
RESEARCH ARTICLE

COVID-19 Crisis in Morocco: Lessons Learnt

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak has pushed many countries to take unprecedented procedures to slow down the spread of the virus. Hospitals, schools, colleges, and other educational institutions have been widely closed to stop the COVID-19 virus from spreading among the older and younger communities. The Moroccan government shared that health experts have suggested "preventive and precautionary" measures to ensure complete protection for students and staff. Thus, the need for virtual schools arose to prevent learners from falling behind intellectually. In this context, educators were forced to quickly shift their teaching from face-to-face to remote teaching. As a result, there was a clear gap in the teachers' preparation and readiness for such a transition to teaching online. This article aims to tackle educators' experiences during this crisis, shedding light on the lessons learnt. To do that, we contacted 1200 teachers, through an online questionnaire, from all over Morocco, but we got a total of 948 answers. In this paper, we discuss preliminary survey findings and recommendations for better preparing and supporting educators to teach remotely in times of emergency.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, Morocco, Lessons learnt, online education

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Life as we know it was altered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is possible that each of us experienced similar changes, from our daily routines to our priorities in life. In this regard, the field of education has never witnessed a disruption like the one that COVID-19 outbreak has caused. Educators found themselves forced to swap face-to-face classes with virtual ones whether or not they were trained to do so. The majority of educational institutions around the world have quickly shifted to an online educational instructional process in response to the implementation of a social distancing protocol to stop the person-to-person spread of coronavirus at the end of March 2020¹. Indeed, educators must be "fluent users of technology; creative and collaborative problem solvers; and adaptive, socially aware experts throughout their careers" (U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology [OET], 2016, p. 34). This is especially important during times of emergency, like the COVID-19 crisis, in order to ensure continuity of learning in any setting and to help learners across physical and temporal barriers (Trust, T. & Whalen, J. (2020).

Despite the fact that many teachers have been using technology for in-person, distance, and remote teaching since the early 1980s, the widespread closure of schools and universities due to the COVID-19 outbreak appeared to cause shock waves through the educational community. This closure sent educators rushing to sort out how to shift their pedagogy to "emergency remote teaching" (Hodges et al., 2020, para. 5). Thus, there is a scientific need to highlight the lessons learnt in the field of education in Morocco during this pandemic.

¹ Fedotova, O.; Platonova, E.; Latun, V.; Filkevich, I.; Igumnov, O. Experience of using distance technology to teach Chinese undergraduates during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Proceedings of the 8th Annual International Scientific and Practical Conference on Innovative Technologies in Science and Education (ITSE), Divnomorskoe, Russia, 19–30 August 2020.

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2. Literature Review

Online teaching and learning have a number of drawbacks, including "the weakness of online teaching infrastructure, the limited exposure of teachers to online teaching, the information gap, non-conducive environment for learning at home, equity and academic excellence in terms of higher education²," according to a literature review on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on worldwide educational activities. One of the significant lessons that the world has learnt in these pandemic times is that school closures have a global impact on children's and adolescents' education and health, particularly among the poorest. From what we learnt recently, closures create a learning gap, with children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds less likely to have access to online programs than their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly in low and middle-income nations. Research indicates that school closures have the potential to disassociate motivated students from education. In fact, the data shows that up to 10 million children are unlikely to ever return to school, and 2.5 million girls may face child marriage in the following five years.

In addition to the educational barriers, school closures have a wide range of consequences on students. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) acknowledges that school closures, even if temporary, can have significant social, emotional, and economic consequences. According to an Australian mental health survey that was conducted on teens, particularly those who began high school in 2020, there were exhibitions of higher psychological distress rates and poorer coping methods than adolescents of similar ages polled in 2018. There is also strong evidence that attendance at school and early childhood educational centers (ECEC) reduces the risk of poverty in families since students are provided with meals which help lessen the burden on families that are struggling financially. Students' physical attendance also allows caregivers to keep and focus on their jobs.

