-paced online programs (Ni, 2013; Swan, 2001).

A. Self-efficacy

According to Cho and Heron (2015), self-efficacy plays a central role in determining an individual student's ability to excel, arguing that students who understand task value and requirements, and students who display higher self-efficacy for learning are more likely to pass a course than students who do not possess such qualities. Cho and Heron (2015) further added that the motivation of the student to learn based on the learning strategies employed and the student's emotions determined the individual student's experiences in online self-paced courses. Alqurashi (2016) argued that self-efficacy with computers significantly impacted the student's satisfaction with the online learning environments and influenced their interest and intentions to take future online courses in select studies. Lee et al. (2020) hold a similar view based on a study on self-regulated learning of US navy sailors noting that the sailors' self-efficacy in self-paced online courses was a significant influence on their perceptions of their learning progress, and further their satisfaction with the courses.

B. Collaborative strategies

The different approaches, such as collaborative training employed in self-paced learning, determined the success of the programs (Raczynski et al., 2015). Collaborative strategies in self-paced learning improved self-efficacy and reduce computer anxiety in learners (Gupta, 2017). Ma et al. (2017) believe that co-training improves the effectiveness of self-paced learning. Similarly, Hildebrandt and Belmont (2018) noted that the inclusion of instructors in self-paced learning improved the effectiveness of the self-paced learning programs. Although various barriers exist that influence students' access to, experiences with, and perceptions of online learning programs (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005), the students' perceptions of such programs can be improved by aligning the curriculum with the students' course evaluations (Stoner & Billings, 2021).

C. Positive and negative influence

Past studies have shown that self-paced learning can be effective in promoting student engagement and learning outcomes. For example, previous qualitative studies by Khalil et al., 2020; Djidu et al., 2021; Laksana, 2021 have empirically examined a group of variables impacting the quality of online learning. Past studies have confirmed that these environments impact students' effectiveness and achievements positively and negatively (Franklin et al., 2001). Therefore, involving students in online learning programs for evaluation purposes will surely provide valuable insights into the variables affecting the quality of online education. Online education is advantageous since it provides students with flexible access to online lessons at anytime and anywhere (Petrides 2002; Poole 2000; Schrum 2000).

On the other hand, Pratiwi (2020) conducted a study on "The Impact of COVID-19 on Online Learning Activities at Christian Universities in Indonesia". He found that online resources provide numerous advantages for students, yet the effectiveness of online education is influenced by several variables, including the support of the faculty, the student's willingness, and motivation. Self-paced learning is linked to having a good internet connection. For example, Laksana (2021) in her research on "Implementation of online learning in the pandemic COVID-19: student perception in areas with minimum internet access" concluded that learners encounter several obstacles that impact having good quality online learning services. These challenges were because some students lived in areas with bad internet connections and electricity outages (Laksana, 2021).

Nevertheless, previous studies illustrated some negative effects that students experienced in online education. Students expressed dissatisfaction with online learning platforms due to a lack of social connection. For instance, a study by Rovai, Wighting, and Lui revealed that "*online students feel a weaker sense of connectedness and belonging than on-campus students who attend face-to-face classes*" (Rovai et al., 2005, p. 4). Another shortcoming that online education involves is the delay of feedback because of the high number of participants on these platforms. Kehrer, Kelly, and Heffernan (2013) stated that immediate feedback had several positive impacts on students' learning and performance. Similarly, Lemley, Sudweeks, Howell, Laws, & Sawyer held the same views in 2007 about how important feedback is, mainly when students make mistakes.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Constructivism in online self-paced learning

The focus of research on the development of meaningful self-paced online learning has been developed from a constructivist view of learning. Constructivism as a theory of learning is rooted in both philosophy and psychology. It is a learning theory that states that individuals construct their own understanding and knowledge through experiences and interactions with the environment. In an online self-paced learning environment, constructivism can be applied by providing students with opportunities to interact with the content and engage in activities that allow them to dynamically build their own understanding (Doolittle, 1999). This can be attained through activities such as debates, discussions, exercises, case studies, problem-solving,

and interactive simulations. The goal of a constructivist approach to online self-paced learning is to provide learners with a personalized and appealing learning experience that supports their individual needs and different learning styles.

Constructivists found the development of knowledge as structurally based on experience rather than received from an objective world or external reality (Lowenthal & Muth, 2008). Therefore, a constructivist's focus on instruction and learning is inductive and developed from the point of the student in a bottom-up approach. Conclusively, the constructivist approach, when incorporated in the design and implementation of self-paced online learning programs, directs instructors to focus on learner-centeredness so that a meaningful learning environment can take place.

4. Method

The quantitative and qualitative survey methodology was employed for data collection. The intended participants of the study were teachers and university students (undergraduate, graduate, and research students). They had participated in a self-paced TESOL online program. Each student was required to have completed not less than 35 hours of free TESOL training and received a minimum grade of "Pass" to receive TESOL certification and participate in this study. Every student who had completed the free TESOL program was given a course evaluation form to complete. Research data were collected using questionnaires and interviews based on students' evaluations of the self-paced TESOL online program.

