| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Online Assessment: A Case Study of Ecole Normale Superieure, Moulay Ismail University

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| **ABSTRACT**

In the digital age, the use of technology is gradually being imposed in all institutions of higher education in Morocco. Without pretending to replace face-to-face teaching, distance learning is less expensive, flexible and accessible if discussed from a temporal and spatial point of view. It allows for the achievement of objectives that could not be achieved without technology. The numerous pedagogical and technical challenges that our training system should face are becoming more and more important and complex; and so are the speculations. In the era of massiveness and lifelong learning, distance learning favors a greater level of autonomy and productivity in the learning process, which is becoming increasingly distant from the teaching process. However, it should be noted that distance learning is still in the experimental stage and has not yet been adopted as a training modality that would meet the new needs of learners and a new audience that is not to benefit from face-to-face training. If this is the case of distance learning, what could be said about online assessment then? In this article, the focus is going to be put on this latter through the experience of the Ecole Normale Superieure of Meknes with the online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study was conducted at the level of the institution using both a qualitative survey addressed to the professors and a qualitative exploration addressed to the students with the aim of reflecting on the process of the online evaluation. The research findings refer to a deficiency in this area and call for the implementation of training systems to be used, not just in the case of Emergency Remote Teaching.

1. Introduction

Albert Einstein once said that "All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded to the individual''; that is exactly what the university is doing. It has this specificity of being a cognitive institution that produces, circulates and appropriates knowledge. It provides answers to problems of acquaintance about the world and in the world. Its challenge is to transmit knowledge in society and to develop new knowledge that is necessary for human beings to live, communicate and act upon on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the characteristics of these activities have changed recently due to one reason or another, whether it is an option or the only option as in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic. As new coronavirus cases in the country hit a record high, Morocco's government has announced a lockdown in some major cities to curb the spread of the virus on March 20th. As a result, there has been a sudden shift away from the classroom to Emergency Remote Teaching. The methods and technical means of learning, as well as the nature of knowledge, the report between this knowledge and the world, their mode of arrangement, and the body involved in the learning situations, everything has changed, and each university reacted to its way. We can say that this experience was an opportunity to rethink the way things have been dealt with before, and it's high time to talk about how professors can plan scenarios not just for the teaching/learning material but also for the means of evaluation. As a matter of fact, and as professors at Moulay Ismail University, the university platform existed, but it was not fully used until the pandemic time! It is true that the activation phase was excellent in terms of network, scenarios of classes, support

etc., but not much has been said about the evaluation and post-evaluation. Our research is concerned with the evaluation in particular by sharing the experience we had during the pandemic time.

I.1 The context

Moulay Ismail University has immediately put in place modalities to ensure the continuation of pedagogical activities. The university platforms for online training have been functioning since Friday, March 20th. The university put online more than 6300 pedagogical resources on April 14th, 2020. These supports include 5328 resources in the form of PDF, PPT and Word, 661 videos and 314 audio capsules, and it was assigned to the Moroccan Agency of Press to broadcast on the national TV channel Arriyadia and regional radio stations. More than 17.700 students had access to the platform, and they were able to check more than 423.700 pages of courses. The university also ensured the production of an average number of 24 audiovisual capsules per day. The purpose was related to awareness more than education with the participation of experts from the ministry of health.

To encourage professors to produce more audiovisual content, the university's technical teams have developed a training program to introduce them to the techniques and standards for producing this type of content. Professors were offered technical assistance throughout this operation; a lot of e-training sessions were animated by professors from our university to introduce their colleagues to the use of the Moodle platform. As the professors expressed a need for more support, the university was there to provide a training space in the platform; they made it easy to handle it; guidelines were provided starting from the students' registration to the final stage of assessment. It should be noted that the university establishments have held several meetings with the heads of the departments to examine ways of dealing with the exceptional situation.

Considering the students, a unit of communication and remote psychological support has been created. It was insured by experts in psychology from the university in order to ensure channels of listening, support and advice for the benefit of students and help them better-overcome anxiety.

The ENS gave priority to the interaction between the communication unit and the students; this was possible by organizing scientific and cultural activities and opening doors. This was crowned by a video clip that the students made to thank the professors. All in all, the act of teaching-learning took place under favorable conditions (from a professor's perspective).

The main concern was at the level of assessment, one of the most controversial issues in higher education today; it is difficult to choose an approach to evaluate students in the classroom. The professors face many challenges, including issues related to group grading or grading criteria, the appropriate timing to answer questions, exam anxiety, and cheating .... Many of us undergo these challenges and others in the classroom, and the Covid-19 pandemic has made it more challenging, especially that we are not sure who is really behind the screen. Therefore, our main concern was cheating; how can we make sure that our students are not going to check external sources to answer exam questions?

