E-learning in Morocco: Now and beyond

The impact of Covid19 on the future of Education

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Across the world, schools have been shut down for weeks, even months on end. Making things worse, no one is sure when schools will be able to operate as the coronavirus pandemic shows no sign of lessening any time soon. In Morocco, students are currently under national lockdown and therefore the second semester has been postponed since the outbreak of the pandemic calling on students to stay at home as teaching is undertaken remotely. Again, very important sectors are forced to embrace remote working to keep the pace steady. As far as education is concerned, an alternative way of learning is being adopted. Thus, the ministry of education in Morocco encouraged schools to use an online platform called Microsoft Teams and launched a daily program of lessons broadcasted on TV for students to study at home.

Teachers as well have made great efforts to launch an e-learning class for their students to follow their teachers' lessons and assignments at home. Some of them are conducting online classes through a video web conferencing app called, Zoom while others are delivering lessons through possible available means such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Google Meet, hangouts …etc.

Elementary, middle, and high school students are not going to join classes till the beginning of September as end-term exams have been delayed except for baccalaureate Exams which are taking place in July. University students are also preparing to engage in online learning for the rest of the school year. By using different digital software and online platforms, it enables college students to complete assignments, deliver presentations, and take quizzes. MA thesis defenses will be carried out online whereas Ph.D. defenses are put off to a later date. However, teachers as well as students have concerns surrounding internet access and any weaknesses that the system may have compared to face-to-face learning.

Indeed, Morocco has embarked on a tech educational model since schools have been closed to maintain education continuity and at the same time keep students busy learning at home until we feel it is safe for schools to operate. Yet, as promised, schools

and Universities will reopen after summer is over. Bearing in mind that schools and students face unprecedented challenges in the wake of the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the back-to-school season will be quite different as new measures are to be taken to put things on track again through an urgent in-learning plan.

Before the outbreak of Covid19, Morocco has already launched several programs aiming at digitizing the educational system though those programs are not pervasive across the country and they are carried out at a slower pace. To initiate such an approach in Teaching, the ministry of education has launched several training courses within GENIE program "Generalization of Information and Communication Technologies in Education" through which teachers will be acquainted with manipulating Microsoft Office software and interactive boards and enhance their skills in the digital domain. With the aim of allowing students to master digital tools, many schools have been equipped with digital materials. Along with this digitation, an online platform called "Massar" which is based on Excel software was created to implement technology in the ongoing assessment process. This integrated assessment system has created much fuss

among teachers as many of them are still intimidated by the use of technology.

The Challenges of Remote Learning During quarantine

It is obvious that Covid19 has pushed education authorities in Morocco to take action and provide an alternative way to sustain pedagogical continuity. This decision has been wisely made and parents and educators have appreciated the initiative. Educators across the country are innovating to find new ways of reaching their students using social-media tools and applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, zoom, to name a few. However, shifting to an online model of teaching quickly and with limited resources and tools has brought with it a bunch of challenges. This major shift has forced teachers with little media literacy to teach online. Again, the majority of teachers are not qualified enough to utilize technology-based materials. Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning; this gap has been experienced many times especially in rural areas. The gap is also significant between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds. Though many students are familiar with

using different media in their daily lives, they rarely use them for education. Most of them have troubles logging in to online platforms suggested by the ministry of education. On top of this, some other students don't own computers or even phones. They have to borrow one of their parents' phones if their parents are around. So students find it difficult to attend all classes. Needless to say, even those who are attending classes, are mostly distracted by some technical hatches they encounter once in a while. Other problems related to organization and discipline are highly frequent during online classes.

Like all learning models, distant learning does have some inherent problems, especially in the areas of isolation, support, technology, planning, organization and discipline.

The scope of distance learning After Covid19

With this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe including Morocco, some people are wondering whether the adoption of distant learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a move would impact the education sector in Morocco. It's too early to identify any particular impact as sufficient data is not available across the country. However, we have witnessed a great interest in engagement in using ICT for online teaching and learning. Thereby, we speculate that the education policy will be considered entirely in the light of the challenges faced amid this pandemic. There should be an urgent call for full implementation of a technology-based model across all institutions as well as across all subjects. Yet, the teacher should be at the heart of those considerations because no gadget can replace a human touch in education. The latter is much more than offering knowledge. Despite the ongoing success, there are certain things that simply can't be replaced by distance learning. That's why; face-to-face instruction is highly substantial in the building of the students' character. Yet, ICT should be implemented in the classroom to boost students' critical thinking skills and prepare them for the real modernized world. With that, a hybrid model should be established on solid grounds in order to maintain and sustain a tech approach that is feasible in the real classroom.

Conclusion:

Moroccan schools and institutions started offering courses online to ensure education was not disrupted by quarantine measures. Technologies involved in distant learning are similar to those used for remote work. So continuing education through alternative learning pathways, as soon as possible, must also be a top priority right now, to ensure that education is less interrupted. We urgently need to support teachers, parents, innovators, superintendents, communications experts and all those who are positioned to provide education, whether through radio programs, home-schooling, online learning and other innovative approaches. Once the pandemic is over, authorities have to consider those challenges and figure out consistent ways how to accelerate integrating ICT in education and no school should fall behind. Again teachers and educators should be highly trained to gain the skills of the 21st century. By doing so, new visions will be considered as ICT will come to play a substantial part in education.