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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Prospects of Internationalising Higher Education in Morocco: A Digital Citizenship Perspective

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| ABSTRACT

Considering the progress in research and innovation in higher education, promoting social change is a must to face the multifarious barriers that hinder the process of internationalising higher education in Morocco. Therefore, an implementation of Digital Citizenship (Ribble and Bailey, 2007; Mossberger and Tolbert, 2008; Ribble, 2012; Choi, 2016; Ribble and Park, 2019; Whitehead, 2019) provides opportunities for the internationalisation of the curriculum in higher education in Morocco. This quantitative study explores possibilities of internationalising higher education in Morocco by dealing with some Digital Citizenship elements to enhance collaboration on research between institutions, to increase awareness of the need for social change and to bridge the gap between university professors and students. The results show that Digital Citizenship is a prerequisite for higher education in Morocco to keep up with technological progress, call for social change and forge stronger links between Moroccan universities and their peers worldwide.

| KEYWORDS

Digital Citizenship; Internationalization; Higher Education; Morocco

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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### 1. Introduction

As we have reached the third decade (2021-2030) of the 21st century, an upheaval in the educational systems at the level of higher education in the world has become a must, especially with the movement towards more asynchronous classes/seminars in post Covid 19 era. Morocco, therefore, is not an exception, and it is a chance for developing countries, such as Morocco, to internationalise their educational systems at the universities to give the latter a chance to showcase their scientific progress worldwide. In this regard, concepts such as Digital Citizenship (Ribble and Bailey, 2007; Mossberger and Tolbert, 2008; Ribble, 2012; Choi, 2016; Ribble and Park, 2019; Whitehead, 2019) can provide the international aspect for higher education in Morocco as far as it targets elements that foster social change and open doors for collaboration between universities.

By addressing some Digital Citizenship components, such as Digital Communication and Collaboration to improve collaboration on research between institutions, Digital Literacy/Fluency to increase awareness of the need for social change, and the Digital Divide to close the gap between university professors and students, this quantitative study explores the possibility of internationalizing higher education in Morocco. The findings of this study demonstrate that Digital Citizenship is a must for higher education in Morocco in order to keep up with technological advancement, advocate for social change, and establish closer linkages between Moroccan institutions and their counterparts across the world.

### 2. Literature review

The concept of "Digital Citizenship" is wide and encompasses a variety of topics. T.H. Marshall first proposed the idea of "Citizenship" in the 1950s (Marshall, 1950), and it has evolved through time to become "Digital Citizenship." Due to this, several

definitions have been developed, revised, and redefined in order to give a far more comprehensive understanding of what the word "Digital Citizenship" means. Numerous authors have provided their perspectives on this idea, including Mossberger (2008) on social inequality in online communities, Simsek and Simsek (2013) on new forms of literacy, Choi (2016) on measuring the scale for digital citizenship, and Ribble and Park (2019) on developing a workable model for the incorporation of digital citizenship in schools.

According to Mossberger et al. (2008), "the ability to participate in society online" is the first definition of digital citizenship. This means that individuals are seen to be active members of society if they are able to participate in virtual activities online, whether on the internet or social media. According to the second definition of digital citizenship, it is the "abilities, thinking, and action regarding internet use, which allows people to understand, navigate, engage in, and transform self, community, society, and the world" (Choi, M. 2016). In other words, being able to participate online is not enough because people also need to understand what they are doing in the virtual world and be able to be productive digital citizens capable of creating and recreating. The following definition of "digital citizenship" refers to "norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use." (Ribble and Bailey, 2007, 10), demonstrating that citizens have obligations to other citizens in the virtual environment. Individuals' behavior matters in how they interact with the virtual world. The definition of "the continuously developing norms of appropriate, responsible, and empowered technology use" (Ribble and Park, 2019) that follows is an expansion or update of the previous definition of "digital citizenship," and it means that the required responsible behavior of citizens in the digital world advances and develops over time and as a result of personal experiences because technology is constantly evolving.

