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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### PROFESSORS PERCEPTION OF E-LEARNING AS PERMANENT MODEL: MOROCCAN BUSINESS SCHOOL - QUALITATIVE STUDY

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#### Abstract

The teaching profession had to change to face the imminent health crisis that forced the world to step back and shutdown all the activities, in order to continue their activities, all the sectors and professions had to switch to a new way of work, as the education did to face the crisis, by changing their way of teaching from a face to face to a distance learning, that forced the professors to change also their way of practicing their work. This article aims to bring to light the professor's perception of a permanent model of online learning, in a business and management studies in higher education and its impact on the quality of the programs and the courses, based on qualitative research, administrating a guided questionnaire.

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#### Introduction:-

The world faced and still living a very uncertain and ambiguous times, due to the covid 19 crisis, this ongoing situation has not yet faded, with years passing by, the societies have to improve the working process to maintain whatever other matters and difficulties they will be facing, all the activities were suspended and had to find a solution to get through this imminent interruption, some of the industries maintained their activities due to a digitalization of their process and practices, but a lot of them tried to search for a solution to get through the crisis, the education sector have to face it too, and remote/distance learning became the solution.

Universities, schools and institutions who had already started their digital transformation didn't find that hard to switch in to 100 per cent digital learning, but for the others the struggle was real.

For the Moroccan education sector, it has been very challenging and difficult to maintain a qualitative activity, but however they managed to get through the crisis by the help of social networking sites, and other plate-forms.

It's in this case that the word e-learning was a priority to maintain the education activities, so that all cannot interrupt their academic cursus.

The multiple resolutions that have been taking by the education ministry thought those last decades, in order to offers all the young citizens, the right to knowledge and education. Also they managed a digital strategy to overcome

Dysfunctions, that higher education have to face for the upcoming years, as enormous numbers of students who will integrate the university, the costs of education, etc.

therefore, the implementation of Law 01-00 and the pedagogical reform in 2003, several actions have been taken to develop a digital environment, especially at the level of teaching and schooling services. Regardless of these initiatives, a global national strategy for higher education, driven by a national policy for the development of digital technology and its use at the national level that would be applied at the university, is struggling to emerge (CSEFRS, N°5 – 2019).

Those actions will help the educational sectors to develop and create a value. To improve the governance and transparency problems and solve them, to transform the way its organized and operated, to lead in terms of innovation in the education pedagogy.

Therefore, those actions were tested in the world health crisis in 2019, by forcing to transform and to applicate an e-learning model, it's necessary at this stage of operational digital transformation to evaluate its impact, to learn about the challenges and opportunities that this model can offer to the educational sector.

Online teaching has both pros and cons for professors and students during this pandemic. The overwhelming professors confronted obstacles in e-learning due to the lack of online teaching experiences (Bao, 2020).

We seek through this article, to emphasize the perspective of e-learning model in our society by questioning the important part of all education institution, and discussing it with the professors, as they are a key element to the success of this component.

### Overview of digital transformation in the education sectors

The Covid-19 pandemic is conceptualized as a major environmental change requiring organizational adaptation at different levels. Adaptation processes as such are always important events in the evolutionary history of organizations. Therefore, a selectionist perspective that is able to apply central concepts of complex science and evolution is suitable for investigating organizational change (P.Khanal, F.Bento&M.Tagliabue, 2021). Those last decades were marked by the concept of digital transformation, any organization seeking to develop and continue existing knows that it's important to remain in the course and to adjust and rethink their process and work, moreover as mentioned the Covid 19 pandemic led to immediate change and a total switch to digital transformation.

### Defining concepts (El Addouli&Imouri, 2022)

In their article about the social networking integration in Morocco, El Addouli&Imouri, collected and listed the defining concepts related to the education digitalization, to get a better understanding of the differences that may occurred. (El Addouli&Imouri 2022)

Social Networks	Boyd and Ellison, 2008	Social networking sites as web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.
Online learning	Harasim, 2013	Refers to the use of online communication networks for educational applications, such as: course delivery and support of educational projects, research, access to resources, and group collaboration; an online program is one where at least 80 percent of the program content is delivered online
Distance learning	Harasim, 2013	Learning activities which occur when instructors and students are separated by geography and time. Distance learning employs a correspondence model in which learning materials are sent to the student who completes and submits the assigned work. The student also has access to a tutor for assistance. Enabling communication technologies include the postal system, telephones, television, videoconferencing, email, and computer conferencing/forums
E-learning	Sangrà& al.	E-learning could be considered a natural evolution of distance learning,

	2012	which has always taken advantage of the latest tools to emerge in the context of technologies for structuring education. In fact, some authors consider e-learning to be a new generation of distance education, even as they point to significant differences between the two and highlight a key starting point: “E-learning does not represent more of the same (...) [It is] about doing things differently”.
Virtual Learning	Racheva, 2017	. According to virtual learning can be defined as Distance learning conducted in a virtual learning environment with electronic study content designed for self-paced (asynchronous) or live web-conferencing (synchronous) online teaching and tutoring.
Blended learning	Allen and Seaman, 2010	It’s blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings.
Education 4.0.	Fedena, 2018	Education 4.0 essentially uses technology based tools and resources to drive education in non-traditional ways. This means that students are no longer in traditional classrooms learning from teachers using textbooks, pens and papers only.

