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Teachers' Perceptions and the Challenges of Online Teaching/Learning in Morocco during Covid-19 Crisis

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Abstract

The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused one of the most extensive school closures worldwide, sending over one billion students home away from their schools, teachers, and classmates. Governments opted for online education to ensure the continuity of learning. Teachers in Morocco have opted for different tech tools and platforms to design and deliver online classes. This study aims to assess the impact and effectiveness of online teaching during the COVID 19 outbreak among teachers in Morocco. Based on the theoretical framework Online Collaborative Learning (OCL), an online survey questionnaire is employed as a data collection instrument. A total of 421 Moroccan teachers from different regions all over Morocco took part in the study. This paper used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyze the collected data and determine the impact and quality of online teaching during the Covid-19 national school closure in Morocco. The results showed that most of the teachers faced numerous technology, training, and socio-economic challenges that acted as barriers to the processes of online education. The findings obtained can be of use in making future decisions concerning the implementation of teaching and learning online programs in Morocco considering the teachers' perspective.

***Keywords**:* challenges, COVID-19, online education, online teaching, Moroccan teachers

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Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic has caused one of the most considerable disruptions of systems all over the world. While this pandemic is primarily affecting public health, spillover effects took place in the education sector too. Education was one of the profoundly disrupted fields affecting almost 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries around the globe (UNESCO, 2020). Due to the highly infectious nature of the disease, governments and world leaders decided to shut down schools and universities in an attempt to slow down the spread of the virus. School closures were considered as some of the most effective measures for social and physical distancing. Many countries in the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa applied nationwide school and university closures to control contact between students and lower the risk of infections.

In Morocco, a national school closure was introduced on March 18, 2020. Since then, all industries, offices (government and private), businesses and academic institutions have been temporarily closed down following the government guidelines. As a result, schools closed for 30 weeks (UNESCO, 2020), shifting to online learning/teaching. This switch was sudden and unprecedented. Thus, new timetables were created, new classroom settings were made, and different tools were adopted. During this time, e-learning tools, such as Zoom, Teams, Skype, etc., played a vital role in helping teachers, schools, and universities ensure the continuity of learning and teaching. These tools have proved to be efficient and adequate. According to other que, E-learning has many advantages for students because it is more flexible and involves student-centeredness (Dhawan, S. 2020).

Indeed, teachers could use many free and smart online tools, from standard text-based documents to different image files, interactive models, and multimedia presentations, to create study materials for various purposes. Moreover, the possibility of demonstrating examples and documenting processes that students would not usually observe in real-life settings is one of the significant advantages of adopting online teaching as a mode of education. Online teaching can also facilitate the testing and assessing students' skills and competencies (Gohl, Gohl, & Wolf, 2009).

However, students and teachers have faced many challenges while teaching and learning from home. Although most studies emphasize positive attitudes toward E-learning, similar studies concluded that students do not believe online courses have the same value as classroom courses (Galy, Downey, Johnson, 2011). In a developing country like Morocco, technical, educational, and socio-economic problems all function as roadblocks to effective teaching and learning. One of the main issues is the absence of any formal teacher training to teach online. Moroccan teachers do not receive training in online education in either the public or private sectors as much as they undergo training that includes ICT use in face-to-face instruction. Internet access is another issue, along with students' demotivation. In addition, there is a literary gap as far as teachers' experiences while teaching online. Thus, there is a need to highlight these experiences to improve online education quality, proving to be a promising model in the post-Corona world.

The current study aims at answering the following research questions:

R.Q1. What are the challenges that Moroccan teachers have faced during COVID 19 crisis time?

R.Q2. What are Moroccan teachers' perceptions towards online teaching?

The research objectives of this paper are:

R.O1. Identifying the experiences of Moroccan teachers in online education and challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

R.O2. Understanding the transitional situation from face-to-face to online teaching and learning in Morocco.

R.O3. Exploring Moroccan teachers' perceptions towards online teaching and learning.

Literature Review

The segment that follows presents previous research in online learning/teaching undertaken during COVID 19 outbreak and several studies related to online education difficulties and educational technology in general.