3. Methodology

As mentioned earlier, this paper aims to explore the lessons learnt from Moroccan teachers' perspectives during the COVID19 outbreak. This paper makes use of the quantitative research method through Google forms, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups. The participants were teachers of all educational levels all over Morocco who work in public and private institutions. The participants' number reached 948, grouped as 532 females and 416 males (See Table 1 below). To analyze the data, this paper makes use of the SPSS program (Social Packages for Social Sciences).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Population Demographics

The population targeted in this study constituted more females (532) than males (416) (See Table 1 below). This might be because of females' increasing use of technology due to the urgent need to switch from face-to-face classes to online ones. It is worth mentioning in this regard that this is a new trend in females' inclination to be more likely to use technology, which was not the norm in pre-pandemic times.

Table 1: Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	532	56.1	56.1	56.1
	Male	416	43.9	43.9	100.0
	Total	948	100.0	100.0	

As far as participants' age is concerned, we noticed that the younger the participant is, the more likely they will participate. In fact, 416 participants belonged to the 20 to 30 age group, and they showed more interest in the study. This is because the younger generation seems to be more comfortable interacting with technology as opposed to the older generations, that may be hesitant to engage in online activities.

² Pokhrel, S.; Chhetri, R. A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. High. Educ. Future 2021, 8, 133–141.

Table 2: Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20_30	416	43.9	43.9	43.9
	30_40	348	36.7	36.7	80.6
	40_60	184	19.4	19.4	100.0
	Total	948	100.0	100.0	

4.2. Lessons learnt from the challenges faced by Moroccan teachers

Table 3: Challenges faced by teachers

Challenge	Total (n)	Percent
- Electricity-related issues	46	6.6 %
- No internet access	74	10.6 %
- Weak internet coverage/connectivity	484	69.6 %
- Unavailability of electronic devices	260	37.7 %
- Lack of technology use knowledge	290	41.7 %
- Lack of students' interest	492	71 %
- High internet costs for students	508	73%
- Families disinterest to co-operate	212	30.5 %
- Failure to attend to students individually	278	39.9 %
- Inability to teach one's subject online	218	31.3 %
- Stress caused by working online	272	39.1%
- Hard time juggling between work and personal lives	264	37.9 %

The unexpected move from the face-to-face mode of teaching and learning to online ones came with a whole set of challenges that Moroccan teachers had to deal with. The four most prominent challenges were high costs of the internet ($n = 508$), in which most Moroccan families belong to medium to low economic classes. It has been hard, especially with the crisis, for these families to pay for their children's daily expenses as well as paying for monthly or daily internet access added to their financial burden. Additionally, the lack of students' interest ($n = 492$) came second on the list of challenges. It can be explained by the fact that students find it hard to engage virtually. They are used to face-to-face classes that stimulate their minds and bodies, while online classes might fail to do so. This challenge is tightly linked with the next challenge, which is weak internet coverage/connectivity ($n = 484$). It is worth mentioning in this regard that students' lack of interest is also caused by the unsatisfactory service that internet companies offer. It is pretty ironic how expensive it is to pay for internet access only to find out that the connectivity is weak and a lot of times break together. The table below details the other challenges that teachers face.

5. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic came with a lot of challenges as well as it pushed governments and decision-makers to think of urgent opportunities for professional development. These opportunities bridged the gap, and they offered a range of lessons that we can all learn from. The current paper took the responsibility to shed light on the different lessons that may be learnt from the Moroccan teachers' teaching and learning experiences during the recent health crisis of COVID-19. More than that, this research identified important concerns such as lack of training opportunities and preparing teachers to teach online, as well as issues related to technology use. The findings from this study show that there are different lessons that all educational bodies can make use of while planning for the school year, educational programs, or being ready for emergency situations like the one that has just happened.

Following this thought and from the situations faced by teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak, we noticed that there are many deficiencies in the professional training received by teachers in the teachers' training centres. In this respect, many teachers who have been working for many years did not receive any training regarding technology use for teaching and learning purposes, whereas others have attended training, which unfortunately was not enough. The ministry of education devised several programs that offer training opportunities for teachers so as to help them be able to conduct online classes. Nevertheless, this training did not reach all the Moroccan teachers as it should. As a result, there is an urgent need to reform teachers' training programs to accommodate the online aspects of education. In addition, the government should take into account equipping schools with the necessary teaching/learning technology tools. Moreover, this paper opens doors for further research to be conducted so as to support teachers and students alike to improve everyone's preparedness in any situation moving forward and to ensure a quality education for everyone as an ultimate objective.

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