The arrival of the Z generation with advanced information and digital capabilities has brought about a state of change in peoples’ personal, professional, social and cultural lives. The computer networking revolution has transformed even our educational systems. Furthermore, all the previously mentioned concepts, are used interchangeably and meet at a certain point together to mean that education can be a successful one when they are used accurately by both digital natives and digital immigrants and create interactive learning environments (El Addouli&Imouri. 2022)

Within those arguments we tend to implicate our professors into a new technology of communication cause simply that their generation lived a phenomenon into a late age considering that they need more effort to integrate the use of digital tools into their work.

The school system had to adjust to fit into this new situation, and professors need training to boost their confidence to deal with the new condition imposed by the pandemic (Kast, 2021)

### **Context:**

This study is taking place in a private Moroccan business school, in higher education, after the Covid 19 crisis, after almost one and half year form the lockdown, we aim to comprehend the perception of the professors toward the e-learning model as a permanent solution. The participants of this studies are the professors in management and business discipline. The school is engaged in a connected classrooms and connective working spaces, and students are in majority having their own laptop and network connection, about 14full time professors, in management and business were invited to participate to the research.

This research is seeking to answer a major research question:

What are the professor’s perception of e-learning, as a permanent model and as new way of teaching and sharing knowledge?

To do so so, we administrated a guided survey in interviews, to help us get a detailed answer for our major research question, we asked a number of questions that well helped us. Here below the series of the questions asked in the interviews.

### **Research questions:**

The purpose of this study is to explore and to emphasize the professor about their experience of e- learning and how they perceive it, for the future.

To do so, and to get an answer to our hypothesis, we administered a guided survey in an inductive, qualitative research, shared with the professors on e-mail and face to face with some who were available. The guided survey included eight major questions:

1. Did you have the opportunity to deliver a course or meeting with your students remotely, prior to the Covid19 crisis, if so how did you experience this and how was it perceived by your students and colleagues?
2. Do you think that your institution has managed and organized the immediate transition to distance learning in an optimal way?
3. -Do you plan to adopt online teaching permanently for your next courses or meetings?
4. -Do you think the quality of teaching and content has changed for online courses, during the health crisis?
5. -What did you identify during the online courses as factors of effectiveness and/or difficulty?
6. -Did the workload change during this period, if so, on which part of your practice as a teacher did the load manifest itself?
7. -How did you perceive the experience of your fellow teachers?
8. -What was your students' feedback?

The interviews dates, were divided in two parts, the 29 & 30 August and the 2 & 8 of September, 2022.

### **Materials And Method:-**

The study used semi-structured interview tool. A background survey asked the participants to provide their e-mails and answer questions about their experiences with the distance learning during the lockdown. The interview questions mostly were open questions to select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest, and one oriented question to help us get a level of implication using Likert scale. Questions reflected the attitude professors towards the distance learning and its influence over the quality of the course content delivered and if it is the same as face-to-face learning within classrooms, and opinions about professors' pedagogics and the workload difference. The interview was conducted in two main stages. It started with identifying and introducing the topic to help participants feel at ease, and thank them as they accepted the invitation to participate in contributing to the aims of the research. In the second phase, the researcher addressed the previously mentioned questions and gave interviewees enough time to feel comfortable and express themselves in a freeway. As a note, it should be stated that the interviews were conducted during August the 29th & 30th, 2nd, 2nd and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

### **Design**

This is a qualitative research, using a guided survey administered to professors in a business school, in higher education, descriptive and explanatory study, shared with 14 full time professors, 3 of the professors were not available to participate to the study.

The research had in depth the workload of the professors, and the time line of a post lockdown evaluation, in addition if they were comfortable with a distance learning model as a permanent model.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are professors of a business school in higher education, implemented in Morocco, 14 full time professors in the field of management and business were invited to participate by answering a list of open questions.

The data collected, from the professors, who have worked during the lockdown and they participated to the sudden change switch from a physical, face-to-face course to a 100 per cent to distance learning, after they approved by email their participation to the interviews. They have been working in the school from one to six years, and with a background teaching experience, holding a Ph.D. in management and business discipline, participating actively in the curriculum and many extra curriculum of student's activities, as is their value in the school. They hold a detailed knowledge of their students and their administration staff, located in Rabat.