According to UNESCO (2020), over 1.5 billion students in 165 countries have been affected by the school closing of COVID-19. This applies to 87% of the world's student population. The switch to online education was not entirely abrupt. Countries have been slowly shifting to online or virtual teaching in the last decades (UNESCO, 2020). In a survey commissioned by an education think-tank 'Times Higher Education' on higher learning opportunities from the viewpoint of representatives of major universities all over the world in 2018, some 200 respondents from 45 countries around the six continents pointed to clear fact; online education cannot fit the usual teaching process. However, 63% of representatives expected that by 2030 most prestigious colleges would be offering their fully online courses. There is a shred of solid evidence that technology will completely reshape schools and universities by 2030. While the online education system is seen as comparatively modern, it can only be as effective as school-based approaches (Murphy, 2020). According to Al Shammari(2021):

> "classrooms have been replaced with the virtual and nonlimitative world of technology, which can be significantly modified to respond to the learners' needs and satisfaction. This potential of reaching out to distant geographical spaces has transformed remote teaching into a tremendously welcome opportunity in times of crisis" (p.84)

All students from kindergarten to doctorate level were required to stay home and resume their online learning experiences in the Chinese mainland. This was after the New York Lunar Break ended in January. The pandemic has affected 30 million tertiary learners in over 3000 universities. According to Bao and UNESCO, a plethora of these universities have rushed to create online or virtual classes to fill the anticipated void in adversely affected areas that will last for the remainder of the academic year. Other countries worldwide were trying to find online options for their students because of a travel ban on their return to school. Higher education institutions in other affected countries, such as Italy, Iran, and Singapore, were forced to halt their operations and close their campuses instead of opting for online learning over in-person classes (Bao, 2020). In this regard, Matvienko, Kuzmina, Yamchynska, Kuzmin,& Glazunova (2021) have discussed that "Education that implied much of face-to-face communication and collaboration became an area of

serious concern even in well-developed countries where distance learning had appeared years before the pandemic." (p.137)

To ensure educational continuity, schools and universities have embraced online learning/teaching as an alternative. During such a tough time, the question was not whether online learning/teaching is effective. It was rather how governments would be capable of implementing online learning/teaching on a massive scale at such short notice. The transient nature of the decisions made during this delicate period calls into question the quality of these learning/teaching experiences.

It is a good idea to differentiate between online learning/teaching and Emergency Remote Teaching. According to Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bon, (2020), effective online learning/teaching results from careful preparation and planning, including cautious instructional design. Thus, it is of utter importance that this design follows a systematic way of designing and outlining classes. The emergency shifts that most governments have implemented will be ignoring this thorough planning and training (Hodges et al., 2020). Online learning/teaching can solely be efficient if it is systematic. Online learning/teaching has basically nine elements, according to one of the most comprehensive study summaries. These items are divided into subsequent options, which makes the whole process methodical and precise. Additionally, they are essential since they help instructors navigate their teaching experiences. These nine dimensions vary from modality, pacing, student-instructor ratio, instructor role online, student role online, online communication synchrony, the role of online assessments to a source of feedback (Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014).

In comparison to expected online learning/teaching, Emergency Remote Learning is a sudden shift in instructional delivery to a different mode due to an emergency. To ensure learning consistency, this necessitates the use of entirely remote educational options, which can compromise instructional designs and methods (Hodges et al., 2020). Aside from online learning/teaching quality issues, students and teachers face various challenges when transitioning to online or virtual education. According to Shivangi (2020), Digital innovations are fraught with challenges and problems. That includes installing errors, downloading issues, password problems, audio and video problems, and so on.

What is more, online learning is too flexible, which is a concern because students believe that there is always time to complete their schoolwork. Students find attention to be another big problem of online learning because the interaction is not as natural as it would be in face-to-face classes. Moreover, students mostly need two-way conversations, which can be difficult to enforce at times.

Furthermore, since the learning process cannot be fully understood until students put what they have learned into practice, online content can be all-theoretical at times, making it difficult for students to practice and learn effectively. (Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2004). Students are not sufficiently prepared to manage their careers, families, and social lives in an online or virtual learning environment. Students were also found to be underprepared for a range of e-learning and

academic-type skills. In comparison, students have an insufficient degree of readiness to use Learning Management Programs (Parkes, Stein, & Reading, 2014).