190 students were asked to rate statements focused on as either; excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, or very poor. Further, 16 students were asked to state what they liked or did not like about the course as well as suggesting ways to improve the online course. The statements focused on the assessment of the quality of the course, course content, and course organization, the effectiveness of the materials used, the usefulness of the study materials, assessment consistency, the trainer's effectiveness, program time allocation, and an overall individual view of the course.

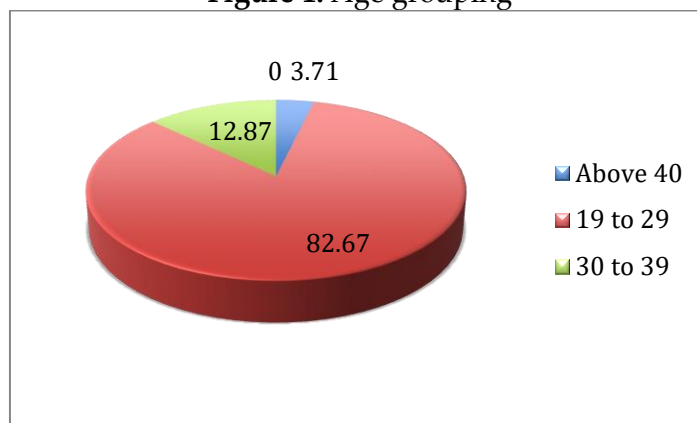
The quantitative data were analyzed using percentages while the qualitative data relied on the thematic analysis based on the student's perceptions. The data were presented in the form of pie charts, graphs, tables, and paragraphs.

4.1 Data analysis and results

4.1.1 Quantitative questionnaires

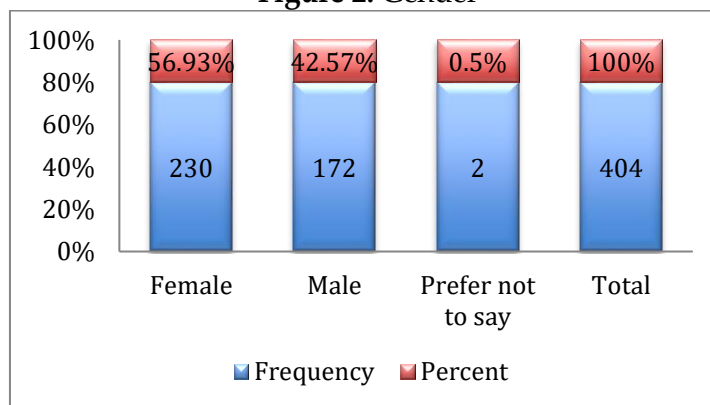
The majority of participants evaluated the quality of the online self-paced TESOL program as excellent and very good. This proves that the students based on self-assessment felt that the self-paced programs improved their overall performance in the course. 90% of the participating students viewed the course content as very good and excellent. This could be linked to the availability of broad and easy-to-access content in online learning programs, which is viewed as a factor influencing successful course completion, perception, and student satisfaction (Lim, 2016; Palaigeorgiou & Papadopoulou, 2019; Ranieri et al., 2018).

Figure 1: Age grouping



The pie chart above shows the age distribution of the participants in the study. The majority of the respondents fell in the 19 to 29 brackets, often populated with college freshmen and graduate students. Among the three groups (the 20 to 29 is similar to the 19-29 group), those above forty are very few, indicating a possible least uptake of online education since most of them have defined their career paths.

Figure 2: Gender



Interestingly, according to the chart above, females are the majority, 56.93%, implying a certain degree of convenience given their critical responsibilities in their cultural settings. The 0.5% percent of those who preferred not to indicate their gender means TEFL is a non-gender discriminating learning institution.

In the pie chart below, 69.31% of the respondents rated the courses they were taking as excellent, indicating that they are equipped to offer quality education beyond average. The combined percentage rating of very poor and fair for the course shows that only small portions of the courses are tailored to meet personal demands, which can be adjusted based on the suggestions identified above.