### **3. Methodology**

This part outlines the methodology implemented in this study. Since it is a quantitative study, statistical figures were highlighted to measure how Digital Citizenship as a concept can be of added value to Moroccan universities and be a source for social change and more scientific collaboration between universities in Morocco and their counterparts worldwide.

#### **3.1 Statement of the problem**

In Morocco, many reforms have tried to improve the level of higher education to keep up with the systems of higher education worldwide. Still, one of the problems that hinder this process is that there needs to be more initiatives to update the subjects being taught in Moroccan universities.

#### **3.2 Objective of the study**

One of the objectives of this study is to consider teaching the concept of Digital Citizenship in Moroccan universities. As far as it is a very broad concept, the different Digital Citizenship elements can provide enough room for university professors and university students to identify, explore and analyse many current global issues as well as raise students' awareness towards some of the technological issues they face in their digital experiences.

#### **3.3 Participants**

The participants in this study are university professors and university students from different universities in Morocco. Their attitudes towards the issue of internationalising higher education in Morocco varied and provided ample insights in terms of the concept of Digital Citizenship in Moroccan universities.

#### **3.4 Research Questions**

In order to explore the possibilities of internationalising higher education in Morocco from a digital citizenship perspective, three research questions need to be answered:

How can Moroccan universities collaborate and communicate effectively with their peers worldwide?

How can Digital Literacy/Fluency help university students to be aware of the significance of social change?

How can Digital Citizenship bridge the digital divide between university professors and university students in higher education in Morocco?

In this regard, the following section will discuss the results of this study in detail.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section highlights the results of the study in terms of internationalising higher education in Morocco.

##### 4.1 Higher Education in Morocco:

**Table 1: The need for a change of educational perspectives in higher education in Morocco**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	10	52.6
Disagree	1	5.3
Neutral	2	10.5
Strongly Agree	6	31.6
Total	19	100.0

When the respondents were asked if there is a need to change educational perspectives in higher education in Morocco, the answers demonstrated that 52.6% of students and professors agreed that there is a need for change at the level of higher education in Morocco, while 31.6% strongly agreed with this statement. On the other hand, only 5.3% disagreed with this idea, while 10.5% were neutral.

##### 4.1.1 Defining Digital Citizenship:

When the respondents were asked about their opinions about the appropriate definitions of Digital Citizenship in the Moroccan context, their answers varied based on the definitions provided:

**Table 2: Digital Citizenship as online behaviour imposed by cultural aspects.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	5	26.3
Disagree	4	21.1
Neutral	9	47.4
Strongly agree	1	5.3
Total	19	100.0

When the respondents were asked if digital citizenship referred to the online behaviour imposed by cultural aspects, 47.4% were neutral, 26.3% agreed, and only 5.3% strongly agreed with this definition. Contrarily, 21.1% disagreed with the above-mentioned statement.

**Table 3: Digital Citizenship as a political and social change in society**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	8	42.1
Disagree	3	15.8
Neutral	5	26.3
Strongly agree	2	10.5
Strongly Disagree	1	5.3
Total	19	100.0

When asked about Digital Citizenship as a political and social change in society, 42.1% of the respondents agreed with this definition, while 10.5% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 15.8% of the respondents disagreed with this definition, while 5.3% strongly disagreed. In the same vein, 26.3% of the respondents have been neutral.

**Table 4: Digital Citizenship as standards of suitable and responsible behaviour in terms of one’s technological experience.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	10	52.6
Disagree	2	10.5
Neutral	3	15.8
Strongly agree	4	21.1
Total	19	100.0

Concerning the definition of Digital Citizenship as standards of suitable and responsible behaviour in terms of one’s technological experience, 52.6% of the respondents agreed with this definition, while 21.1% strongly agreed. Conversely, 10.5% of the respondents disagreed with this definition, while 15.8% were neutral.

**Table 5: Digital Citizenship as a way to participate in social decision-making.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	9	47.4
Disagree	1	5.3
Neutral	6	31.6
Strongly agree	3	15.8
Total	19	100.0

Taking into consideration Digital Citizenship as a way to participate in social decision-making, 47.4% of the respondents agreed with this definition, while 15.8% strongly agreed. Even though 31.6% have been neutral, only 5.3% disagreed with this definition.