### **Data collection**

Multiple sources and descriptive data regarding the e-learning and the professors' experience toward distance learning, the interviews were conducted to learn about the professor's perception of a permanent e-learning program, to learn more about their experience with the distance learning during the lockdown that made them change their practices into a new solution to face those difficult times, physically and emotionally and integrate the students and their doubts during this period, the research includes the fact that a lot of research has brought to light the

challenges but also the opportunities that this situation may have offers, and it's relevant to consider the importance of professors perception, and vision about e-learning, several studies described obstacles confronted by instructors in virtual teaching in higher education during the Covid 19 while disregarding the perception and challenges of school professors toward e-learning in an ongoing outbreak. In the present article we will fill in this gap.

The semi-structured interview questions included open-ended and closed questions about how teaching instruction changed, how student learning was perceived, what challenges were encountered, and the opportunities that we can take it as a lesson, how the transition to online education was handled? And if the quality of the learning somehow changed, to better or worse during a distance learning.

Open-ended questions were crafted with a focus on content, clarity and sequencing. Conversations focused on subject-specific instructional goals, individual professors' performance, interaction with colleagues, technology needs, personal professional skill development, facilitation, the role of the institution. The categories, themes and connections formed a storyline that allowed the description, explanation, and summary of phenomena emerging from the data. Care was taken to use non-technical terms to educational technology to keep it simple to the professors, to get a simple and honest view of their thinking of e-learning model.

### **Analysis**

Data were analyzed using a qualitative general inductive approach, which used to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format, to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data also to develop of model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data provide us with frequently reported patterns used in qualitative data analysis, an systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data where the analysis is guided by specific objectives (David R Thomas, 2003),

The raw data, taken from the interviews, were analyzed and double checked so the results can be accurate.

### **Results:-**

The following sections report on data from the interviews, and the observations from the participants describing and explaining how they experienced the imminent transition during the Coronavirus crisis, to distance learning mode.

Most of the professors had experienced the e-learning model before the lockdown, for them it was a good experience as it was a new way of interaction with the students whom have been very comfortable than classes for most of them, this question is aiming to know if the professors had enough knowledge and back ground of ICT, information communication technology. As the majority known the concept even for those who never used it before.

### **The Transition to distance learning lead by the institution:**

The distance learning started one week from the lockdown in march 2020, the participants have divided opinions on how their institution handled the emergency of the situation and to switch to a total distance learning, but as the majority the transition were well held and the enough resources to simplify the process, as they mentioned a tutorial made by two colleagues that have already use a distance learning in their courses before the crisis. Only two professors had problems with the way their institution didn't held well the transition especially at the beginning were confronted to bad signal and technical issues but they confirmed after that found a way through it to handle their courses.

### **Professors workload**

Most of the participants noticed a change in their workload especially at the beginning of the distance learning, they said that they had to go through their courses materials and adjusted to so they can share it with their students as it was a guide trough the course, they had added a new task to their schedule, is to answer the students emails as they consider that they did answer them mostly when they were in classes which saved them time, and in the lockdown they were submerged with students emails.

The online meeting was a plus task for them as they claim that they spent all day long scrolling their emails and Zooms, which were time consuming.

Last but not least they felt more efficient and flexible as they move in the weeks after they tried to managed their time and had more time to work on their research articles and future courses.

Indeed, the transition need to put some plus work to make the model of e-learning work but as the time go through they found it flexible and better way to share their knowledge with the students, they especially mentioned that those times made the students be more independent with their students' life as they were active actors the in the courses and that they had to put more efforts to learn and earn their diploma.