Figure 3: Course evaluation

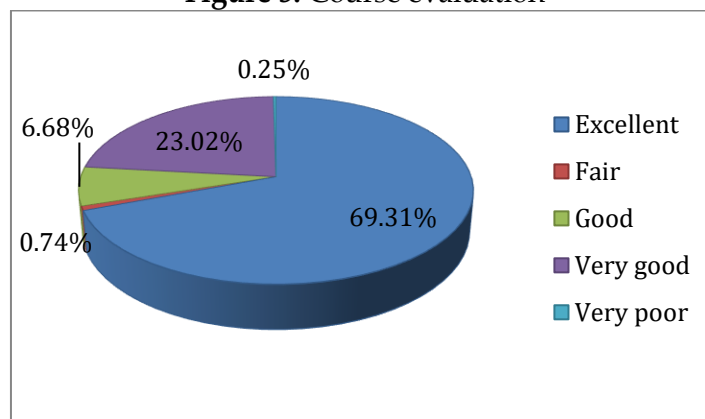
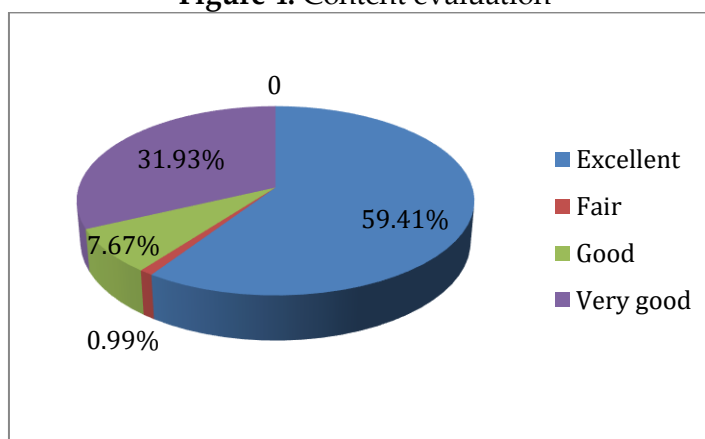
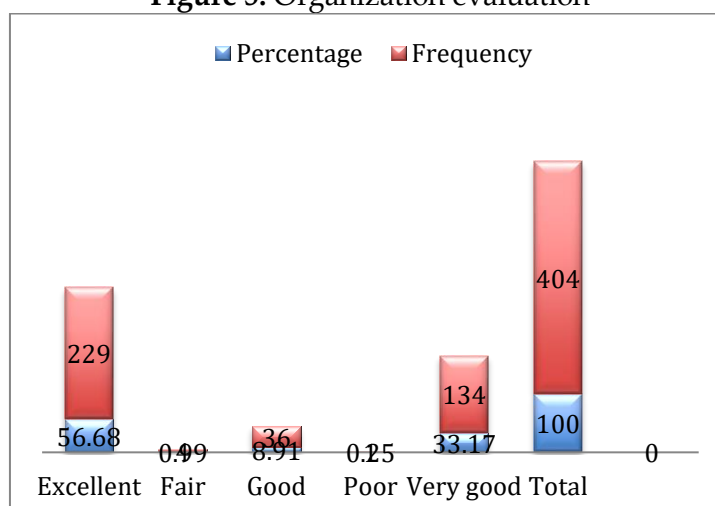


Figure 4: Content evaluation



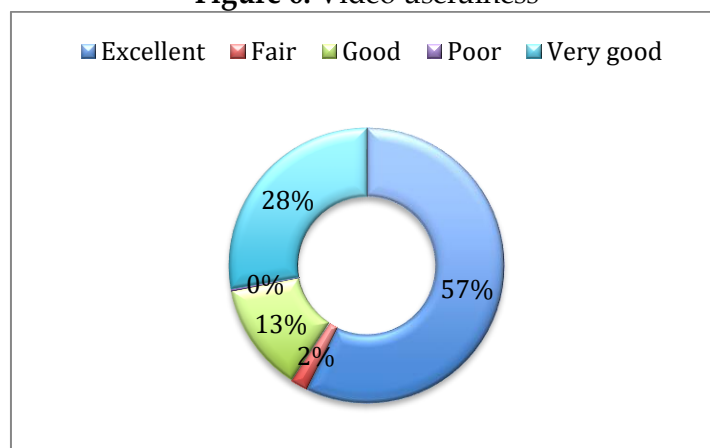
The pie chart above illustrates that more than half of the students who responded that the content course at TESOL Academy was very good or excellent is evidence of the course material being relevant to the issues they need to tackle in their society within their careers, instructors being fully equipped to impart knowledge and the curriculum being structured to meet the need created by the pandemic.

Figure 5: Organization evaluation



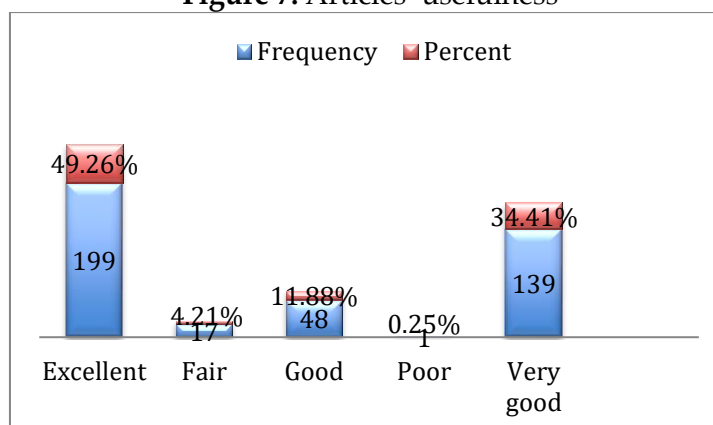
Concerning the above chart above, though only 56.68% rated the course organization as excellent and 33.17% rated it as very good, the percentage is adequate to conclude that the course is organized in terms of the content outline, regularity in exams, structured teaching, and assignments to test on the understanding of the already covered content. The percentage also implies that the scope of the courses in TEFL is followed and completed within the specified time.

Figure 6: Video usefulness



The percentage of the respondents who rated the video usefulness in the courses as excellent (57.18%), very good (27.72%), and good (12.87%) gives substantial evidence that the videos were well crafted to make the lectures sessions more robust in teaching the class content. It means the videos were clear in both voice and content. However, the group rating the videos as fair suggested the length of the video be reduced to a reasonable size and the quality of the voice be improved.

