

# Moroccan English Department Student Attitudes Towards the Use of Distance Education During COVID-19: Moulay Ismail University as a Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

The current study aims to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of distance education during COVID-19 in Morocco. The first cases of COVID-19 starting from the first weeks of March 2020 has obliged educational authorities to suspend face-to-face education. Immediately, distance education was declared the alternative means to complete the academic year. Moroccan TV channels started broadcasting lessons for different levels at different times. Moreover, teachers and students started using social media and university platforms to share lessons. However, not all students agree with distance education in the adopted format. Accordingly, the current study investigates the attitudes of Moroccan English Department students at Moulay Ismail University. A mixed-method design was adopted by triangulating data from five-point Likert scale questionnaires and a focus group. The results showed that students generally prefer face-to-face education rather than distance education. However, part-time students reported positive attitudes towards distance education. It is recommended that both distance education and face-to-face education should be planned by teachers, coordinators, and administrators.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, Distance Education, ICT, Remote Instruction

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Distance education has a relatively long history before the spread of COVID-19. The ways of communication have evolved rapidly, especially in the second decade of the twentieth century during the industrial and technological revolution. Distance education combines many types of educational modes of learning using technology. It refers to teaching and learning where teachers and students are

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distant from each other rather than in the classroom. In Morocco, the Ministry of Education embarked on the integration of Information Communication Technology in education. At the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, there was an adoption of *Massar* and *Microsoft Outlook emails* in primary and secondary education and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (Moodle) and *academic emails* in post-secondary education. However, no serious attempts were made to activate these learning platforms until the outbreak of COVID-19 on the second day of March 2020 and the official adoption of distance education during the quarantine period starting from the mid of March to ensure educational continuity. Such abrupt adoption of distance caused a lot of confusion among students, teachers and administrators alike. Hence, their attitudes towards this new approach of education vary given the new emergency and crisis-management circumstances. Overall, this research is divided into a review of literature, methodology, findings and discussion.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

COVID-19 has impacted greatly research on the national and international scale. Researchers and decision-makers started relying on official media outlet information to identify gaps for research. Decisions makers started following models of other countries that are strongly hit with COVID-19. The number of cases and mortality rates recorded in some European countries along with the panic caused by media has impacted all aspects of life greatly, especially education. The different concepts, types of distance education, procedures and previous studies will be discussed in this section.

### 2.1 Definitions of Key Terms

The developments of technology have resulted in the emergence of new terms on education. In this regard, we hear of Information Communication Technology (ICT) integration in education, e-learning, online environment, among others. Attitudes are an important variable in using such platforms.

According to Davies & Hewer (2009, as cited in Dang and Nguyen, 2014, p. 34)

*ICT refers to all technological tools that are currently available or will be available. ICT specifically refers to computer-based technologies such as desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and software and internet-based technologies including email, websites, and social networking sites for English teaching and learning.*

ICT can be a learning resource like videos and portable document formats (PDFs), management of learning like MOOCs and Moodle, TV channels, and radio.

Distance education means learning and teaching through other ways that do not involve being in the same brick and mortar classrooms. It is synonymously used with e-learning and e-teaching that can be synchronous or asynchronous. The former means that it is online, whereas the latter is offline.

During the crisis of COVID-19, another term has become viral. It is emergency remote instruction. However, this term is teacher-fronted; whereas distance education is all-inclusive as it comprises students, teachers and educational authorities including parents as well.

As for attitudes, they are perceptions that move the behavior of individuals. It is one of the components of KSA that stands for knowledge, skills and attitudes. They refer to patterns of thinking and feeling. Attitudes are very important in studying the behavior of students and their influence on learning habits.

### 2.2. Types of Distance Education Platforms

During COVID-19, the Moroccan Ministry of Education along with universities have started delivering lectures, lessons, and orientation through the following ICT tools:

**Websites:** many websites contain lessons addressed to all learners at all levels and all disciplines.

At the primary and secondary levels, the websites include *TelmidTICE*, *Moutamadriiss*, *Massar*, and *Taalim.ma*. At the post-secondary level, Moroccan universities posted the courses mostly in PDFs on their website. Some universities created YouTube channels where short video lectures are uploaded. Other universities provided their students with access to subscription courses on Coursera like the case of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University. There are also training programs for academy and administrative staff via *e-takwine*, which was launched on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The total number of the ones who benefited from these training sessions reach 23290 persons within eight weeks from its launch according to the Ministry of Education reports (2020). Universities produced more than 111000 education resources posted on their websites. Moreover, some online libraries like EBSCO, Cairn, Manahil and Dalloz are freely accessible to teachers and students for three months. Moreover, a free internet connection was provided to some educational platforms for three months. However, YouTube streaming is not free. Hence, YouTube videos were converted into stream videos. To unify lecture delivery, a MUN website was created in partnership with France following the FUN website. It stands for *maroc université numérique*.

**Institutional emails:** All Moroccan educational institutions have provided their students with an intuitional email which includes Massar [username@taalim.ma](mailto:username@taalim.ma) for primary and secondary school students and the first and last names of the students in addition to the acronyms of their universities followed by the extension “ac.ma” at the tertiary level. These institutional emails enable students to access software like Microsoft Teams and research websites like Researchgate, Scopus, and J-store. These will enable students, especially those who have to write a research paper in the Licence Degree, Master and Doctoral programs to find research papers for their graduation projects.