In Saudi Arabia, it was reported that EFL students had faced multiple barriers while learning online. Indeed, respondents complained about academic, technical, and communication challenges. According to the findings, most EFL learners were dissatisfied with their online or virtual learning experiences because they could not meet the required language learning success standards. (Mahyoob, 2020).

Just like students, teachers and instructors have faced several challenges while teaching online. The size of the class is one of the most important considerations when teaching online. The bigger the number, the more challenging teaching becomes. Indeed, as Tomei (2006) reported, a class of only 12 students would use up all of the teachers' time when it comes to preparation and planning. Applying this in the real world, where classes may be as big as 30 or more, it sounds like teachers and instructors encounter severe barriers that could make their online teaching experiences a nightmare. Other scholars have concluded that with every new student enrolment, teachers' workload increases by six hours and 46 minutes (Cavanaugh, 2005).

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to investigate and explore the various experiences, expectations, and challenges that Moroccan teachers have had as a consequence of the abrupt large-scale implementation of virtual or online learning/teaching in the Moroccan educational system. ***The participants*** are 421 school teachers and university professors from different regions all over Morocco. Given the descriptive nature of the study, the quantitative approach was used. ***The procedures*** included a literature review from other internet sources, and we developed a survey questionnaire as a research data collection too*l.* ***The findings*** of this paper revealed that the majority of instructors encountered various technological, training, and socio-economic obstacles that functioned as roadblocks to the processes of online education. The data collected can be used to make future decisions on the deployment of online teaching and learning programs in Morocco, taking into account the instructors' perspectives.

For the study of virtual or online learning/teaching, there are several theoretical frameworks. However, this study considered *BLENDING WITH PURPOSE: THE MULTIMODAL MODEL* the most effective framework. The rationale for using *THE MULTIMODAL MODEL* is to explain better how students, teachers, and educational institutions use technology to teach and learn.

It is worth starting with a definition of "blending" since it is at the core of this framework. Blended learning, according to Picciano (2009), means different things to different people. The term "blended" means a mixture or a hybrid. In 2004, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation financed a workshop on blended learning to develop a global definition of the term "blended learning". On the other hand, participants struggled to come up with a simple definition of blended learning, and the conversation alternated between vague and narrow meanings. In the broadest context, blended learning is described as using a variety of technology and media in conjunction with conventional, face-to-face classroom practices (Figure 1). However, many workshop participants decided to

concentrate on a narrower concept focused on the online aspect that replaced sitting time in the traditional classroom (Figure 2). The question of a broad or narrow concept was explored thoroughly, and the two main elements (face-to-face and online or virtual teaching) were considered crucial to blended learning. One year later, the participants agreed on two definitions in their second workshop. First, blended learning is a set of courses that combine online with conventional face-to-face class experiences in a scheduled, pedagogically helpful manner. Second, blended learning can occur when a part (institutionally defined) of face-to-face time is replaced by online activity (Picciano, 2009).