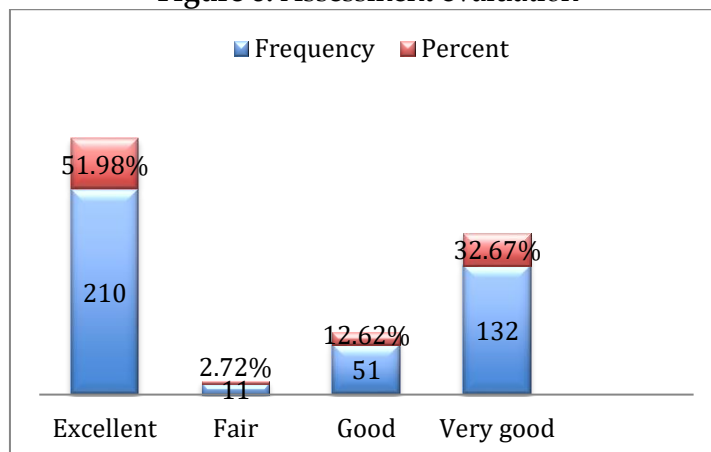
Figure 7: Articles' usefulness



Only less than half of the respondents, 49.26%, rated the article's usefulness as excellent. This is possibly a red flag in the delivery of the instructions that cannot be ignored. The respondents suggested the content in the articles be adapted into a video. This would thus serve thus the greater majority of the students who are audio-visual learning easily through a

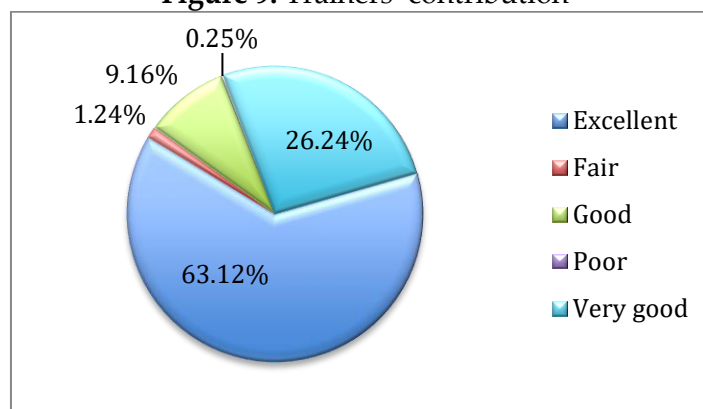
combination of voice and video content. The articles also needed to be prepared and prepared in the class portals way before to allow the students to familiarize themselves with the weekly content.

Figure 8: Assessment evaluation



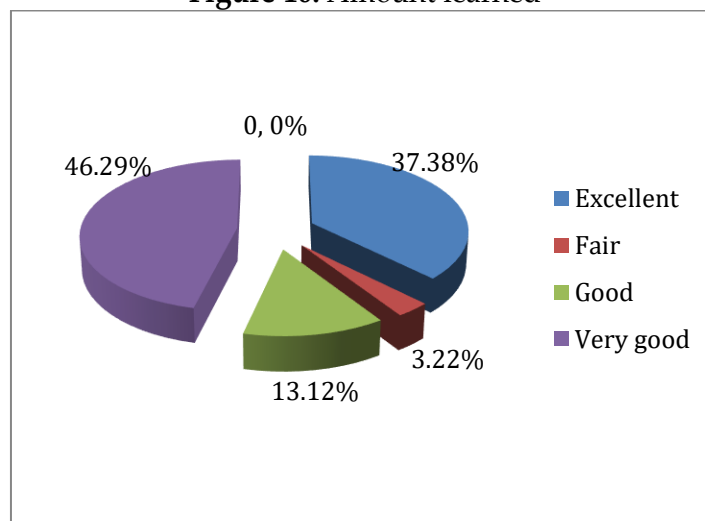
It is a good sign that more than half of the respondents rate the assessment techniques, such as quizzes, homework, weekly discussion forums, essays, and final tests, as good and well-structured to test the student's understanding and competence in applying content in actual practices. The combined percentage of those rating excellent, very good, and good indicates only a little streamlining of the assessment material, such as making the instructions more detailed, revising the assessment time, and making the platform receptive to content that needs uploading to ensure smooth learning.

Figure 9: Trainers' contribution



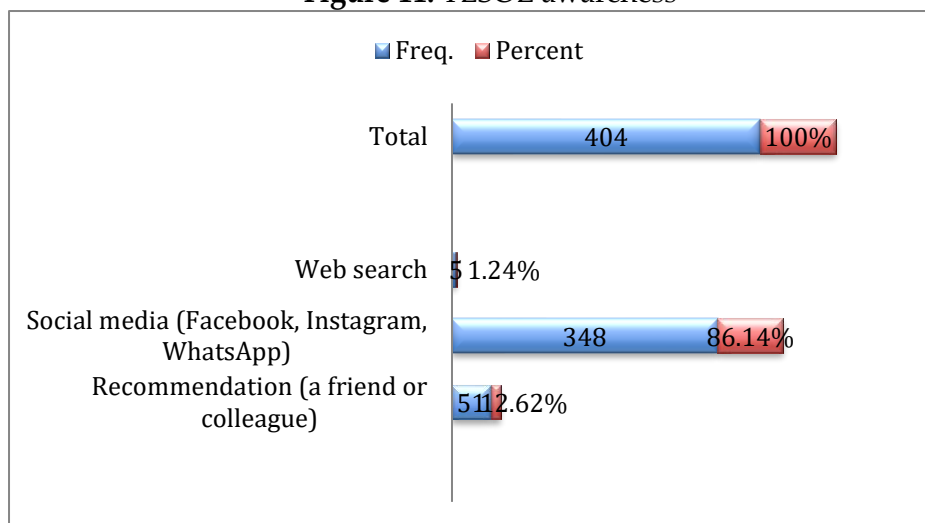
The 63.12%, 26.24%, and 9.16% rating of the trainers' contribution as excellent, very good, and good is a helpful report that the instructors are well equipped to teach, supportive to the students, and capable of guiding the students in most practical problems they encounter in the field.