It was necessary to limit as much as possible attempts to cheat during exams; to maintain the value of the value and quality of the programs students were engaged in. Methods differ from one institution to another, but the thing that everyone was concerned with was keeping the TRUE nature of exams.

On the part of the ENS, the midterm exams took place during the lockdown. We privileged take away assignments, mainly topics of reflection, to allow them to encompass the personal work of the students and what they acquired.

2. Methodology

From a professor's perspective, the experience was successful; but we were still concerned. We have conducted a study, and we opted for a mixed methodology. Concerning the qualitative survey, the professors responsible for the modules in both departments were asked about the process of evaluation. On the other hand, the quantitative exploration was addressed to students in order to study and reflect on the process of the online evaluation. It should be noted, though, that students were coming from both rural and urban areas; this part will be referred to in the upcoming sections.

Consequently, we provided students with a questionnaire composed of ten questions. We divided them into three main parts; the first part was concerned with familiarization with the platform and the technical problems, then the fluidity or smoothness of the exams, and finally, the psychological preparation.

Our questionnaire was addressed to two different departments, one of which was specialized in Pedagogical Engineering and Teaching Technologies (I.P.T.E). These students were already well-versed in the use of technologies; because they had modules specialized in Pedagogical engineerings, such as audio-visual, computer science, and science of Education. 27 students received
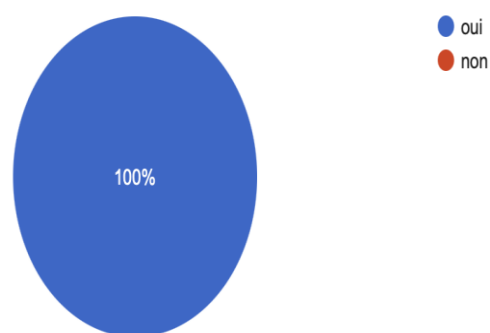
the survey, but only 18 answered it; this could be due to the fact that they had already got their degrees and left the school. The other department was Bachelor's Degree in English Didactics (B.D.E.D, specializing in Secondary Education. They had been initiated to the use of technology; because they had modules specialized in ICT and teaching English, Learning Technologies for the EFL, Didactics of English, and competencies and standards. The questionnaire was sent to 76 students, 61 of which answered, worth bearing in mind that they are in their second year at the ENS.

3. **Discussion**

The experience of the online exam at the ENS was the first of its kind at Moulay Ismail University, and it could be described as successful to some extent. It was the result of teamwork where both administration staff and professors coordinated and worked hand in hand to make it happen.

A plan of implementation was made by the professors; the first step was providing an evaluation guide before the exam took place; it included diagrams of activities to refer to the role of each of us. The day of the exam was a little demanding and stressful; along with variant tests were given to students to reduce cheating attempts. The groups were divided into 5 subgroups, each of which was given a different test. Furthermore, personalized topics were provided; every student had to talk about his/her own research project instead of content-based questions. Finally, remote monitoring using Google meet; we asked students to be connected both on their mobiles and their laptops, three professors were invigilating, and once they had doubts about a student, they would ask him/ her to activate their microphones.