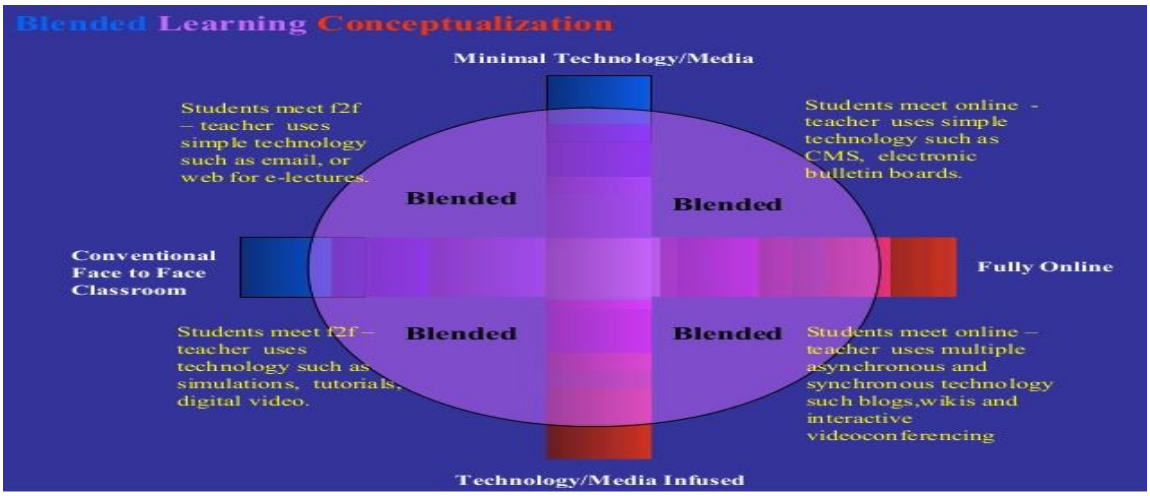

Figure 1. Broad Conceptualization of Blended Learning

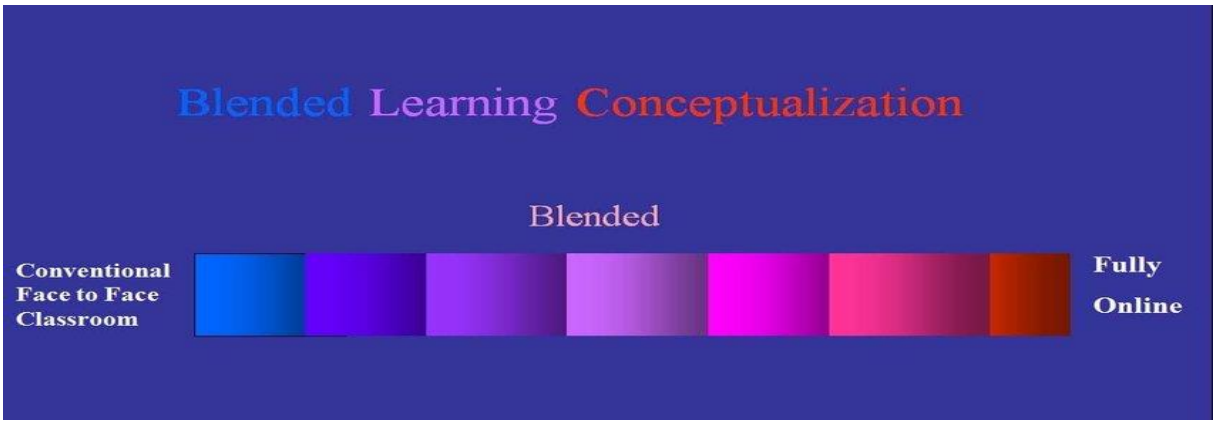

*Figure 2.*Narrow Conceptualization of Blended Learning

The Blending with Purpose model stems from mixed learning technologies, generations, and learning styles. This model provides six primary pedagogical goals and tasks as well as practical approaches to their accomplishment.

Picciano suggests mixing the different elements that constitute the learning and teaching experiences into a specific model (see figure 3 below). This model flows from blended learning technologies, generations, and learning styles. It argues that pedagogical objectives and activities

should be the driving force behind the approaches used while teaching/learning. It also suggests that combining these objectives, activities and approaches in various ways may be most effective and appealing to a wide range of students (Picciano, 2006).

