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Distance Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic in Morocco: Perceptions of Teachers from Kenitra Directorate

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to present the idea of distance learning as a basic solution to develop the educational level in Moroccan schools during COVID-19 pandemic, in order to elevate it to the highest levels to keep pace with the tremendous technological development and to identify obstacles to distance learning in general in Morocco. The sample of the study consisted of 25 male and female teachers in Moroccan public schools, specifically in Kenitra Directorate during the COVID-19 pandemic in the academic year 2020/2021. A short questionnaire was built to collect data from the study sample that included 11 items. The questionnaire was used to illicit teachers' perceptions about distance learning and to see the extent to which teachers are ready to work with new technological tools and keep in touch with their students. Based on the results of the study, the researchers recommend a set of recommendations, including the necessity of providing the infrastructure, which is represented in providing the material as well as technical requirements for using effective distance learning.

Keywords: *Distance Learning, Moroccan Schools, COVID-19 Pandemic, Teachers' Perceptions*

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1. Introduction

This article addresses the issue of distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic. There is incorporation of the ICT tools into institutions during COVID-19 pandemic, using not only applications, but also a variety of programs. School teachers make extensive use of the internet by giving different group of students' tasks to solve together around the computer. Some students are highly motivated to engage in work at the computer because of their mastery and enjoyment of the technology. This enjoyment motivates some students to read challenging materials and to take risks in their writing. However, other students were demotivated to engage in work at the computer because of their low mastery and enjoyment of technology. Their demotivation result in less education.

1.1 Distance Learning

¹Distance Learning also known as distance education, e-learning and online learning is a type of education in which teachers and students are physically separated during instruction and various

technologies are used to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication. Since the National Charter of Education and Training was adopted in 1999, distance education has been used. Many attempts have been made since then in terms of logistics and implementation. Nonetheless, the influx of COVID-19 cases in Morocco at the start of March compelled the Moroccan Ministry of Education to officially adopt distance learning. Google Classroom, institutional e-mails, Zoom, Facebook, and officially WhatsApp are examples of distance education platforms. It may include live lessons, recorded lessons, and assignments that have been posted.

1.2 Distance Learning in Moroccan Context

²The Council of Government approved **draft decree No.2.20.474** on distance learning which was submitted by Said Amzazi, Minister of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research and the government's official spokesman. According to a statement issued by the Government Council, this project was

approved “in accordance with the requirements of **Framework Law No. 51.17** related to the education, training and scientific research system, especially the **provisions of Article 33** of it, which stipulates the development of distance learning as a complement to in-person learning.” Minister Amzazi explained that this draft decree was prepared to create a legal framework to define the conditions and modalities for providing distance learning for the benefit of learners in educational institutions, schools, vocational and university training in both the public and private sectors. This project essentially provides a specific definition of distance learning and its types, as well as identifying the parties involved in providing it in the public and private sectors, as well as defining the conditions, controls, and how to provide distance learning, as well as the spaces and headquarters in which it will take place. The project also specifies how to prepare audio-visual digital resources for distance learning, define the learner's rights and duties associated with distance learning, as well as educational, formative, administrative, and technical frameworks, and subject the latter to special distance learning training. In this context, the Ministry of National Education decided to establish a national committee and regional committees to monitor, develop, and evaluate distance learning, while also defining its composition and meeting format. Morocco had adopted distance education for the first time following the decision to suspend studies in all educational institutions; the Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education, and Scientific Research has developed a digital platform for distance education as part of the measures to contain the emerging “Corona” virus. This procedure was viewed as the beginning of a process that had long been a demand of much sensitivity in Morocco. However, due to a lack of necessary equipment, it was not activated until Morocco was forced to do so in order to save the school year at the start of the school year in March 2020.

1.3 The Ministry of Education and Distance Learning

³In Morocco, the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, and Scientific Research launched ‘**TelmidTICE**’, a distance e-learning mobile application that contain lessons that correspond to the national curriculum and the pedagogical hierarchy of various

subjects and study levels, and allows students to track their lessons at a time and place that suits their desires, capabilities and circumstances.