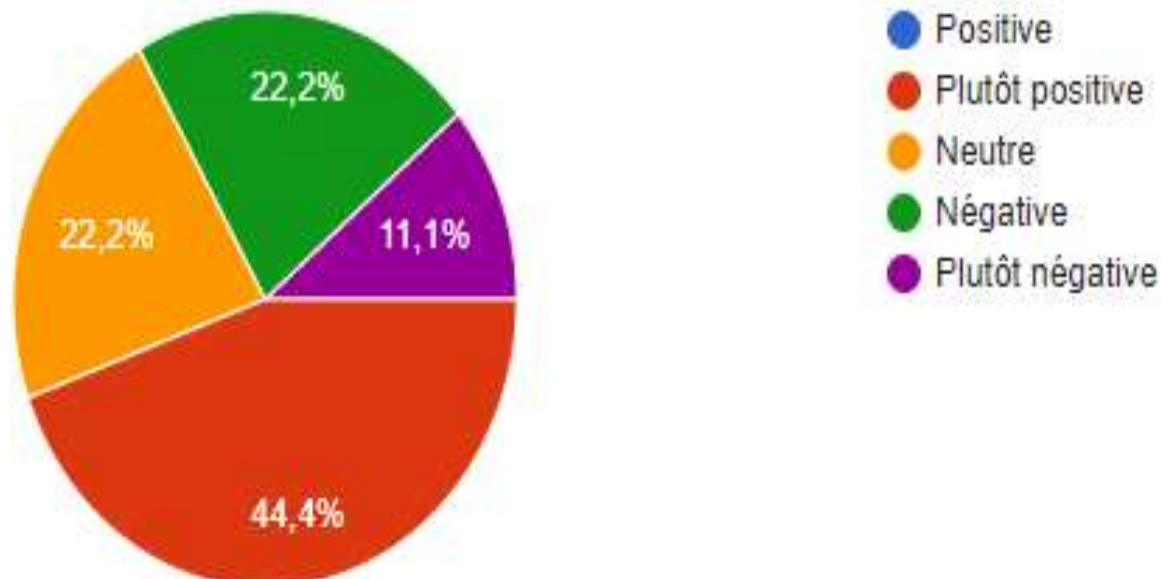
one said that the way from the school to his house took at least two hours and he felt more relieved to just give an online course in his home office where he mentioned that he felt that he had a plenty of time to move on with other projects, like writing and reading. Indeed they all express a frustration feeling at the beginning when they announced the transition most of it was because of the chaotic situation they were facing at that time with spread of the coronavirus in world, and they were worried about them self and their families and their future, but one they begin their courses and they had to see through a digital canal other persons (referring to students and colleagues) they felt comfortable and for a lot it was comforting and escape form the new lockdown days that no one had faced before.

They had all mentioned a routine meeting with other members of their school to catch up on their next session and discussing it more efficiently online than when they were in the school physically the time and space for each were different especially when the courses begins.

#### **Online delivery, the success and challenges faced, and the students feed back**

The online delivery was in resume a success, from a part that professors willing to initiate this approach on their future courses, but in hybrid way for most, because they feel the necessity of having human contact with their students even if most of the courses can be taught remotely, taking in consideration the time efficiency were the location doesn't matter, so the majority of students can attend the course, to resume the flexibility that distance learning had offer them. Moreover, the difficulties or challenges that professors faced during the remote learning were a technical issues related to network and the absence of a human presence and interactions, adding that there were losing the attention of most of the students without knowing if they were present or if they only been logged.

Professors expressed that their students were in majority fairly positive with the distance learning experience as shown in the graph below.



**Figure 1:-** Statistics form the research survey on the student's feedback on e-learning during Covid 19 lockdown.

A very few students expressed to their professors, their none satisfaction with the experience, as some mentioned that they felt more connected with the courses in physical classroom, and that they are more likely preferring to attend the classroom than a virtual course.

**Discussion:-**

The professors experienced an important workload average especially in the first weeks of the Covid 19 lockdown. They had to face a new challenges and search for new commodities to their courses format, the time needed to prepare their courses, the amount of content they could teach, and how difficult it was to engage the students and asses their learning.

The participation of the school to reach out with them and to offer them a psychological support for them and their students during those hard times were a motivating key to improve their content and to interact with their students through a new canal, this effective and collaborative move from the institution was a good idea to make the distance teaching a success. whilst remote learning has brought many challenges and difficulties, some of the students seemed to be thriving in the new learning setting.

Stated by the professors the hybrid approach should be taken seriously for the next years as they appear to reach more the students, than only a face to face learning course, for some students a distance learning approach have them learn in their own rhythm their courses and they were putting the efforts to learn it, they were more confident and they felt less shy to ask questions and interact than the face to face course, but for some of the students according to professors , they believed in human contact so they are more satisfied with a face to face than a distance learning.

**Conclusions and Recommendation:-**

This study aims to emphasize the importance of the professors' point of view, as it has been shown that is important to understand learning and emergence of new patterns of behavior in different social and organizational setting.

This pandemic has brought new resolution and insight to the effective implementation of the new technology information and communication to our educational system, and to eases the integration of digital transformation. The digital access and connectivity must be the first component for of our future policies,

The professors expressed that during the pandemic they had the chance to work remotely and that the future of education is developing thanks to TIC, they also expressed that they need the face to face contact with their students, the human contact is for them as important as the success of their students, their opinion were very positive but only in the hybrid way, so that it will be possible for them to think of digitalizing their courses. In addition,it's very flexible and productive new way of learning, it gained students with more confidence and independence, the scheduling of classes was more fluid also and simple.

Although, this situation has offers for the Moroccan educational system the test concerning the digitalization and transformation that motivated the educational ministry for almost two decades, surely the focus on the training of the professors and develop the pedagogical units to search for new resolution to made the e-learning a successful component within our future generation.

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