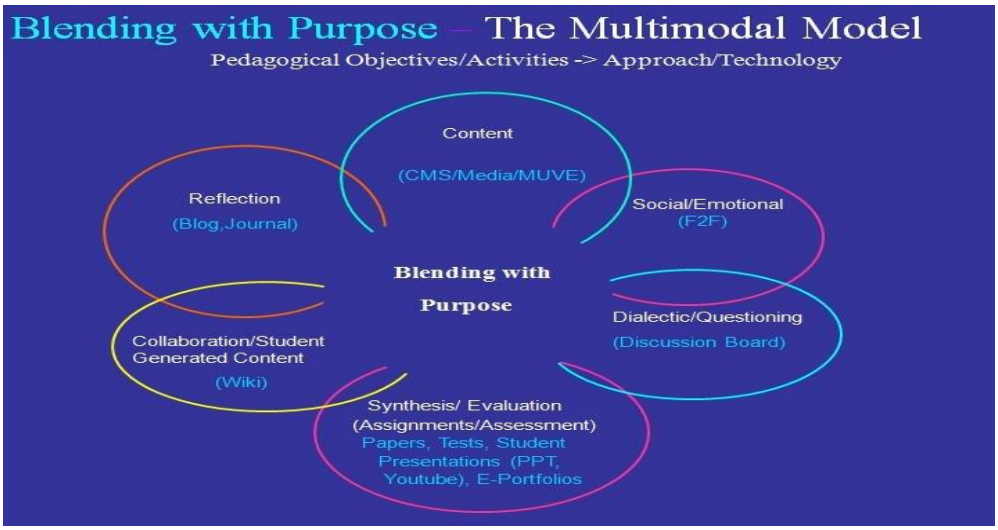

Figure 3. Blending with purpose

Instruments

A descriptive survey questionnaire on Google Forms was developed and conducted. We divided the questionnaire into five sections. The first section dealt with demographic data, while the second section was about online or virtual teaching characteristics. The third section focused on challenges teachers and professors faced; the fourth section was dedicated to students' and class quality. The last part discussed teachers' perceptions, experiences, and training.

We contacted 421 Moroccan teachers and professors from different schools and universities. During the outbreak of the COVID-19 national lockdown, 85.3 percent of these teachers were teaching online classes.

Participants

Moroccan teachers and professors employed in government and/or private schools and universities made up the study's sample. They were contacted through different teachers' and professors' Facebook and WhatsApp groups. 421 school teachers and university professors took part in filling in the survey questionnaire. The population consisted of 58.2% male teachers and professors, while 41.8% were females ranging between 20 to 40 years old.

Findings

The shift from face-to-face to virtual or online classes has been an ordeal for many governments and educational institutions. Online classes have served as a good alternative during the crisis of COVID-19; however, numerous challenges have been encountered by teachers while conducting online classes. These challenges have varied from one context to another, as in the case of the Moroccan context. In this paper, the challenges and the perceptions of virtual or online teaching/learning in Morocco during the pandemic are explored regarding several determinant

variables such as gender, age, place of work, ability to conduct online or virtual classes, and teachers' perceptions towards online education.

Research Question 1 #

What kind of challenges that Moroccan teachers have faced during COVID 19 crisis time?

Participants by gender

Assessing online education in Morocco during the outbreak of COVID 19 revealed significant variations between males and females. Females' participation reached 176 (41.8%), whereas males reached 245 (58.2%) as table 1 and figure 4 show below.

Table1: *Participants by Gender*

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	176	41.8	41.8	41.8
	Male	245	58.2	58.2	100.0
	Total	421	100.0	100.0	

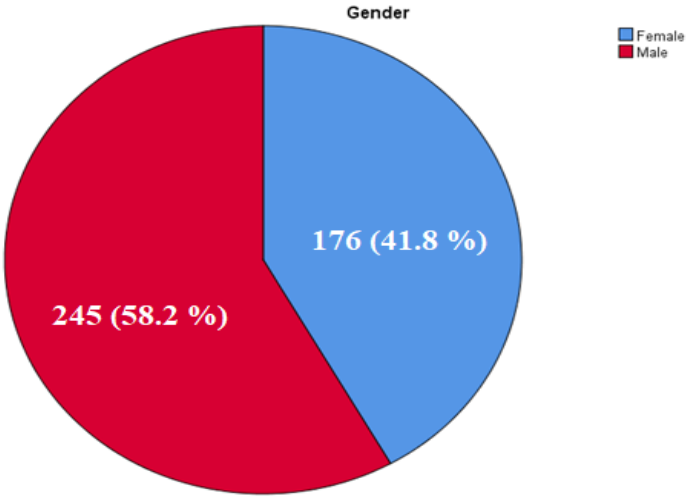

Figure 4: Participants by gender

Participants by age

To explore and investigate the differences between respondents based on age, descriptive statistics (see Table 2) indicate significant variations in which different age groups differ from one another in switching to online or virtual education. Age group 2 (30-40 years old) scored the highest, while the fourth age group (50-60 years old) scored the lowest.