1.   Familiarization with the platform & Technical problems:
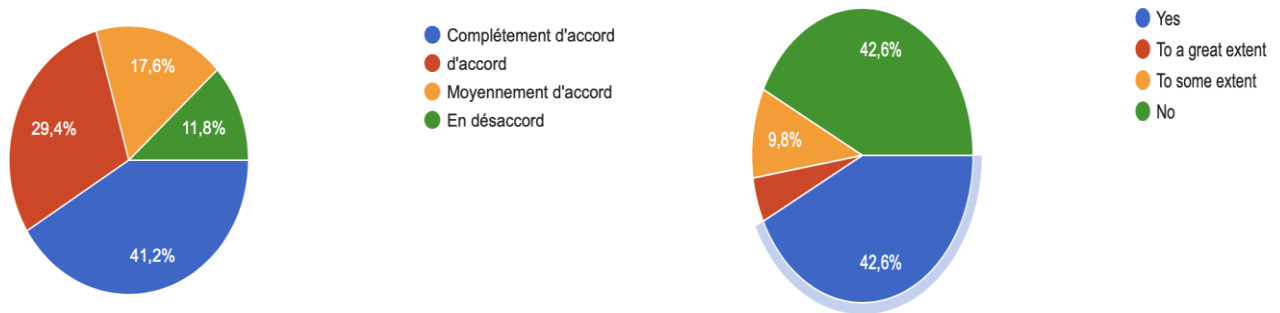 Department of Pedagogical Engineering   English department
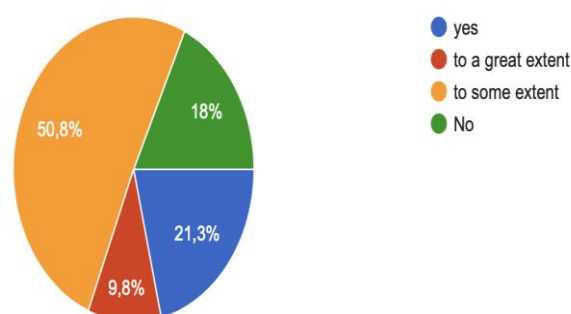
Concerning the department of Pedagogical Engineering, all students have answered that they were used to the platform since they had been implementing lessons in Moodle during the whole stages of their studies in the university, contrarily to students of the English department who were introduced to Edmodo only during their studies while their exams were taken on the platform.
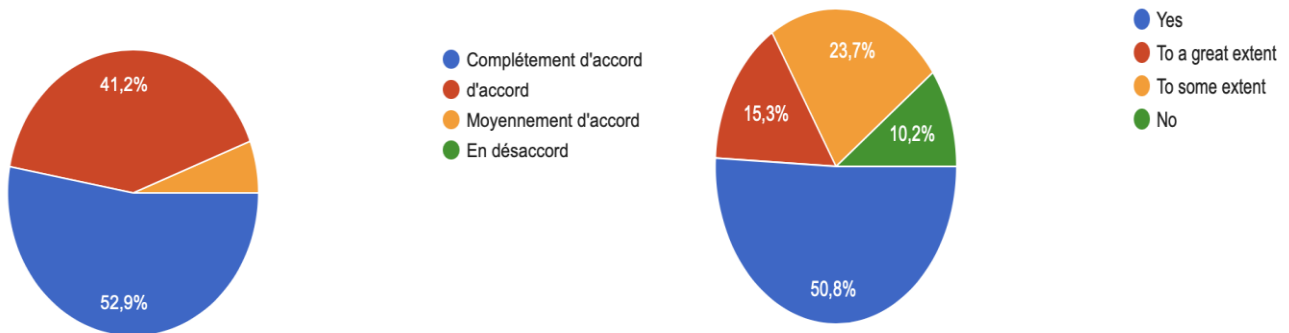
As a result of this, students from the department of Pedagogical Engineering did not really find serious technical problems while dealing with the platform. On the other hand, students from the English department expressed finding certain problems related to the connection speed and network. It is worth noting that the platform was free during that period of exam of I.P.T.E and the main problem was at the level of remote monitoring on Google meet, conversely to the period when students of the English department took their exams and paid for the connection they were using.

3.   Was it possible to take all exams online?

Pie chart 1 (left):
- Complétement d'accord: 41,2%
- d'accord: 29,4%
- Moyennement d'accord: 17,6%
- En désaccord: 11,8%

Pie chart 2 (right):
- Yes: 42,6%
- To a great extent
- To some extent: 9,8%
- No: 42,6%

Students were also asked if it were possible to take all the modules online; the results were close in both departments as more than 40% affirmed that it was possible, while 11,5 % from the I.P.T.E were in total disagreement along with 42,6% from the English department. The result could be understood given the fact that it was the first time students were evaluated under these circumstances. This opens the door to seriously discussing the implementation of technological tools in the curriculum and making use of the university platforms for different activities in the learning process.

4.   Were the exam questions well structured?

Pie chart 1 (left):
- Complétement d'accord: 52,9%
- d'accord: 41,2%
- Moyennement d'accord
- En désaccord

Pie chart 2 (right):
- Yes: 50,8%
- To a great extent: 15,3%
- To some extent: 23,7%
- No: 10,2%

More than 50% of students from both departments affirmed that the exam was well structured; 41,2% from the I.P.T.E agreed to a great extent, along with 15,3% from the English department. This was a challenging part for the professors as they had to change the way of putting questions, in addition to the fact that not all professors were technologically newfangled to create questions that suited the online context.