According to the Ministry, the application's launch "comes in order to ensure continuous pedagogical achievement through the distance education mechanism based on the wishes expressed by parents, and to achieve the advancement of this pedagogical mechanism, and its renewal to ensure a safe academic achievement that preserves the safety of students in light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic."

According to the statement, the new application improves the Ministry's distance education educational pattern, which was implemented in response to the pandemic, and it is represented in video educational lessons broadcast on national television channels, digital platforms, as well as interactive virtual sections, and it is distinguished by its speed in transferring and sharing knowledge, and educational advancements. It also has smart indexing, which makes it easier for students to obtain the knowledge they need, as well as a feature of continuous updating for each study subject, which allows each user to communicate and share developments.

Due to the country's alarming epidemiological situation, which has resulted in a significant increase in the number of deaths, the Ministry decided to adopt "distance education" as an educational formula at the start of the school season 2021-2020, which began on September 7 last.

In addition to the adoption of distance education, “attended education” was provided to learners whose parents indicated a preference for this formula, and the Ministry stated that “at any station of the school season, the approved educational formula can be adapted at the local or regional level in coordination with the local health authorities.”

Many questions have been raised about the effectiveness of distance education in Morocco since it was implemented in response to the Corona virus outbreak, especially since there was no prior planning for this step.

1.4 Distance Learning and COVID-19 Pandemic

Morocco was one of the first countries to declare a health emergency in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the Ministry of Education has made a number of television channels, radio



stations, smart phones, and platforms available to the student community as of March 16th, 2020. Following the closure of all schools and universities, this situation immediately resulted in the suspension of all preparatory courses. As a result, students were compelled, despite their lack of preparation, to engage in a new learning process. Since the beginning of the lockdown, the Ministry of Education has been extremely responsive to students' learning needs. The latter has responded by making all necessary learning tools available and making the necessary efforts given the timing of the process's implementation. However, one can question students' level of acceptance, involvement, and satisfaction with this new learning pattern. Indeed, as a result of the various measures, Moroccan university students quickly realized that the lockdown period is not a vacation, but rather an opportunity to continue their studies and courses through a new process: distance learning, which has kept the students away from the support of their teachers. Undeniably, many questions arose during the lockdown's first two weeks, via social media networks, about the quality of distance learning and students' perceptions of this new approach, as well as the future of teaching and learning (Rahali et al, 2020. p. 1).

In light of the recent use of virtual modes in universities, there have been few studies that investigate whether distance learning affects students' grades. The benefits of teaching via distance classes are often obvious, particularly in terms of student access and availability, but there are some drawbacks. Traditional learning methods do not allow students to develop socialization and interpersonal skills. For students, the daily interaction with the university and peers that aids in the development of professionalism may be lost (Gossenheimer, 2017. p.1).

Understanding the potential impact on academic performance and academic achievement of students' distance learning experiences is critical. According to some studies, distance education has a positive impact.

According to research, cognitive factors such as learning experiences, academic performance, and distance learning formats are comparable to those observed for university-based classes. However, perceptions and levels of satisfaction among distance education

professors and students have not been consistent. Access to materials, interaction between students and professors, time management, and cost are all factors that may influence the opinions of distance education participants (Gossenheimer, 2017. p. 2).

1.5 Tools for Distance Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

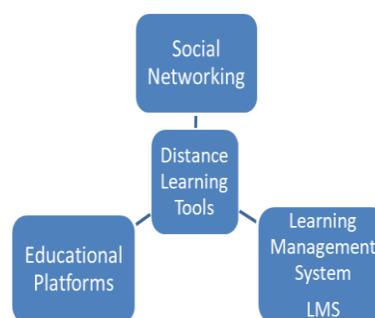


Figure 1: Tools for Distance Learning

Table: 1 Tools and platforms of Distance Learning

Social Networking	Chatgroup, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, Hangouts, FB, Google docs, Wiki
Learning Management System	Synchronous and Asynchronous Platforms, Live meetings
Educational Platforms	Coursera, MIT, Edx, Future Learn, Udacity, Open 2 study

Students who are comfortable with technology will find these distance learning tools extremely motivating. Students should be given the opportunity to take advantage of new technological advances as they progress through their academic careers. Access to a wide range of technologies, including computer-assisted instruction, interactive video, CD-ROM, the internet, electronic mail, and the World Wide Web, will benefit students to improve linguistic skills and establish interactions with peers (Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 1996, p. 31).

