Chapter 12
Student and Teacher Assessment of Digital Education During the COVID–19 Pandemic and After:
The Case of Cadi Ayad and Sultan Moulay Slimane Universities

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 spread through the entire world and has automatically changed student and teacher perceptions of the entire educational system. This serious pandemic has totally affected students and teachers in their diverse pedagogical tasks. It was therefore important to cope with the far-reaching implications of the virus at the educational level. Obviously, those tremendous implications and changes have given us a glimpse at how the whole system of education could actually change for the better or worse. Most governments around the world have taken swift decisions in order to mitigate the impact of this dangerous and full blown pandemic. Like the rest of the world, the Moroccan government opted for the online education as an alternative to secure a good education for thousands and thousands of students in urban and rural areas. Distance education has completely revolutionized the Moroccan society. Surely, after the pandemic, the students are free to opt for the kind of learning that suits their own interests.

DISTANCE LEARNING AS AN ALTERNATIVE IN THE MOROCCAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Suddenly within a matter of weeks, (COVID 19) spread through the entire world and has completely changed how students are educated. Obviously, those tremendous changes give us a glimpse at how the

whole system of education could change for the better or the worse in the long run. With the coronavirus spreading quickly across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa as well as the United States, governments have taken swift and some decisive actions in order to ward off the danger and to mitigate the impact of a dangerous and full blown pandemic. In the whole world, there have been diverse announcements suspending attendance at schools and universities. In March, 2020, most schools and universities in Morocco were closed and the government opted for distance learning as an alternative to secure a good education for the majority of students in both rural and urban areas and to save lives. Yet, digital education proved to be effective for those who have access to the internet and turned out to be useless for those who live in rural areas as they do not have access to the internet at all. Morocco like other countries has tried to come up with some measures to help students and professors to instill an inviting learning environment by providing certain virtual learning platforms like moodle, miscrosoft teams to initially enhance the contact between the two and to exchange lessons and assignments on line. Surely, Morocco is a huge geographical landscape and the quality of learning depends heavily on both the level and the quality of digital access. Nowadays, more than 60 percent of the globe's population use the diverse sophisticated technological means to communicate, to learn foreign languages and to do business. In Morocco, there is a huge discrepancy between social classes. Hence, only wealthy families can benefit from the sophisticated digital platforms to secure a good education for their children. In some private universities and schools in Morocco, a whole range of material is delivered on line. Virtual classes on personal tablets may be the norm in some urban areas in the country. Yet, many students in poor rural areas are denied such a privilege. At this stage, one may wonder what does distance education mean in the first place? What are its advantages and drawbacks? To what extent has Morocco been able to implement the digital system in its diverse schools and universities? Are professors and students really satisfied with digital education? These are some of the questions that must be addressed and dealt with in this study. After all, one of the main objectives of this conceptual and empirical study is to come up with some pertinent results concerning the impact of distance learning on the whole educational system in Morocco and to show whether the country is ready to opt for the digital education at the detriment of the traditional face to face learning. The data presented in this study reflects the university professors and students remarks concerning the flexibility and importance of distance learning.

Before presenting the data gathered in this empirical study, it is crucial to define the concept and see how it is different from other types of learning. Distance education is completely different from the traditional face to face learning. The term "Distance learning" or "Distance education" has been the target of different critical studies. The concept seems to be open to different interpretations and cannot therefore be pinned down to one particular approach or perspective. In their illuminating article, "Distance Education: Definition and Overview", the authors strongly argue that the term "Distance Education" has never been clearly defined. The concept was rather used interchangeably with phrases like "education by correspondence" Historically speaking, there have been several attempts to define the term in simple and straightforward words. A good definition is surely provided by Zigerell (1984:10) who states that distance learning or education is a type of instruction that is essentially marked by "the physical separation of teacher from student, except for the occasional face to face meeting allowed for by some projects". (p.10). To further back up his approach, Zigerell (1984) points out that there is "a difference between presupposes opportunities for student interaction whether live or mediated, as well as for student independence." (p.14). Still, Wedemeyer (1983) defines distance education taking into account the role of the learning. According to him, distance learning essentially entails the "learning undertaken in a transactional relationship with educational programs and institutions, but entered into

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