5. Were the instructions given on the day of the exam clear?
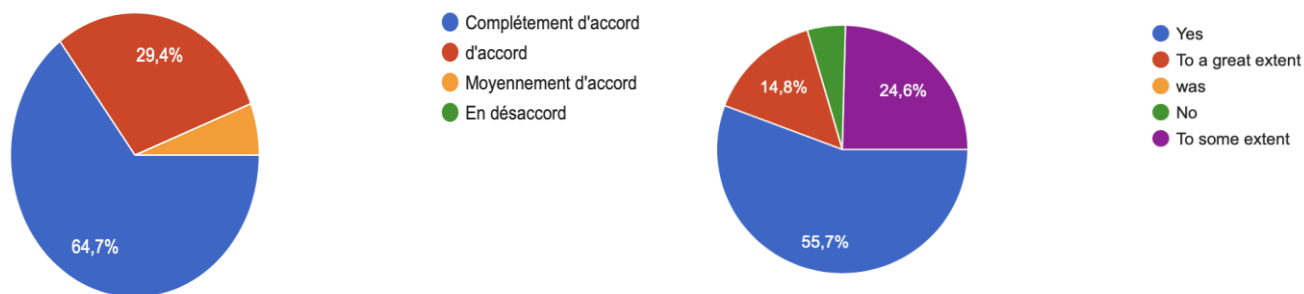
 In the classroom context, it's manageable to clarify instructions if there is any ambiguity. In the online context, it was difficult to judge! Students were asked about the clarity of the instructions; about 55,7% of the English department to 64,7% of Pedagogical Engineering affirmed the instructions were clear. These results are due to adapting the instructions to the online exam; there was a prior online meeting with the students. They were asked to fill up personal details carefully, to submit their paper only once and to check if the document was successfully submitted. They were also informed that the form would be active for two hours only and to contact the professors if they find any difficulties while appearing for the test.

6.   Do you think the type of evaluation you had corresponds to what you acquired?
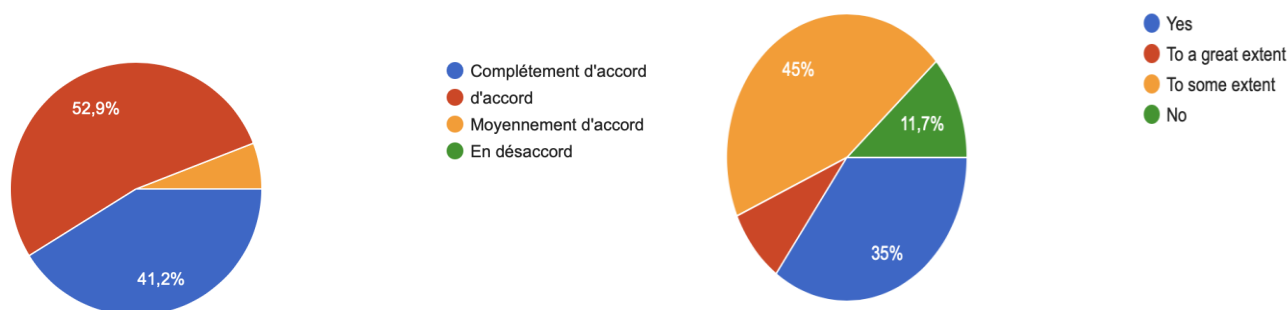
While evaluating, we expect students to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter. It is also important to assess whether the educational goals are being met. Students were asked if the type of evaluation they had corresponded to what they acquired, and the results were surprising to a great extent: 52,9% from Pedagogical Engineering students to 45% from the English department.

7. Was the time given to the modules sufficient to answer the questions?
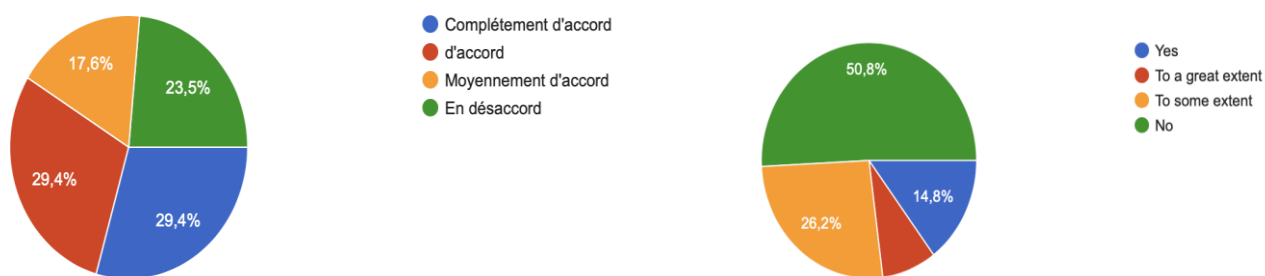
Time is always an issue in exams. Most of the students would complain and ask for more time to finish the exams; the online exam was an exception as 50,8% of the English Department to 23,5% of the Pedagogical Engineering affirmed it was not enough! This

could be due to the nature of exams in both departments, especially since the students from the English department were asked to write an essay, whereas the others were asked to answer direct questions.