**Software programs:** there are officially recommended and unofficially recommended software for studies. The first recommended software is Microsoft Teams. The latter announced by the Ministry of Education on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. The total number of created virtual classes reaches more than 725000 in the public sector and 108000 in the private sector. Both teachers and students have their accounts in Microsoft Teams to interact and study online through all media forms. Moreover, MOOCs and Moodle software are also recommended by some universities. Other unofficial software programs include Coursera and social media apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, Zoom and the like.

**TV Channels:** The Moroccan Ministry of Education and Universities started broadcasting university courses on some media channels, namely *Arryadia* and *Attakafia* channels. The lessons are daily broadcast from 8:30 to 23:30 for sixth, ninth and baccalaureate grades. The *Tamazight* Channel was later added broadcasting from 8:30 to 12:30 for primary school grades. *Layooune* channel was broadcasting lessons from 8:30 to 19:00. University lessons especially targeted to students of the Licence degree are broadcast on *Arryadia*. Roundtables on COVID-19 were also broadcast. Moreover, the Moroccan Ministry of Education and the British Council signed a partnership to broadcast some TV shows and radio programs in English, such as “World on Street” on *Arryadia* channel and “Obla air” on the Atlantic radio website. Repetition of lessons is done during the weekends and official holidays. The timing of lessons is shared on the Facebook page of the Minister of Education, Dr. Saaid Amzazi which has 711,528 followers till October 2020. The total number of videotaped lessons until the mid of May 2020 reaches 3127 lessons.

**Radio:** Some universities like Ibn Zohr and Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University broadcast their lectures via local radio channels. This is because most students who are enrolled in universities are originally from the region of the university. However, there are some students and teachers who live in different regions, which makes impossible the process of recording lessons at university for teachers or listening to radio channels during the quarantine.

### 2.3. The Procedures for Distance Education During the Quarantine

The first case of COVID-19 was reported on the second of March, 2020. In the mid of March, Morocco suspended face-to-face education and adopted distance education instead. Moroccan universities, academies and directories started recording lessons and uploading materials to their websites.

The Moroccan Framework of Education and Training Law recommends distance education. According to the framework (2017, article 2), “The government should take all necessary and appropriate measures to enable institutions of education, training, and scientific research in the public and private sectors to develop the resources and platforms of teaching, learning and research”. Similarly, article 33 recommends the creation of laboratories for the innovation and production of digital resources as well as the training of specialists in this field. The same article recommends the gradual integration of distance education with the view of generalizing it.

Distance education complements face-to-face learning. Article 31 of the Moroccan Constitution 2011 stipulates that:

*The State, the public establishments and the territorial collectivities work for the mobilization of all the means available to facilitate the equal access of the citizens to conditions that permit their enjoyment of the right: to a modern, accessible education of quality.*

The National Charter for Education and Training (1999) suggests distance education. It was followed by the Emergency Plan of 2009-2012 and the Strategic Vision of 2015-2030. Hence, all Moroccan legislative documents recommend distance education in one way or another. All these reforms attempt to put the learner at the hub of the education process. However, distance education mode as implemented during COVID-19 is mainly teacher-fronted. Students have to sit down in front of their laptops or phone screens to watch videos or read portable document files uploaded to the aforementioned educational platforms. Moreover, lack of equipment, internet connection and student involvement can be cited as the main obstacles for distance education.

While distance education may be difficult for primary and secondary school students, university students are considered autonomous learners. Hence, distance education for university students is more likely to succeed. Despite the relative supposed success of distance education at the university level, students are not supposed to be evaluated online. The Moroccan Ministry of Education, Scientific Research and Vocational Training did not recommend distance assessment until September where cases have increased in some areas. Universities started an online assessment for limited-access institutes. However, the perpetuation of the virus has obliged many Moroccan universities to postpone exams to another date as they were initially scheduled in September 2020 unlike the baccalaureate exam, which took place at schools in July 2020.

Assessment in higher education during COVID-19 pushed universities to adopt many policies. For open-access universities, they started creating proximity centers for students to sit for the postponed spring term exams. Moulay Ismail University in Meknes was the first one to notify its students to choose the examination centers through a platform specifically made for this. For limited-access institutes of higher education and some branches, distance education was recommended. Students in the faculties affiliated with Hassan II University have to fill out a google form to choose whether they can sit for online exams or face-to-face exams. The University of Mohamed the Fifth in Rabat issued notices warning students who are infected with COVID-19 with strong threats in case they sit for the exams without reporting these cases.

Safety and education are the two main concerns of educational authorities. Moroccan universities can benefit from the baccalaureate experience in terms of exams. For the latter, stadiums, universities and schools were rendered as places for exams. Moreover, social distancing and the use of facemasks and disinfectants were used during the exam. Temperature is measured before the entrance to the exam room for both teachers and students. Second-year baccalaureate exams took place on July 3<sup>rd</sup>

and 4<sup>th</sup> for the pole of literature, human sciences and Islamic education and from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> July for the pole of scientific, technical and professional baccalaureate. The lessons subject to examination are limited mainly to face-to-face education delivered lessons. This indicates the failure of distance education since the lessons delivered therein were not scheduled in the exams. The catch-up sessions of the exams were conducted from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> of July 2020. Students infected with COVID-19 took their exams at hospitals (Table 1).