Distance learning in Morocco has been an attempt to continue education without interruption, even after the closure of schools and universities, with a slightly adjusted grading scale in order to continue the academic year. It is important to note that the government has taken some initiatives, such as providing free access to a few platforms, national channels, and official pages of the Ministry of education, namely 'TelmidTICE'. It should be noted that during COVID-19, Morocco's distance learning faced challenges ranging from

content and pedagogy to assessment and evaluation (Bachiri & Sahli, 2020. p. 240).

After March 16, 2020, the Moroccan educational platform 'TelmidTICE.ma' was used to improve the numerical educational content. Among the procedures demanded by the Moroccan Ministry of Education were the establishment of virtual classrooms and the enrollment of students in these platforms. In fact, this process had many pitfalls in terms of technology literacy, let alone the lack of distance learning process objectives. Distance learning in Morocco includes virtual classes via TEAMS, video conferences, e-learning, internet sites, self-evaluation, and interactive relationships (Oussama Hamdouch, 2020, p. 90-91).

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted in order to have an idea about teachers views on distance learning, to measure the workability of distance learning with different school subjects, to promote the use of distance learning at primary, middle-school, and high school levels and finally to seek whether teachers adopt this new paradigm in their teaching.

1.7 Research Questions

1. What are the obstacles that teachers encountered using distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the advantages of distance learning from teachers' points of view?
3. What are the teachers' suggestions to improve distance learning in public schools?

2. Methodology & Findings

Concerning the procedures that are taken to implement this research, they include the instrument, the population, and data collection. As regards the instrument, a questionnaire was designed using Google Form Application. The questionnaire was sent to teachers via Emails, and WhatsApp groups. The latter was sent to 40 public school teachers working in both urban as well as rural areas, but only 25 teachers responded. When it comes to the population, we used random sampling for selecting teachers. The age of urban and rural teachers ranged from 20 to 50 years old. They are all B.A teachers. Those teachers teach different school subjects, namely English, French, Arabic, Sport, Math, Physics, Islamic Education, History and Geography, Science and Informatics. The data collected is mainly about teachers' views on delivering online courses using distance learning

paradigm, investigating their ability or inability to promote this new paradigm.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of the Teachers

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	09	36%
Female	16	64%
Total	25	100%

From the table above N° 1 we can see that the number of females exceeds the number of males. We find that females are 16 with a percentage of 64% from the respondent population, whereas males are 9 and represent a percentage of 36% which means that females are the dominant gender in this study.

Table 3: Age Distribution of the Teachers

Age	Number	Percentage
20-30	10	40%
30-40	10	40%
40-50	05	20%
More than 50	00	00%
Total	25	100%

In table the majority of the respondents were between 20 and 40 years old with a percentage of 40%. The least percentage 20% represented by those aging between 40 and 50 years. The category aging between 20 and 30 years refers to young teachers who have recently joined the sector of education. The second category is of those between 30 and 40 years, most of them are young adults, meaning that they have some years of working experiences. The third category of those aged between 40 and 50 years represents experts in the domain of education with long experience who can offer guidance and advice.

Table 4: Working Place of Teachers by Location of Schools

School Location	Number	Percentage
Rural areas	10	40%
Urban areas	15	60%
Total	25	100%

The table above shows the working place of the respondents by their school location. We find that 60% of teachers work in urban areas, while 40% work in rural areas. The results reveal that the numbers of teachers who work in urban areas represent the majority in this study.