Figure 10: Amount learned



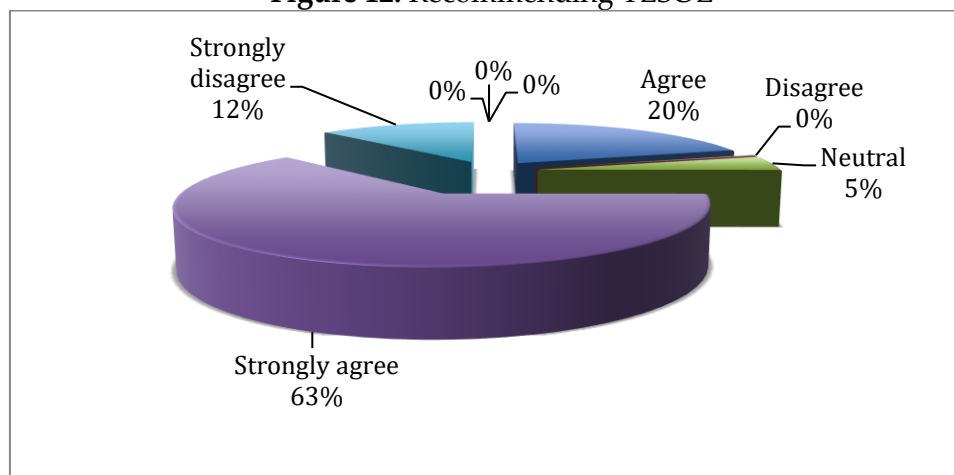
Respondents also confirmed that they learned a lot about the subject, with 37.38% rating it as excellent, 46.29% as very good, and 13.12% as good. The students thus benefited from the courses enrolled, and this is a show of commitment to continue taking courses at TESOL.

Figure 11: TESOL awareness



Social media is critical in spreading awareness of the course and would go far in publicizing the course. The TESOL management should thus be diligent in spreading its benefits in social media for broader coverage.

Figure 12: Recommending TESOL



Based on the quality offered in the TESOL course, over 80% agree to recommend the course to anyone interested in joining the TESOL study sessions. This suggests that the TESOL management should widen its scope of courses and strengthen the system for more student influx.

4.1.2 Qualitative interviews

- What did you like most about the online training course?

a. Trainer's contribution

It is worth noting that the present study shows the essential role trainers purely play in online education. Since the physical contact between the trainer and trainees is absent, facilitation skills are considered a key to quality education in online learning. Interviewees expressed satisfaction with the trainer's contribution to making the online, self-paced learning meaningful and, most importantly, engaging by adding demo lessons with observation checklists to complete.

As participant (7) stated:

"What I liked most about this online training course is the fact that I was totally engaged, as if I were a member, in the training video sessions. I reacted to every question asked by the professor; in addition to that, I liked the atmosphere that was set by the trainer to make this course a successful one. It seems you are in the course."

While participant (9) enjoyed the online course saying:

"Everything related to this online training is great but the most interesting thing the trainer is highly qualified Masha 'Allah. So, he successfully managed to combine between what is theoretical and what is practical."

Participant (2) expressed his engagement in this online course stating:

“Indeed, everything was excellent about this online course, I loved the professor; the way he explained the lesson is very clear and helped me to understand the course. He is a professional teacher and hopes to see his videos again.”

The participants of this study also stressed the way the trainer explains and demonstrated online lessons about how to teach vocabulary, grammar, and function communicatively. They prefer that the trainer's delivery should be based on simplicity, and authenticity as well as using relevant course materials.

Participant (10) was thankful:

“I would like to thank the trainer for his efforts. The training was really excellent. The way he explains the lessons is simple and catching. The articles he shared with us were really simple and helpful. I was all time excited to discover more.”

Participant (8) stated:

“I like the way the trainer was explaining those lessons and I also liked the relevance of the content, especially the articles to read and videos to watch.”

Participant (4) said:

“I liked how the course went smoothly on my understanding, I liked the way our trainer explained everything. The videos and articles were very helpful and useful. Finally, I am really thankful to be part of this learning journey.”