**Table 1. The rate of success in the ordinary session of baccalaureate exams 2020**

8.5% males	55.75% females
Total: 63,08%	
<i>Note.</i> These statistics were provided by the Moroccan Ministry of National Education in July, 2020 ( <a href="http://www.men.gov.ma">www.men.gov.ma</a> )	

The rate of success in the ordinary session is less than the previous year of 2019 which reached 65.55%, which amounts to 196664. It may be attributed, in part, to the effect of COVID-19.

In brief, the procedures adopted are determined by the status of COVID-19 spread in Morocco. Face-to-face education and assessment have been proven to be more practical than online and distance education for formal education delivered by the ministry of national education, vocational training and scientific research.

## 2.4 Previous Empirical Studies on Attitudes Towards ICT

There are not many studies on students' attitudes towards ICT or distance education in the Arab World and Morocco.

Bataineh, Atoum, Alsmadi and Shikhali (2020) investigated obstacles and effectiveness of distance education during the beginning of the pandemic by randomly selecting a sample of 10000 students in public and private universities. The authors used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that the majority of the Jordanian university students are dissatisfied with distance education due to many obstacles, such as internet speed, technological difficulties and online content design.

In Turkey, Isik, Karakis and Güler (2010) investigated Postgraduate students' attitudes towards web-based distance learning, taking the case of Gazi University. The study surveyed 64 participants using a five-point Likert scale. Only six of the participants are females. The results were analyzed by a t-test to determine the attitudes of males and females towards distance education. Females showed more positive attitudes towards distance education compared to males. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to test the degree of a linear relationship between working years and web-based distance learning in the future. Moreover, one-way analysis of variance was used between the purpose of the internet usage and their recommendation of distance education to students. Students who use the internet for research recommend web-based learning more than students who use the internet for communication.

In Morocco, Draissi and Young (2020) studies COVID-19 Outbreak Response Plan: Implementing Distance Education in Moroccan Universities. The method of data collection is a content analysis of the daily newspaper Moroccan World News and official reports of the Ministry of Education and universities website. Draissi and Young (2020, p.1) said, "The Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research (MNE) announces the closure of preschool and nursery school, educational institutions, vocational training, managerial training, universities, including language centers and schools under the responsibility of foreign missions". The closure was declared after reporting the first cases of COVID-19 in Morocco and after the World Health Organization has announced that COVID-19 is a pandemic on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Mohammed

VI Polytechnic University contributed to the digital plan to respond to distance education needs (Draissi and Young, 2020). Morocco entered in a Moroccan Digital University (MUN) with France via an edX powered server and English sessions with the British Council in Morocco

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current section will delve into the methodology followed in the current study. It will be about the research design, questions, sample as well as procedure of data collection and analysis. Finally, research ethics will be disclosed.

#### 3.1 Research Design

Triangulation is the research design adopted in the current study (Creswell, 2009). It combines quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will give frequencies on the use of ICT for learning during COVID-19, whereas qualitative data will explore the reasons behind students' positive or negative attitudes towards Distance Education. It imbibes from the pragmatic philosophy, and avoids the dichotomy created by empiricism on the one hand and interpretivism, on the other hand.

#### 3.2 Research, Objectives, Questions and Hypotheses

The research objectives of the current study are numerous. The first objective is to verify whether students use the suggested distance education platforms. Second, the research aims to investigate students' attitudes towards distance education in Morocco. Third, the study has an objective to explore the suggestions and opinions of students in relation to distance education during COVID-19 in Morocco.

The study has one hypothesis:

Moroccan English departments at Moulay Ismail University have negative attitudes towards distance education because of the complaints posted on social media and memos the mock distance education in terms of organization and support.

Accordingly, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

What platforms do students use for distance education during COVID-19 in Morocco?

What are the attitudes of Moroccan English department students towards distance education at Moulay Ismail University?

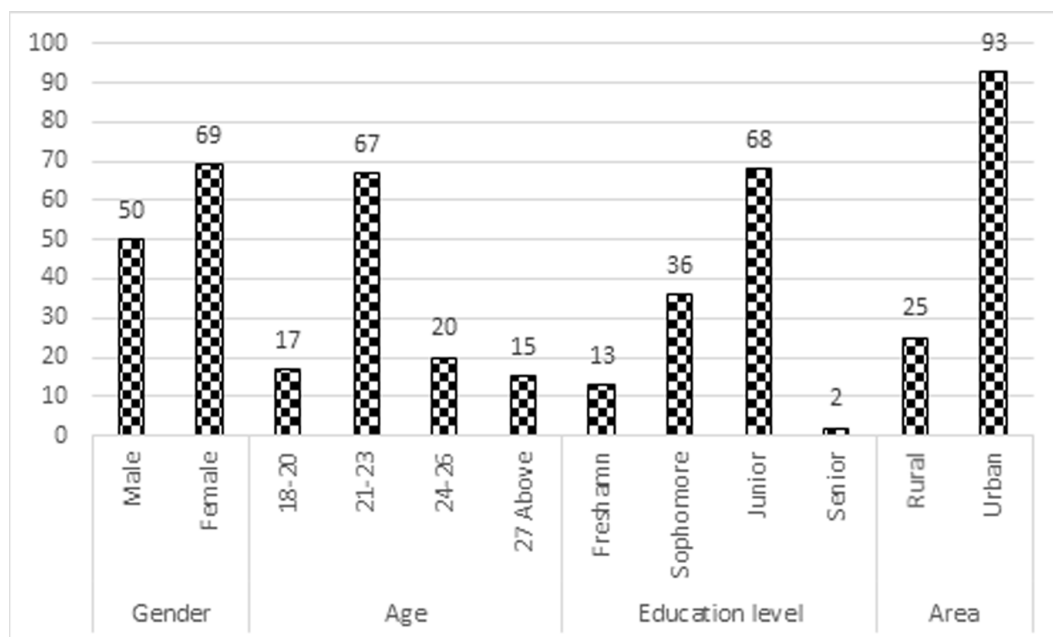
What do students recommend for better distance education in English departments?