Table 5: Distribution of Teachers According to the Level they teach

Level	Number	Percentage
Primary	3	12%
Middle School	18	72%
High school	4	16%
Total	25	100%



Table indicates the levels taught by respondent teachers, namely primary, middle-school and high school. For primary level, respondents are 12%, and for middle-school we have 72%, while for high school there are 16%. Both levels of primary and high school represent a minority in the study population, while middle school level represents the highest percentage. This high percentage can be explained as an indicator of secondary school teachers' interest in the subject matter of this research.

Table 6: Tools & Means Used by Teachers in Distance Learning

Tools	Respondents' Answers	Percentage
Telmid Tice	10	14%
Microsoft Teams	10	14%
Google Classroom	-	0%
WhatsApp	25	36%
Facebook	20	29%
E-mail	5	7%
Others	-	0%
Total	70	100%

In the light of table, interactive courses through social networks; WhatsApp and Facebook were the dominant tools used by teachers to ensure the teaching process continuity with a percentage of 36% with WhatsApp, and 29% with Facebook. For Platforms Telmid Tice was used with a percentage of 14% and Microsoft teams was used with a percentage of 14%. Some teachers referred to E-mail exchange with their students with a percentage of 7% while no tools were used like Google Classroom.

Table 7: Teachers' Satisfaction with Distance Learning

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	7	28%
No	18	72%
Total	25	100%

The table above illustrates the degree of teachers' satisfaction with their teaching experience within distance learning. It is clear that 72% of teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with their teaching in distance learning, while 28% were satisfied with their experience of teaching in distance learning.

Table 8: Distance Learning in Future and Teachers' Motivation

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	8	32%
No	7	28%
Perhaps	10	40%
Total	25	100%

Table indicates teachers' degree of motivation to adopt distance learning in the future. 40% of respondents expressed their motivation to work with distance learning

paradigm in the future using the option of 'perhaps' adding a condition of provision of technological equipment to reason their answers. Furthermore, 32% responded with yes justifying their choice in their will to diversify their modes of teaching. Others chose 'no' with a percentage of 28%, which means that they are no longer motivated to work with distance learning as a mode of teaching.

Table 9: The Advantages of Distance Learning

Response	Number	Percentage
More motivation	8	32%
More interaction	7	28%
Clear and easy lesson	4	16%
Autres	6	24%
Total	25	100%

From the table above, the advantages of distance learning which teachers lived during their experience, 32% chose more motivation and 28% selected more interaction of students the percentage of 24% added new elements, mainly more communication with students, diversity of resources, learning with enthusiasm, availability of courses engaging shy students and working at ease. For the rest 16%. They are for the clarity, charity and easiness of lessons.

Table 10: Obstacles in Distance Learning

Response	Number	Percentage
Lack of equipment	8	32%
Lack of students engagement	11	44%
Unfamiliarity with technology	4	16%
Absence of internet connection	1	4%
Added answers	1	4%
Total	25	100%

There are several impediments that impede teachers from offering distance courses, as illustrated in table 10. The first factor is a lack of student participation, which accounts for 44% of the total. The second point is that there is a lack of equipment, which accounts for 32% of the total. Furthermore, 16% of people are unfamiliar with new technology. Finally, 4% cited a lack of an internet connection as a hindrance, while another 4% cited all of them as an impediment.

3. Teachers' Suggestions to Improve Distance Learning in Public Schools

3.1 Suggestions to Improve Distance Learning in Public Schools

- More training in technological tools
- Train teachers to create interactive lessons in special platforms.