**Table 6: Digital Citizenship as the ability to use technology appropriately in order to understand, navigate and transform self, community, society and the world.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	10	52.6
Disagree	1	5.3
Neutral	2	10.5
Strongly agree	5	26.3
Strongly Disagree	1	5.3
Total	19	100.0

By defining digital citizenship as the ability to use technology appropriately to understand, navigate and transform self, community, society and the world, 52.6% of the respondents agreed with this definition, and 26.3% strongly agreed with it. On the other hand, only 5.3% of the respondents disagreed, and the same percentage strongly disagreed. As well, 10.5% of the respondents have been neutral.

#### 4.1.2 Integrating Digital Citizenship

In terms of integrating Digital Citizenship in higher education in Morocco, the majority of students and professors confirmed that it plays a significant role in the teaching-learning process and that it would even provide more opportunities if it is included during university courses and seminars:

**Table 7: Digital citizenship is a prerequisite in higher education.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	9	47.4
Disagree	1	5.3
Neutral	4	21.1
Strongly agree	5	26.3
Total	19	100.0

The respondents were asked about their opinions on whether Digital Citizenship is a prerequisite in higher education; 47.4% agreed with this statement, and 26.3% strongly agreed with it. On the other hand, only 5.3% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, while 21.1% were neutral.

**Table 8: Digital citizenship raises awareness towards global issues.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	8	42.1
Neutral	3	15.8
Strongly agree	7	36.8
Strongly Disagree	1	5.3
Total	19	100.0

Regarding whether Digital Citizenship raises awareness towards global issues, 42.1% agreed with this idea and 36.8% strongly agreed with the statement. Even if 15.3% have been neutral, only 5.3% showed strong disagreement.

**Table 9: Digital citizenship promotes digital literacy amongst university professors and students.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	11	57.9
Neutral	1	5.3
Strongly agree	7	36.8
Total	19	100.0

When the respondents were asked whether Digital Citizenship promotes digital literacy among university professors and students, 57.9% agreed with this statement, and 36.8% showed strong agreement. Even if 5.3% were neutral, none of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**Table 10: Digital citizenship bridges the digital divide between university professors and students.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	8	42.1
Neutral	4	21.1
Strongly agree	7	36.8
Total	19	100.0

In terms of whether Digital Citizenship bridges the digital divide between university professors and students, 42.1% of the respondents agreed with this idea, and 36.8% strongly agreed with this statement. Even though 21.1% were neutral, none of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**Table 11: Digital citizenship helps digitize TEFL classrooms.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	10	52.6
Disagree	1	5.3
Neutral	3	15.8
Strongly agree	5	26.3
Total	19	100.0

In terms of Digital Citizenship helping digitize TEFL classrooms, 52.6% agreed with the statement, and 26.3% strongly agreed. Even though 15.3% have been neutral, only 5.3% disagreed with this idea.

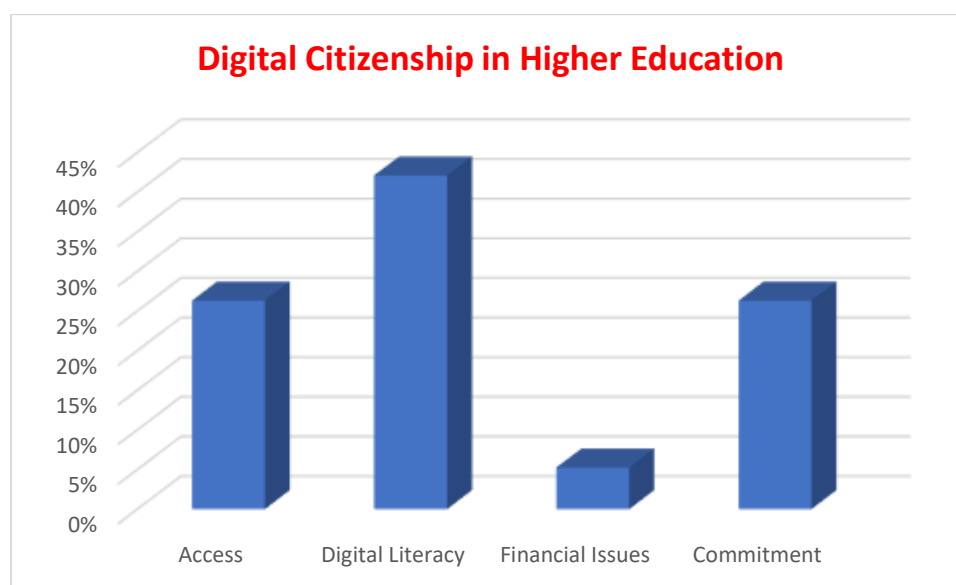
**Table 12: Digital citizenship provides solutions for students' digital access problems.**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	10	52.6
Disagree	2	10.5
Neutral	1	5.3
Strongly agree	6	31.6
Total	19	100.0