#### 3.3 Population and Sampling

Two types of sampling procedures were followed in the current study. The first type is convenience sampling as the researcher shared the Google Form link in English Department groups on WhatsApp and Facebook Face-to-face data collection is not possible during the COVID-19 state of emergency in Morocco. For the focus group, snowball sampling was used in that the researcher asked students to invite their colleagues to participate in a WhatsApp focus group. In brief, the two sampling procedures fall within non-probability sampling. The demographic variables of the sample are summarized in Figure 1:

As can be seen, the majority of participants are females (69). The dominant age category of 67 respondents is between 21 to 23. Most students are junior. That is they are in the third grade of the Moroccan Licence degree. What is meant by the senior level is graduate students or students who study in a professional license degree. COVID-19 postponed the implementation of the Bachelor Program instead of the Licence, Master and Doctoral programs (LMD). The majority (93) of respondents live in urban areas. The data generated from the study should be understood in light of these demographics.

Figure 1. Demographic variables



### 3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Both the questionnaire and the focus group interviews are the data collection instruments used in the current study. First, a questionnaire was designed, pilot-tested and shared on social media platforms multiple times for students to complete. Students were kindly asked to fill in the survey promising them that no personal information will be used, and the data will be kept confidential according to the regulations of research. For the focus group, the researcher asked some of the students to invite others to complete 12 participants in a focus group on WhatsApp. The researcher and participants agreed on a time to start the discussion which too at the convenience of the participants.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The survey questions were coded and entered into SPSS Version 23. The completed survey was imported from Google Forms in excel format. The graphs were generated using Excel. Similarly, students' oral responses were transcribed through intelligent transcription. Arabic words were translated into English whenever encountered.

### 3.6 Research Ethics

The researcher collected data in compliance with research ethics in force worldwide and in Morocco. The researcher started with an introduction of the self and the research. Respondents and participants were informed of the objectives of the study. They took part in the study with their will. No coercive method or fraudulent method was used in collecting or analyzing the data. The data were collected and analyzed anonymously according to the purpose for which it was collected.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

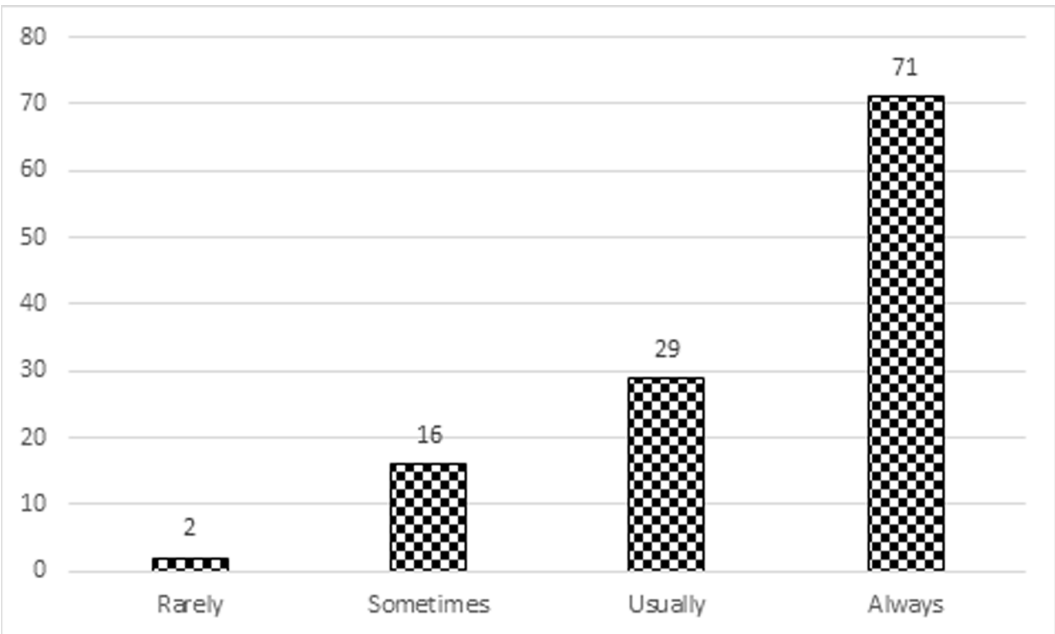
This section will analyze the data of the questionnaire and the focus group. Quantitative data will be presented in the form of charts, whereas qualitative data will be presented in the form of statements

or word clouds. Qualitative data will complete quantitative data. The analysis will be divided into three main sections.

#### 4.1 Equipment for Distance Education

This section will shed light on the materials needed for distance education. Without connection and gadgets, we cannot talk about distance education. Figure 2 shows how often students have an internet connection.

Figure 2. The frequency of having connection



The majority of students (71) reported that they always have access to an internet connection. Just two students who reported that they rarely have access to the connection. However, connections in Morocco may not allow one to watch videos on YouTube as internet connection companies give limited bundles based on non-subscription offers. The type of the connection determines its quality (Figure 3).