- Provide ICT in all schools
- Provide computers plus internet connection
- Provide free connection for poor students
- Create a simple and efficient platform for every body
- Teachers in online learning should give attention not only to excellent students
- Teachers should double their effort to help students to understand their lessons very well.
- Facilitate access to internet and technological tools
- Create well-equipped classrooms in schools for more practice of online courses
- Train teachers on how to teach online (more platforms and Apps that can be used)

4. Discussion of the Findings

Based on the results of this research study, deductions that are possible to make are as follows:

Owing to the participants in this qualitative research, we have gathered a rich data embodied in 25 respondent teachers. Thus, we can notice that the majority of the respondents are females which mean that they do not hesitate to offer their help as well as their interest in the subject matter of this research. For the age, participants between 20 and 40 years old make the greatest number among the participants. Therefore, we can say that young and young adults represent a sense of motivation, enthusiasm and energy, which are good characteristics of this new generation of teachers. Also, this mixture of participants with different age creates a sense of harmony and exchange of experience especially from those teachers whose age is between 40 and 50 years. The school location, whether in rural or urban areas, gives this study balance in terms of teachers' working conditions in Moroccan public schools. Also, for the levels they teach, help us gather a holistic view of different school education levels; however the number of participants from primary and high school levels were not very high to the extent to make a generalization of results.

Another element that plays an important role in this study is the tools and means used by teachers during the pandemic in distance learning. The majority confirmed their use of social networks, such as WhatsApp and Facebook because both teachers and students are familiar with those Apps; they found them easy and accessible to their students. While other teachers resorted to institutional platforms mainly 'TemidTice' and Microsoft Teams as an ultimate solution to keep in touch with their

students and to ensure the continuity of the learning and teaching process.

Teachers' satisfaction after this experience of distance learning during the pandemic. More than half of the respondents expressed their non-satisfaction of their experience in delivering a distant course because of many reasons; like having no previous experience in distance learning, adopting distance learning as an abrupt decision of the Ministry of Education and unfamiliarity with technological tools. Therefore, teachers were unsatisfied of their first experience and they believe they could have offered more. Meanwhile, some teachers believe that they did their best in distance learning and expressed their satisfaction of this experience may be because they faced no troubles.

According to participants, distance learning can be used as complementary to traditional learning in the future. The majority expressed their good intentions towards working within distance learning paradigm underlying some necessary conditions, such as having necessary technological equipment at work, plus having opportunity to training sessions on the use of platforms and ICT in general.

Many teachers are convinced that distance learning advantages on learning process are numerous in relation to their first experience. Many of our respondents agree that motivation is the prominent advantage on the list. After, we have interaction between teachers and students, clarity of lessons. While other teachers were able to add other strong points to the list of advantages, which is a good initiative.

Nothing is perfect, especially when it is the first time distance learning came to existence in Moroccan public schools. The majority had a problem with students' engagement that means that students were not able to follow their lessons with distance learning because of many reasons to be investigated in another research. Also, lack of equipment, computers and internet connection in schools, plus teachers' unfamiliarity with the new technology were the common challenges that made it difficult for teachers to work at ease during the pandemic.

4.1 Recommendations

From the previous analysis of this research study results we suggest the following recommendations:

1. Providing necessary technological tools in all schools in both urban and rural areas including free network connection.



2. There must be more training programs in ICT, plus in the use of platforms for teachers of all levels.
3. Creating digital libraries with free access to students.
4. Encouraging teachers to create new interactive lessons.
5. Establishing program awareness campaigns for students as well as parents and teachers via conferences, media and official documents to adopt distance learning in Moroccan educational system.
6. Introducing the learning of informatics at an early age in primary level.

5. Conclusion

Morocco, like all other nations impacted by the Covid-19 epidemic, has adopted a number of restrictions aimed at preventing the coronavirus's dramatic spread as part of a prevention and anticipation program. Several directions and activities have been implemented in the sphere of education to deal with the ramifications of this pandemic. The goal of this case study research is not only to identify the flaws in our Moroccan educational system, but also to pave the way for future research to shed light on teachers' attitudes toward distance learning and their willingness to work with it in the future, as well as to rehabilitate public schools to keep up with the rapid growth of technology. The Ministry of Education, schools, and families must all work together to make this distance learning paradigm a successful and rewarding experience not only today, but also in the future following the COVID-19 pandemic.

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