Based on the evaluations of participants, the trainer's facilitation skills are key to boosting quality online learning. The trainer should engage students on online platforms by giving clear instructions and engaging and authentic presentations.

b. Course organization

The findings demonstrated that several interviewees linked the quality of an online setting to the good structure of the course content. They felt satisfied with the way the online TESOL course was organized, starting from the input of reading relevant articles and watching videos to the output about doing exercises and then completing short quizzes.

Participant (1) stated:

“I liked the fact that the course is well organized, understandable, and fun. Yes, I had a lot of fun, especially with the quizzes. I really appreciate them.”

Participant (5) liked the order of the classes saying:

"I liked how well-organized the sessions were, and the video recordings utilized were extremely beneficial."

Participant (14) said:

"It was well-organized and straightforward to grasp, and the number of examples added value to the information."

It is worth noting that the majority of the participants placed a high value on the positive learning experiences provided by the course's excellent design. The well-organized course serves as a road map to the desired outcomes; it gives them a clear overview of the course content and smooth movement from one lesson to another, from one activity to another, and from one quiz to another.

c. Accessibility to the course

The current research findings found that several interviewees enjoyed the learning experience thanks to the flexibility and accessibility of the online course. The online self-paced courses allowed students to study at their own pace and on their own schedule, which is often seen as a positive aspect of this mode of learning.

Participant (6) expressed:

"It is accessible in terms of place and time for everyone who likes to improve his or her philosophy of teaching. We were enjoying our vacation and learning at the same time."

Participant (9) reflected:

"I really liked this online training course because it shortened the distance for everyone who lives far from the center, plus, it is free and self-paced."

The participant (16) stated:

"I felt free; to learn at our own speed and any time we want, since there is no face-to-face interaction, instead of virtual interaction. This helps me to be autonomous and independent, and makes me curious to know the content of the courses that posted in Google classroom."

Overall, the study's main objective is to evaluate TESOL students' experiences in an online, self-paced course to improve the quality of online education. The results show that the majority of participants enjoyed the online learning experience. They gave positive feedback on the trainer's contribution, the organization of the online course, and the free accessibility of the course.

- **What aspects of the training could be improved?**

a. Length and quality of audio-visual materials

According to the present study, a quarter of the participants suggested shortening the length of the videos. They found it hard to watch some videos that exceeded 30 minutes. They felt exhausted after spending a long time watching the trainer giving instructions online.

Participant (3) stated:

"I just think that some parts of the videos in which there is no talk when students were doing a writing task should be omitted. This will make the video less lengthy and more encouraging because learners do not like lengthy videos. Also, live videos with trainees are far better because learners get interested more rather than when there is a recorded version because they keep just Procrastinating. Apart from that, the course is excellent."

Another participant (10) reflected:

"I literally liked everything about the course, but if there is the necessity to say improves something I would say making the videos a little shorter. This way, one may not get exhausted rapidly."

In addition to that, several participants agreed that some audio-video materials need improvement. The sounds and the images were not good quality; the trainer's voice, in some videos, was not clear due to the noise surrounding the classroom.

Participant (3) said:

"Although the content of the videos was excellent, the quality of these videos must be improved."

While participant (8) reflected:

"The only thing that should be improved is the quality of the voice in some recording sessions."

Participant (2) confirmed the same suggestion saying:

"Everything concerning this course was perfect. I would however say that the intensity of the voice was a little bit low and this confused me."

According to the study's findings, the clarity of both the sound and image of videos is a key to quality enhancement in online learning courses.

b. Technical grading problems

Based on the participants' feedback, more than half of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the assessment section of the online course. They encountered several technical issues in terms of the automatic correction of the quizzes in Google Forms. They felt frustrated as some of the questions were correct but were marked wrong.

Participant (7) stated:

"When I took a test, it sometimes seems that the database didn't receive it. The color blue of the icon of the test doesn't disappear, sometimes. Also, when I answered a paragraph question, the answer was automatically given zero. What are the correction standards!? And who corrects them!? The app!"

Participant (12) confirmed the same problem with quizzes correction stating:

"The quizzes part, the answers were automatically given a 0 while I am sure they are correct. I mean the part where we had to write a paragraph or definition."

Moreover, some interviewees suggested making the assignment instructions very clear to avoid confusion. Instructions should be simple, clear, and concise.

One of the participants (4) said;

"Quizzes and assignments could have been much clearer. Some questions were too broad and not very specific."

While another participant (6) reflected:

"Google forms always show that our answers are incorrect when we answer using sentences or paragraphs."

Another area of improvement that was raised by thirty percent of interviewees is the delay of the trainer's feedback. They expressed their dissatisfaction when completing the quizzes and other assignments but they either got very late feedback or no feedback at all.

Participant (3) reflected:

"The whole course was stimulating and engaging except for the feedback. It really took so much time to get it from the instructor. I know it is very hard for the instructor because more than 1000 enrolled and participate in the FREE 35 H TESOL online course. For all the assignments I completed, I got only one feedback but it was not on time. I guess there should be other professors to assist the course tutor especially in giving feedback to us."

Participant (2) stated:

"It really doesn't make sense to spend time in doing an assignment but in the end, you get no feedback about it. So, are you going to know if it is correct or not or to know about the grade of if you are getting improved or not? For me the course was great but the only thing that needs improvement is how to give prompt feedback to our assignment."

c. Online interaction

A quarter of participants focused on the central role of interaction between the trainer and students online. They liked the self-paced learning course and being at ease while studying anytime and anywhere. Indeed, they believed that quality education in online platforms should include weekly meetings on Zoom or Google so that both the trainer and students can interact face to face and discuss either the lessons or tasks or quizzes and get feedback.