Similarly, 52.6% of the respondents agreed that Digital Citizenship provides solutions for students' digital access problems, and 31.6% strongly agreed. On the other hand, only 10.5% disagreed with the statement, and only 5.3% of the respondents were neutral.

#### **4.2 Internationalising Higher Education in Morocco from a Digital Citizenship Perspective:**

In order to deal with the issue of internationalising higher education in Morocco from a Digital Citizenship perspective, the following graphical illustrations showcase the problems solved as well as the aspects of improvements when integrating Digital Citizenship in higher education in Morocco.

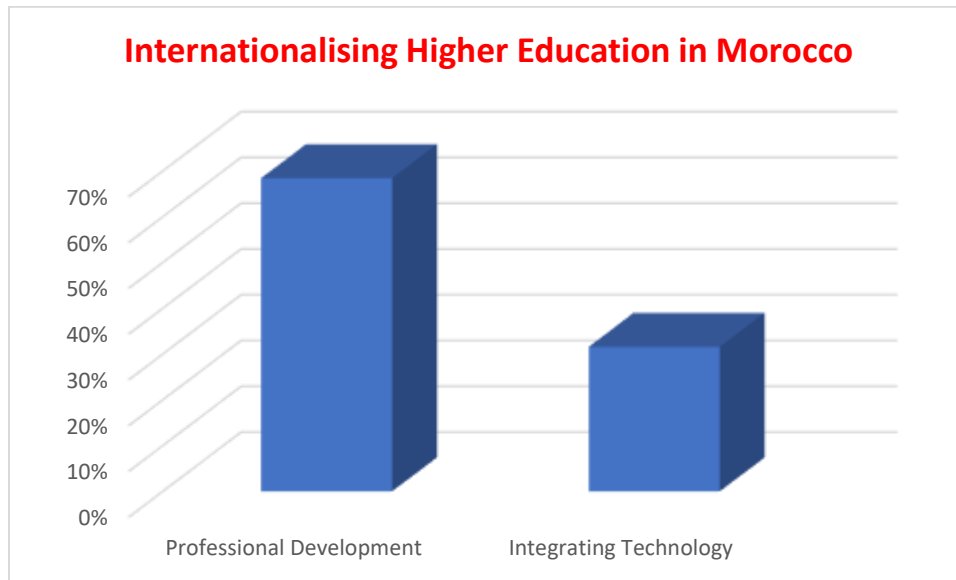


**Figure 1: Problems solved by the integration of Digital Citizenship in higher education in Morocco.**

In Figure 1, the graph shows that Digital Citizenship will help in solving some of the important issues in higher education in Morocco such as access, digital literacy and financial and commitment issues.

As the graph shows, solving the problem of digital literacy (40%) gains much importance in the process of Digital Citizenship as far as it entails sensitizing university professors and university students, most specifically to the significance of their digital knowledge in the 21st century. Also, access (25%) to the different opportunities provided by the universities in Morocco comes in second place because it is a right that every student has the chance to benefit from the available educational opportunities. Likewise, commitment (25%) to university courses is almost of equal importance to access because students are required to be committed to their studies as part of their responsibilities when they have access to universities. Finally, and to a lesser degree, the integration of Digital Citizenship in Moroccan universities will decrease the effect of financial issues (<5%) faced by students to access higher education in Morocco.