The majority of students (77) have a Wi-Fi connection. Forty students reported that they use a mobile connection compared to one respondent who uses them both. Wi-Fi connection is proven to have more quality than a mobile phone connection alone. The former allows unlimited access to video streaming. This will allow students to participate in live sessions and watch YouTube videos (Figure 4).

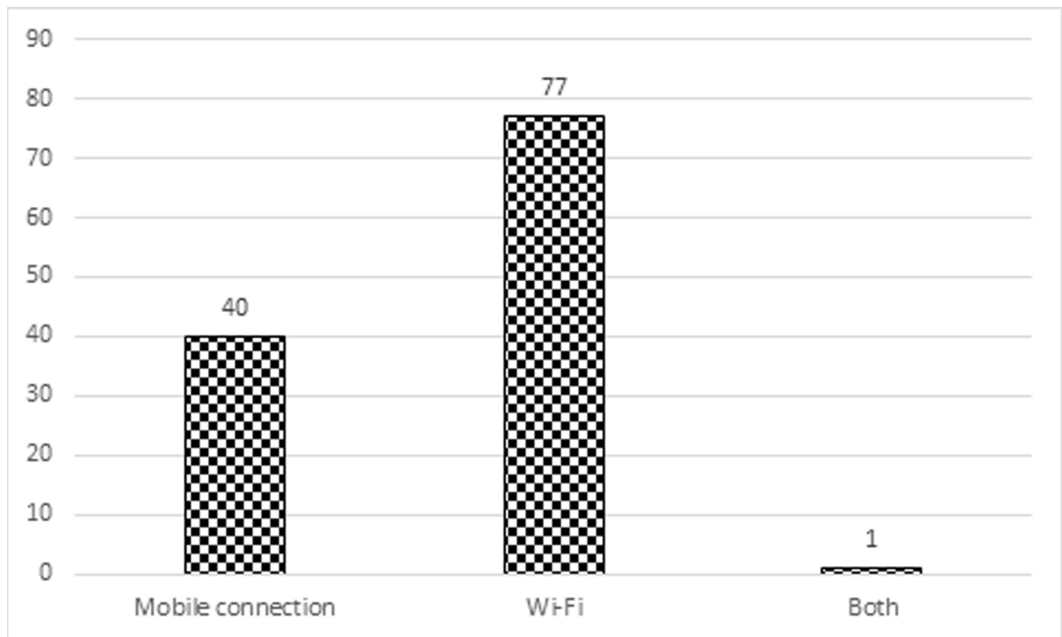
Mobile phones are the most frequently used gadgets by students. Accordingly, teachers and administrators should consider this to provide compatible lessons.

#### 4.2 Attitudes Towards Distance Education

Some measures of central tendency and dispersion of the five-point Likert scale items are summarized in Table 2:



Figure 3. Type of connection



The five-point Likert scale is considered an interval scale. The mean is very significant. From 1 to 1.8, it means strongly disagree. From 1.81 to 2.60, it means disagree. From 2.61 to 3.40, it means neutral; from 3.41 to 4.20, it means agree; from 4.21 to 5, it means strongly agree.

In the first statement, the mean is 3.08. Hence, it means that the majority of participants are neutral as to whether they need technical assistance or not. The mean of the second statement is 2.39. Accordingly, the majority of students do not prefer ICT to face-to-face classrooms. The third statement about satisfaction with teachers' performance, the majority of students are not satisfied with their teachers' online performance. Some students are neutral. The majority of students reported neutrality with being distracted when they learn online as is seen in the mean of 3.0.

#### 4.3 Access and Use of Distance Education Platforms

Figure 5 shows the most frequent platforms student have access to.

As can be seen, WhatsApp, dictionary and Google are most frequently used by students. This is followed by portable document files and word documents. Other platforms like Moodle and MOOCs in which the Ministry of Higher Education invested much money are less frequently used by students (Figure 6).

Surprisingly, the majority of students reported that they do not have access to their academic emails. These emails are indispensable in having access to online platforms like Moodle and MOOCs. Without having these emails, students cannot see the lessons posted on these platforms. It is high time access be granted to students or the lessons be posted on social media accessible to everyone. Some students share the PDF documents taken from the platforms on WhatsApp groups.

#### 4.4 Positive and Negative Attitudes Towards Distance Education

Students in the focus group were asked the following questions:

1. What is your attitude toward ICT during COVID-19?

Figure 4. Word cloud on the most frequent gadgets used by students



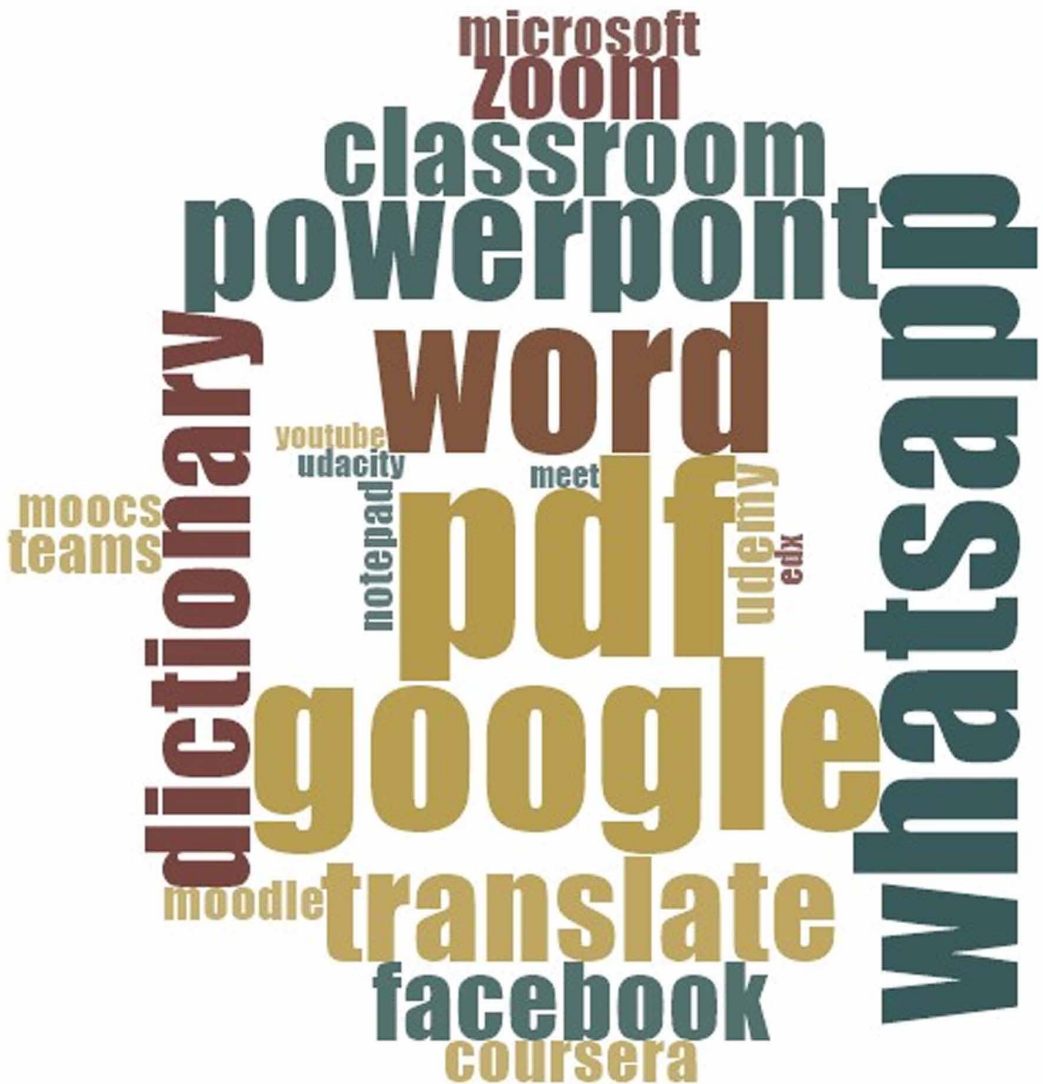
Table 2. Descriptive statistics on the attitudes towards distance education in Morocco

Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I need technical assistance.	116	1	5	3.08	1.210
2. I prefer technology to real classes.	117	1	5	2.39	1.231
3. I am satisfied with my teachers' online performance.	116	1	5	2.75	1.407
4. I get distracted when learning online.	117	1	5	3.00	1.365
Note. 1 strongly disagree; 2 disagree; 3 neutral; 4 agree; 5 strongly agree.					

2. Do you agree with how the university deals with distance education during the outbreak of COVID-19?
3. Could you mention three things universities should do to enhance E-learning?
4. Do you have any idea about the weaknesses and strengths of distance education in Morocco?
5. What do you suggest to improve the use of ICT in Morocco?

Students' attitudes were classified into positive and negative attitudes in addition to recommendations:

Figure 5. Word cloud on the most frequent software programs used by students

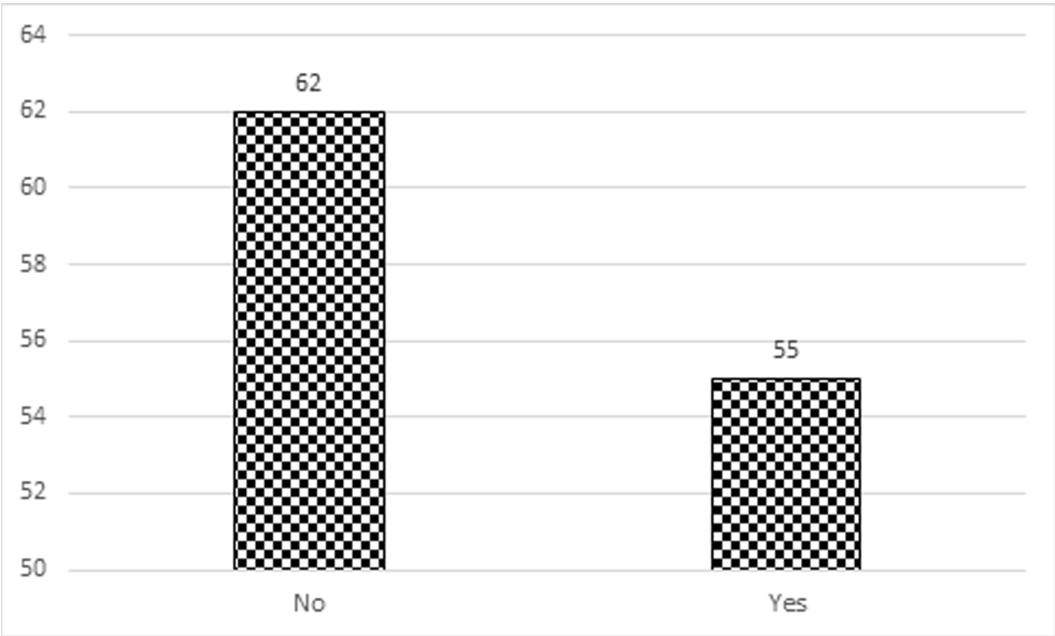


### 3.4.1 Positive Attitudes

Students reported many positive attitudes. Distance education is necessary during COVID-19 because there is no choice. It is the only way to ensure education continuity and protect health. Respondent 1 said, “my attitude towards ICT is that it is necessary in these circumstances to protect people (students, professors ...)”. Moreover, distance education is good for students who live far from the universities. Respondent 10 said

None. If anything, I suffer more with face-to-face classes than online classes. I live exactly 9.1 Kilometers away from my university, and taking public transportation (especially buses) is not the best. Not to mention that it is a waste of both money and energy when sometimes professors fail to warn us of their absence

Figure 6. The frequency of students who have an academic email



Employees and part-time students reported positive attitudes towards distance education because they can study in their free time without having to attend. Besides, distance education will guarantee the safety of teachers, students and their parents.

#### 4.4.2 Negative Attitudes

There are many negative attitudes toward distance education in Morocco. The reasons revolve mainly on the lack of materials and teacher involvement. Respondent 3 said, “I do not agree because they have to clarify lessons whether with recording videos or video calls”. The majority of students reported that their negative attitudes are because of a lack of support and lack of free platforms. One student reported having difficulties by saying, “because we don’t get enough information, and we find many difficulties to understand the lessons we get from our professors”. The use of distance education is unplanned. One student said, “In fact, I think that our university is not qualified much better to be in the top dealing with some kind of these circumstances as now”. For lack of involvement, another student said, “Because some professors didn’t care about their students or provide the lessons that are required to prepare for”. In general, lack of materials, involvement and organizations are the reasons behind holding negative attitudes towards distance education.

#### 4.4.3 Recommendations of Students

Students recommended many changes in distance education as is currently delivered. Respondent 4, refereeing to teachers, said “they should do a lot of explaining of lessons and make videos”. This is a call for teachers to coordinate their efforts and deliver online lectures rather than just sharing materials. There is an issue of internet access, especially for students living in rural areas. One respondent said, “Many students live in rural areas, and they don’t have any Wi-Fi or internet, some others have problems with websites. They couldn’t create accounts...”. This is an implicit demand for improving the internet connection sector in Morocco. Hence, one student recommended the following steps to improve distance education in Morocco

*Give and supply free internet to the majority of students. Teachers need to provide and grant more explanations with massive examples for a better understanding. However, supply much time for the preparation for the exams by lessening and limiting the lessons.*

Pedagogically speaking, one respondent suggested working on old exams by each teacher. This is a recurrent pedagogical demand of students. Moroccan university students look passionately for validation of their modules by getting 10 out of 20 or beyond this average. Teachers have different methodologies. Hence, students keep asking about whether a teacher so and so gives good grades or no. They prepare for the exams by working on previous exams.

Another respondent suggested organizing the material on online platforms. Moreover, many students recommended that teachers should explain their lectures using videos and voice recordings because uploading documents alone is not enough. The respondent said, “Some teachers should take into consideration that we are no longer studying in classes because they give students lessons and leave them fighting with themselves trying to understand”. Many recommendations were made to improve distance education in Morocco, especially providing the means and advising teachers to put more efforts in distance education, which is still in its infancy in Morocco at least during the first six months of COVID-19.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The Moroccan educational system collapsed due to COVID-19. Education was suspended starting from the mid of March upon discovering the first COVID-19 case coming from Europe. The abrupt adoption of distance education has a negative impact on students' attitudes towards learning due to the lack of preparation.

Students, teachers and universities were not ready to adopt distance education despite many regulations and former recommendations. Most students have just mobile phones. They use social media more than government-sponsored platforms. These findings fit with the study by Mishra, Gupta and Shree (2020) who investigated online teaching and learning in higher education during the lockdown period of the pandemic in India. Teachers and students use free platforms for education, such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Google Classrooms instead of limited access platforms such as Teams.

Attitudes of students vary on many variables. Part-time students have positive attitudes towards distance education as it allows them to study and work at the same time. Moreover, some students live far away from the faculties. They cannot attend courses. Hence, distance education is suitable for them. Besides, some students come from disadvantaged situations. They cannot afford the rent to attend courses at university. Again, distance education is good for them with or without COVID-19. This finding fits with Badu-Nyarko's study (2006) who talks about the concern with resource shortage and the need for extra work to implement distance education. The attitudes of faculty members are summarized as follows:

- A belief that students taking distance courses will not learn as much as those in regular universities;
- The fear that distance education courses cannot be used to meet the entrance requirements of institutions of higher learning;
- The belief that the use of distance education courses will adversely affect the accreditation of the degrees; and
- The belief that distance education courses are poorly prepared by unqualified persons (MAcafae 1972, p.34 as cited in Badu-Nyarko, 2006, p. 62)

These findings are still applicable nowadays during the crisis of COVID-19.