Participant (15) suggested:

“Instead of watching the recorded videos for more than two weeks, we can have online sessions with the trainer to interact directly with him either via Zoom or Google meet.”

Participant (11) said:

“Everything was clear, and the only thing that might be enhanced is the instructor’s involvement in an online meeting on Zoom so that we can interact and discuss with him all other lessons and get direct feedback from him.”

The current study's findings show that having short videos to watch with good-quality sounds and images and holding weekly meetings with the trainer on Zoom or Google Meet are strongly related to achieving quality in online education.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research will be grouped into three clusters: students' overall evaluation, positive and negative feedback, and suggestions to improve the online course. The student's general evaluation was very satisfactory. The students' positive experiences were: the good design of the online course, the trainer's facilitation skills, and the accessibility of the course. The students' negative experiences were identified as lengthy videos, technical grading issues, delayed feedback, and a lack of online interaction.

RQ1: What are TESOL students' overall evaluations of online self-paced learning courses?

A. Course content

A majority evaluated the quality of the online self-paced TESOL program as excellent and very good. This proves that the students based on self-assessment felt that the self-paced programs improved their overall performance in the course. 90% of the participating students viewed the course content as very good and excellent. This could be linked to the availability of broad and easy-to-access content in online learning programs, which is viewed as a factor influencing successful course completion, perception, and student satisfaction (Lim, 2016; Palaigeorgiou & Papadopoulou, 2019; Ranieri et al., 2018).

B. Course organization and materials

90% of the participants rated the course organization, effectiveness, and access and usefulness of the learning materials within the TESOL self-paced online program as very good or excellent. The findings of the present study reveal the vital aspects of what makes a good online course: the course organization, content, materials, and accessibility of online lessons. The results of our research are compatible with the previous studies. For instance, Denise Finch and Karen Jacobs (2012), in their earlier research, learned of the countless benefits such as opening up opportunities to access and cooperate with experts on a global scale; and offering students the flexibility to access courses at their own pace. The same findings were revealed by previous studies indicating that online education is valuable as it provides learners with flexible access to online lessons at anytime and anywhere (Petrides 2002; Poole 2000; Schrum 2000). However, 10% of the students had problems understanding the course organization and accessing study materials and rated the organization as poor.

RQ2: What positive and negative impact did they get from TESOL self-paced courses?

- **Positive impact**

A. Good design of the online program

The present research has identified factors that help ensure the quality of self-paced online learning. The findings of the study have highlighted the indispensable role of the design of the online environment itself. The majority of the participants showed high satisfaction with the way content and evaluation were structured to improve students' teaching skills. Our current research findings are pretty much in line with past studies. For instance, Poquet et al. (2018) reviewed 178 empirical studies published from 2007–2017. The findings of the review give a preliminary synopsis of the influences of videos on various learning consequences, including the impact of manipulating video presentations, learning tasks, and well-structured and communicated content. The participants were so fulfilled by the variety of online learning materials, such as videos, articles, and case studies, which positively contribute to the quality of students' online learning experiences. For the participants, quality in online education is linked to having short videos to watch, short articles to read, and short case studies to analyze plus quizzes and tests to complete after each online session. The current study's findings are pretty much in line with Clark (2002) who stated in *Myths in E-learning* that the effectiveness of e-learning "all depends on the quality of the designed content" (p. 599), suggesting that the content of e-learning should be more "meaningful, distinct, vivid, organized and personal" (p.601) to increase students' retention.

B. Trainer's facilitation skills

The research's results reveal the paramount importance of a trainer's facilitation skills in online learning. The participants associated quality online learning with the trainer's ways of facilitating the training process online. They showed so much satisfaction with the way the trainer starts each online session by presenting the concept in real-life contexts, followed by examples and questions. Interviewees were hooked especially by the demo lessons presented by the trainer followed by observation checklists and short quizzes to complete. They felt

engaged and part of the training process thanks to the clear communication between the trainer and TESOL participants. This present study's findings are in line with the previous research. Hattie and Timperley research, "Power of Feedback," found that online learning might integrate both written and audio-visual materials to provide content; yet, communication and feedback remain very essential between the teacher and his students. The present study shows that the trainer's presence makes online learning less distant and more engaging. Similarly, Donnelly's research in 2013 on "the role of PBL tutor within blended academic development" concluded that students appreciated online teachers who are constantly present and active in discussions and exercises (Donnelly, 2013, p. 138). Added to that, Samat et al. (2020) sustained the above studies that online platforms which boost social learning are found useful to enhance learning engagement between instructors and learners and learners. In contrast to the teacher's presence in facilitating online sessions, Anderson et al. (2001) argued that students favored their peers to facilitate online discussions rather than asking instructors to lead discussions. Seo's research in 2007 held the same view, emphasizing that more interaction is assured when online discussions are led by classmates rather than teachers.