Table 2: *Participants by age*

Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-30	108	25.7	25.7	25.7
	30-40	181	43.0	43.0	68.6
	40-50	91	21.6	21.6	90.3
	50-60	41	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	421	100.0	100.0	

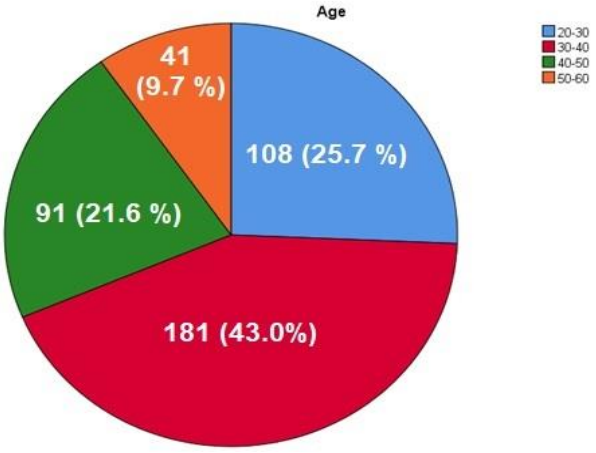

Figure 5: Participants by age

Participants by place of work

Moving to online or virtual education as per the place where teachers work was also explored. The findings revealed that teachers working in urban areas (313) took part in this study more than those (108) in rural ones did.

Table 3: *Participants by place of work*

Place_of_Work					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rural_Area	108	25.7	25.7	25.7
	Urban_Area	313	74.3	74.3	100.0
	Total	421	100.0	100.0	

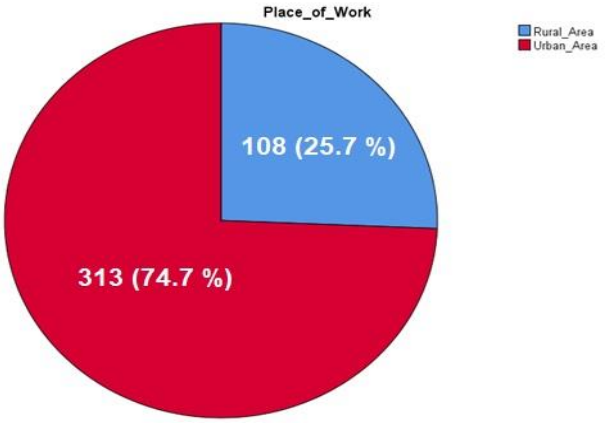

Figure 6: Participants by place of work

The challenges encountered by Moroccan teachers during the Corona crisis

No one can deny that the sudden shift from face-to-face to virtual or online classes experienced particular challenges. About 96.9% of the participant teachers confirmed that they encountered numerous challenges while teaching online during the quarantine. Figure 7 below indicates clearly the major challenges that Moroccan teachers faced. The most prominent challenge was students' inability to afford internet costs (72.7%); the second was students' disinterest in learning online (70.7%), followed by low and slow internet (69.3%). Other challenges are linked to the lack of knowledge regarding technology use for online education, teachers' training to implement technology in their teaching practices, and lack of administrative support to move swiftly to online education.