The next graph focuses on some of the aspects of internationalising higher education in Morocco.



**Figure 2: Aspects of improvement when internationalising higher education in Morocco.**

In Figure 2, one of the results of this study shows that there are two possible aspects of improvement when internationalising higher education in Morocco through the integration of Digital Citizenship. The first aspect is that Digital Citizenship can provide more space for professional development (75%) both for university professors and university students. The second aspect is that it will ensure that there will be more integration of technology (25 %) in Moroccan universities.

## **5. Conclusion**

A revolution in educational institutions at the higher education level worldwide is now necessary as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century (2021-2030), especially given the trend towards more asynchronous classrooms and seminars in the post-Covid 19 age. Therefore, Morocco is not an outlier, and there is an opportunity for developing nations like Morocco to internationalize their educational systems at the universities in order to provide the latter with a chance to present their scientific advancement to a wider audience. Regarding this, ideas like "Digital Citizenship" (Ribble and Bailey, 2007; Mossberger and Tolbert, 2008; Ribble, 2012; Choi, 2016; Ribble and Park, 2019; Whitehead, 2019) may give the international component for higher education in Morocco as long as it focuses on factors that support societal transformation and new opportunities for university cooperation.

This quantitative study investigates the possibility of internationalizing higher education in Morocco by addressing some Digital Citizenship components, such as Digital Communication and Collaboration to enhance collaboration on research between institutions, Digital Literacy/Fluency to raise awareness with regard to the need for social change, and Digital Divide to reduce the gap between university professors and students. The results of this study show that in order to advocate for social change, stay up with technological innovation, and forge deeper connections between Moroccan institutions and their international counterparts, higher education in Morocco must include a course on Digital Citizenship.

### **5.1 Limitations of the Study:**

Taking into account the findings and analysis of this study, it is critical to recognize a few of the constraints that this research procedure encountered. This section highlights the challenges Morocco faces in modernizing its higher education system as well as several limitations in the data collection technique. There is no denying the critical necessity of "Digital Citizenship" in Moroccan higher education. This concept is responsible for Morocco's better educational principles.

Additionally, the media in Morocco has had some success influencing how university students think about various international issues. This fact is, however, constrained in a number of ways. For example, some educators and/or students may find it difficult to embrace the inclusion of "Digital Citizenship" as a component of the curriculum, which could make it more difficult to integrate these concepts into the teaching-learning process in Moroccan universities.

Another drawback is Morocco's extremely slow digitization pace, which makes it difficult for most university instructors to be flexible and gives the media ample opportunity to influence public opinion by molding it to fit their predetermined narratives. Put



another way, most university instructors in Morocco find it challenging to be adaptable due to the country's extremely sluggish digitalization process, which doesn't allow a fast and smooth implementation of the concept of "Digital Citizenship" in the Moroccan higher educational system.

### 5.2 Suggestions for Future Research:

In order to pave the way for future research and researchers to delve into possibilities of internationalising higher education in Morocco, including some of the components of Digital Citizenship is vital. Therefore, our study provides the following suggestions to be taken into consideration:

- Including Digital Communication and Collaboration to improve peer-academic cooperation on research. In other words, encouraging communication and collaboration between Moroccan universities and their peers worldwide can open up more academic opportunities for university educators and university students to expand and enrich their knowledge.
- Starting more conversations to increase awareness about Digital Literacy/Fluency since societal change is necessary. That is to say, discussing issues related to one's digital knowledge and how to become digitally fluent is a must as far as it has a consciousness-raising role in highlighting the dangers and the benefits of one's digital experiences.
- Motivating academics and students to explore more avenues for closing the digital divide; this objective remains a continuous endeavour in the digital age in order to minimise the digital gap between university students as digital natives and university professors as digital immigrants.

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