- **Negative impact**

A. Quality of audio-visual materials

Several participants were not at ease with both the length and quality of some audio-visual materials. They enjoyed watching the videos' content, but the quality of the sound and image distorted the beauty of learning in this self-paced course. This gives a good hint that the content is meaningful, authentic, and engaging. However, more improvement should be given to videos and lessons should be recorded by professional cameras used by professional cameramen, as suggested by the majority of the respondents.

B. Technical issues

Several participants complained about the accessibility of Google Classroom's platform. Thus, they suggested using other online platforms such as Canvas. But what is interesting about their feedback is the suggestion of including live meetings weekly with the trainer either via Zoom or Google Meet to discuss their progress and get feedback on their assignments.

C. Delay of feedback

According to the study's results, the majority were not satisfied with the delayed feedback. Some interviewees showed disappointment about delayed feedback, while others admitted they never got it from the course trainer. It is clear-cut that the huge number of participants—more than 1000 students participated in online—was the major reason why some did not get any feedback at all while others got delayed one. This point suggests that the online course should be managed not only by one trainer but also by other assistant trainers, especially when it comes to giving feedback or grading assignments. The findings of the research give much importance to the feedback and the crucial role it plays in boosting learning outcomes. The present study's results go pretty well with the past studies that emphasized the central role immediate feedback plays in meeting students' learning needs (Kehrer, Kelly, & Heffernan, 2013). Other research findings

by Lemley, Sudweeks, Howell, Laws, & Sawyer, in 2007 held the same conclusions about how important feedback is, mainly when students make mistakes. Yasaei (2016) discovered in his study, "The Effect of Immediate vs. Delayed Oral Corrective Feedback on the Writing Accuracy of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners," that both immediate and delayed feedback was effective. They encouraged students to use the target language more accurately.

RQ3: What should be done to improve the TESOL self-paced courses?

A. Quality of audio-visual materials

The present study reveals that the majority enjoyed studying the online course; yet, they suggested that both the length and quality of the images and sounds should be given another thought. TESOL participants found it tough to spend more than 30 minutes in front of the screen watching the lesson and doing exercises. Some found it very stressful as long videos will consume the quality of the internet connectivity. They insisted on shortening the videos to no more than 5 or 10 minutes. This aligns with Fiorella and Mayer (2018), who suggested two major techniques to develop learning outcomes with instructional video: the first is segmenting, which means breaking a video into smaller and more meaningful segments with learner control, while the second is a mixed perspective, which refers to filming from a mix of a first-person and third-person perspective.

B. Using other online platforms

The TESOL students made it clear that Google Classroom is not a very fruitful online platform. They suggested combining Google Classroom with Zoom or Google Meet. In other words, they defined quality in online learning as combining Google Classroom with the other platforms mentioned above to boost social interaction between the trainer and his students.

Overall, my research concluded that self-paced online TESOL courses are a new mode of education in Morocco, getting popularity exclusively during and after COVID-19. The majority of participants expressed their satisfaction while embarking on the FREE 35-hour online TESOL course. However, some participants had negative experiences due to several factors, mainly the length of the videos, the delay in feedback, and the absence of interaction between the trainer and participants.

6. Conclusion

It is worth noting that the self-paced TESOL online course, designed by senior trainer Lhoussine Qasserras and provided by the American TESOL Academy is the first in Morocco after COVID-19. The findings reveal that today Moroccan students are eager to enroll in and study online courses thanks to their variety of choices and benefits.

Students' evaluation of the quality of online self-paced courses reveals that students generally have positive opinions about this mode of learning. Key factors contributing to the high quality of these courses include well-designed course content, trainer's contribution, user-friendly technology, and flexible scheduling. Students also appreciate the opportunities for self-directed learning and the ability to work at their own pace. However, some students also

expressed concerns about the lack of interaction with instructors and peers, and the need for self-discipline to stay on track. I believe that the findings of this study do not fully reflect the students' perceptions and experiences in online self-paced learning programs, as the experiences were generalized and the differences of such experiences may differ across subjects.

Overall, the findings suggest that self-paced online TESOL courses can provide high-quality language learning experiences, but further improvements are necessary to improve student engagement and provide a more well-rounded online learning experience. Further research is needed to gauge the actual student perceptions of self-paced online learning programs on individual subjects as well as develop data on the actual efficacy of such programs based on individual subjects. Based on the suggestions by Muilenburg and Berge (2005), future research needs to focus on the effects of program administration, social interactions, student academic skills, self-rated online learning technical skills, time and support for studies, related costs and access to the internet, and prejudicial treatment in traditional classes on the individual student's perception and experiences in online self-paced learning programs.

To conclude, the findings of this present research provide valuable insights into the students' evaluation of the effectiveness of self-paced online TESOL courses and can be used to boost the design and delivery of these online courses. The findings highlight that while self-paced online TESOL courses have several gains, there is still a need to address the challenges identified in this study to confirm that they continue to provide high-quality instructions and support student academic success.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Lhoussine Qasserras is a senior trainer and TESOL specialist at the American TESOL Academy in Morocco. He held two masters: MBA from Cardiff Metropolitan University and MEd from Rabat Mohammed V University. His PhD on quality education is in progress. His areas of interest are quality education, TESOL/TEFL, and online education.

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