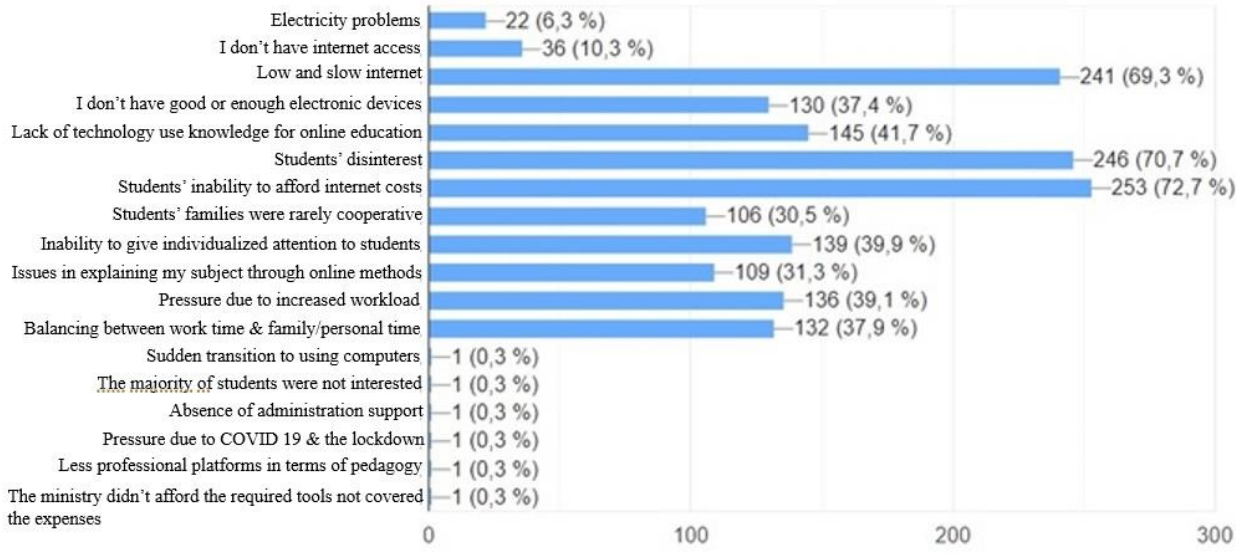

Figure 7: Major challenges encountered by Moroccan teachers

Research Question 2 #

What are Moroccan teachers' perceptions towards online or virtual teaching?

Teachers have expressed mixed opinions as far as their general views on online classes are concerned. 58.9% of the participant teachers thought that their students did not benefit from online classes compared to 33% who were uncertain whether their students have learnt from the courses delivered online (see Figure 8 below). The proof justifies these previously stated views that about 44% of teachers assumed that their students were not committed to attend online classes. In comparison, 53.4% expressed that their students were just somewhat committed.

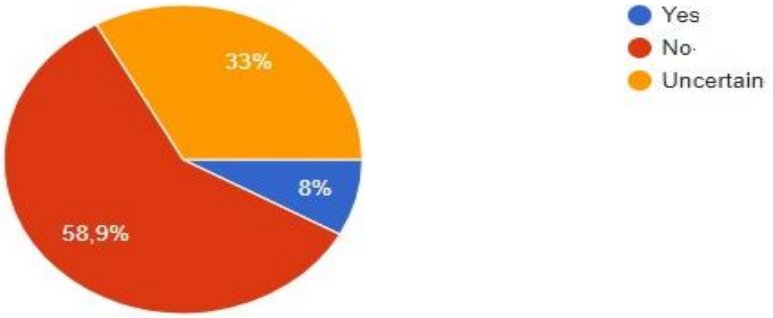

Figure 8: Online teaching benefits for students

Assessing the students' achievement in online or virtual classes is another necessary element that teachers were requested to share their perceptions about. Online assessment is unlikely a successful and effective process to check the students' performance and learning. In this regard, 57.2% of teachers pointed out that they could not assess their students' achievement or failure through online classes (See Figure 9 below).

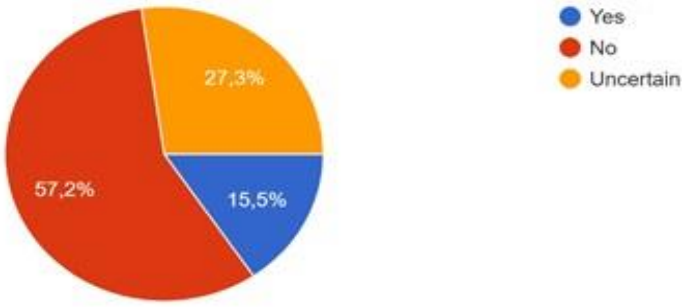

Figure 9: Assessing students' achievements or failure in online or virtual classes

Discussion

The shift from face-to-face to online classes has been an ordeal for many governments and educational institutions. Online classes have served as a good alternative during the crisis of COVID-19; however, teachers while conducting online classes have encountered numerous challenges. These challenges have varied from one context to another as in the case of the Moroccan context. In this paper, the challenges and perceptions of online teaching and learning in

Morocco during the pandemic are explored regarding several determinant variables such as gender, age, place of work, ability to conduct online classes, and teachers' perceptions towards online education.