The limitations of the current study are mainly attributed to the small sample size. Accordingly, generalizations cannot be drawn. However, the statistics given by the Moroccan Ministry of Education on the percentages of parents and students who chose face-to-face education for the 2020-2021 school year constitute the big majority, approaching 85%. Accordingly, this proves that most students have negative attitudes toward distance education. Being at university with friends is not like being alone at home studying. Education is more of a social and humanistic process than a strictly pedagogical one.

As for the recommendations, there should be research more on the situation of each student, each level and each institute. University life of English department students should be investigated, especially everything that relates to campus and dormitories. The latter can give insights into the adopted type of distance education. Furthermore, universities should have partnerships with laptops, mobile phones and internet connection companies to provide special offers to students and teachers.

Teachers should prepare lessons and deliver them in different formats. Universities should organize lessons in an accessible way, and the government should provide free access to educational platforms. It is highly recommended that distance education should take the needs of individuals with visual impairments. Written material will not be suitable for this category of people.

Besides, distance education should be personalized to these students who are used to high school life. Unlike freshman students who are in the second semester who already have some experience with university life, methodology and assessment, the newcomers to university need more orientation and support from the administrators and teachers as they may not even see their faces. Therefore, universities should market more their services, such as their websites, academic email and e-learning platforms. Even junior and senior students do not have access to their institutional emails, let alone freshmen. This issue of marketing can be seen even in that some university teachers do not use this institutional email and Urkund given by the institute of scientific research in Morocco. Hence, a lot of investments and funds have been squandered in vain as few students and teachers do not know of these platforms, let alone use them. The minister of national education reported that 80% of students have chosen face-to-face education rather than distance education. This proves the low popularity accorded to distance education from pre-primary schools to high schools.

Moroccan universities launched new platforms for organizing students for exams and administrative documents. This platform is called “e-scol” which refers to student affairs, student support or student services. Some universities have distributed students to examination centers according to the address they first provided on the day of enrollment. However, some students complain on social media as they have changed those addresses.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

All in all, the objective of the current study has been to investigate the attitudes of Moroccan English Department students towards distance education in Morocco. Accordingly, the study has employed a mixed-method research design by triangulating a survey with 117 respondents and a focus group with 12 participants in addition to a review of the main decisions taken by education authorities as well as previous research articles on the same issues in Morocco and abroad.

The conceptual framework consists of defining ICT and distance education. Attitudes are one of the components of KSA that stands for knowledge, skills and attitudes. Along with motivation, attitude is a determining factor in moving individuals to adopt certain behaviors. Distance education refers to teaching and learning. Moreover, the statements and reports of the ministry of education as well as institutes of higher education were also reviewed. The procedures of examination of the baccalaureate level reported as it was a successful experience. Last but not least, studies on the attitudes of students towards distance education and distance education during COVID-19 were reviewed.

A mixed-method design is adopted in the current study. Both the questionnaires and a focus group were adopted. A questionnaire in Google Forms was shared on Facebook and WhatsApp groups for students to complete using convenience sampling. A snowball sampling for the focus group was

adopted. 117 respondents completed the online survey, and 12 participants participated in the focus group. The results showed that students hold positive and negative attitudes towards distance education. The former is because of work-related issues in real-life education. The latter is because of the lack of involvement of students and teachers, lack of connection and lack of organizations. New changes that coincided with the end of the current study was the implementation of distance assessment by limited access institutes and institutions where there are high rates of COVID-19 infections.

University Hassan II was the first one to implement distance assessment in open access institutes. Students were given exams in the form of research topics that involve the use of research skills rather than knowledge alone. Students in the undergraduate program of the English department in Ain Chok Faculty of Arts and humanities were given one hour to one hour and thirty minutes to finish the exam, type or scan it then send it to the email given by their professors. A warning of plagiarism was reported on the exam papers. However, teachers did not use the email address that measures plagiarism affiliated with Urkund and sponsored by the Moroccan Institute of Scientific and Technic Information (IMIST). It is highly recommended that more marketing of such platforms should be done for university teachers in Morocco during and after COVID-19. Besides, students recommend more serious works for distance education to be successful in Morocco. Moroccan face-to-face education was resumed in September for primary and secondary education, whereas tertiary education was resumed in the mid of October. Parents and students had to choose which mode of education they prefer by signing a form for that. The majority preferred face-to-face education despite the risks.

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## APPENDIX A. QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) What is your gender?
  1. Male
  2. Female
- 2) What is your age?
  1. 18-20
  2. 21-23
  3. 24-26
  4. Above 26
- 3) What is your education level?
  1. Freshman (S2 and S4)
  2. Sophomore (S4 and S6)
  3. Junior (S6)
  4. Senior (Professional Licence/Master)
- 4) In what area do you live?
  1. Rural
  2. Urban
- 5) Which of the following gadgets do you have (you can tick more than one)?
  1. Mobile phones
  2. Laptop
  3. Desktop
  4. Tablets
  5. TV
- 6) How often do you have an internet connection?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Usually
  5. Always
- 7) What kind of connection do you have?
  1. Mobile connection
  2. Wi-Fi
  3. Both
- 8) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?

**Box 1. 1. Strongly disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly disagree**

I need technical assistance.	
I prefer distance education to face-to-face classes.	
I am satisfied with my teachers' online performance.	
I get distracted when learning online.	

- 9) Do you have full access to your institutional email (the email given by the university)?
  1. No
  2. Yes

10) What software programs do you use in your studies?

Thank you for your collaboration 😊