As far as gender is concerned, the study yielded that male teachers were the most gender that participated in this research. It can be deduced that being interested in online or virtual education is male-dominated because of the social and cultural constraints that Moroccan females have to endure. The widespread social and cultural expectations of women looking after the children at home have worsened because of the lockdown. Therefore, female teachers were under pressure to manage their careers as well as maintain the functioning of the family. Also, there is strong evidence that suggests that women generally have more negative attitudes towards computers than men, and that women tend to approach technology with more anxiety, fear, doubt and apprehension than men (Bain & Rice, 2006; Chiu, Lin & Tang, 2005; Coley & Burgess, 2003; Elliott & Hall, 2005; Smith & Oosthuizen, 2006; Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2003).

Age also was an interesting variable. Young teachers, obviously, were more open to switching to online education than their old peers. That this to say, age is a significant variable that affects teachers' transition to online or virtual education. This clearly highlights that young age is essentially correlated to the willingness to work online. Moving on to a place of work as a research variable, we found that teachers in urban areas have better conditions to work online. For example, they have good internet access compared to their peers in rural areas where there is inadequate network coverage. This may also justify why 14.7% of the respondents did not teach online during national school closure.

When teachers started to teach their students online, they faced many difficulties and hardships in conducting their online classes because of significant challenges. For example, scarcity of training for delivering online or virtual classes and technical issues that affected the effectiveness and success of the teaching/ learning experiences. To comprehend the bigger picture, it is of paramount importance to understand the perceptions of Moroccan teachers towards online or virtual teaching.

The previously mentioned challenges, detailed in the findings segment, could be linked to the notion of online or virtual education as a new mode of teaching/ learning in Morocco, which the Ministry of National Education still has to consider and give more attention to. In line with this thought, El Hilali & Moubtassime (2021) stated that technology use for online or virtual education is not satisfactory due to "resistance to change, negative attitude toward technology and technology use, inadequate resources, lack of experience and skill in technology use." (p.3)
Teachers' enthusiasm and ability to manage online or virtual classes are also significant factors. Their perceptions of online or virtual classes and whether or not they can handle them are all issues that need to be addressed prior to implementation since certain teachers might not be qualified to teach online. (Sims, Dobbs, & Hand 2002) Additionally, teachers have expressed mixed opinions as far as their general views on online classes are concerned. According to most of the teacher participants, online assessment seems to be an inefficient process to evaluate the students' performance and learning. In accordance with Alvi, Bilal, & Alvi (2021) in their study confirmed that

> There is a sweeping agreement among almost 95% percent of the participants that teaching and learning English in Medicine in the traditional face-to-face method is far better and more effective than online learning. Another similar percentage believed that they face technical problems while longing into the university learning management systems due to various reasons of internet connection, system collapses or device technical issues. In another question, 45% of students and 21% percent of teacher admitted having technophobia and low digital competence. (p.344)

This might be due to the scarcity of professional training offered by the Ministry of National Education to Moroccan teachers regarding how to effectively integrate technology in their teaching practices and conduct online classes efficiently without having any negative perceptions towards online teaching/learning which proves to be a promising mode of education in Morocco.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice

This paper aims to investigate Moroccan teachers' perceptions and experiences with online education, as well as the challenges that obstruct online teaching's effectiveness. At the start of the crisis, the fast shift to online education was a lifesaver. It was not, however, as successful as educational institutions and governments had hoped. Moroccan teachers endured several challenges that interrupted the online teaching/ learning processes. The study uncovered the major challenges related to the scarcity of training and readiness to teach online and technological and technical issues. It also explored the different perceptions that Moroccan teachers held in relation to online or virtual teaching is concerned.

The Ministry of National Education's decision-makers should undertake more research to better understand how to improve Morocco's educational situation, especially by incorporating online or virtual teaching and learning into our educational system. Teachers are to be offered free internet access and devices to work online with their students. To make teaching-learning operations efficient and competitive, it is recommended that teachers and students receive professional training opportunities in technology resources use in online or virtual education.

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