8. Were you prepared psychologically for the online exam?
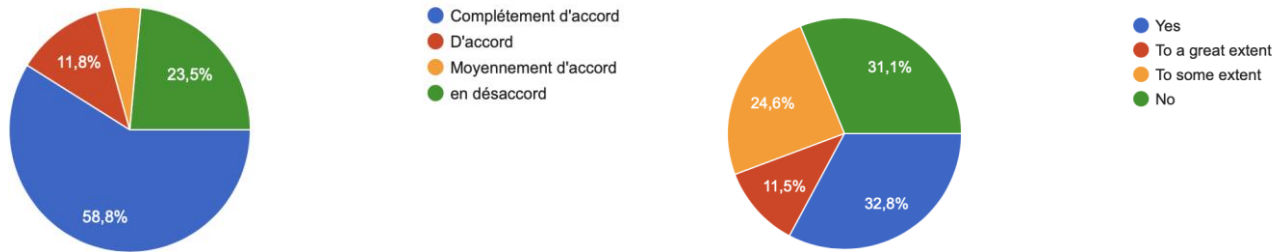
The last part of the questionnaire was concerned with psychological preparation; no one can deny that students feel perplexed during exams; 58,8% of the Pedagogical Engineering to 32,8% from the English Department expressed having psychological support! This part is relative to a great extent depending on how each student sees this support and how each of the professors expresses this latter.

9. Were you encouraged and motivated to successfully take the exam?
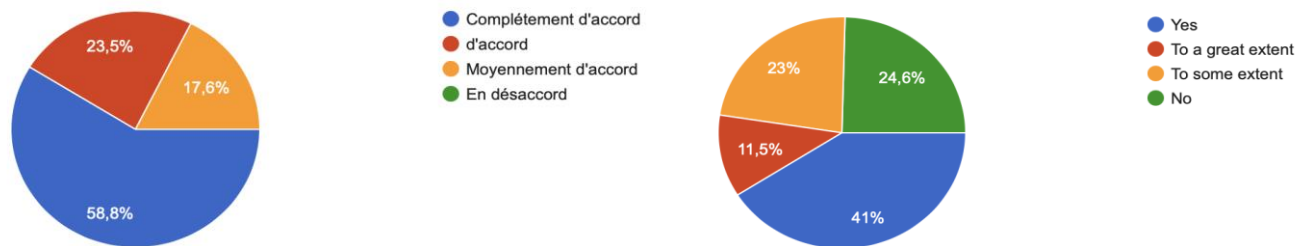
10. The last question was open. It concerned the other difficulties the students faced, whether they would like to repeat if they have to and finally, what could be done to improve the whole experience?

 Below are some of their answers:

If I have to repeat the experience, I would like to improve my organization of time during the online exams.

The other difficulties that I have found are the time given for each module was too short, and there were many technical problems like internet issues; if I have to repeat this experience, I hope the responsible ones inform us before and give us enough time and take into consideration that during the day of the exam we might face many problems and there are some students who have not access to the internet, they live in rural areas

I would like the professors to give more time to the modules' exams.

Provide us with a website with free internet access because there are some of my classmates who have difficulties accessing the internet.

If I have to repeat the experience, I would like to spend all the time allotted and then submit my work

Sometimes the platform would not work or even open. If I have to repeat the experience, I would like to submit my work on edmodo.

I faced many technical problems on the day of the exam. For instance, I failed to send the files of exams because of some problems with the platform. If I have to repeat the same experience, I would like the professor to give us enough time for each exam.

I didn't have any difficulties

Taking online exams was very difficult since we needed hard copies of some modules so as to have a better understanding than answering on the pdf pages. The first thing that has to be improved is the platform because we had many problems on the day of the exam; we couldn't send our answers through the platform on our mobile phones, and their sending required having a laptop. In addition, we had technical problems when we tried to access the exam documents.

4. Conclusion

The experience of the Ecole Normale Superieure of Meknes with the online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic was an opportunity to reflect on our practices in such improvised contexts. Our study was conducted at the level of the institution using both a qualitative survey addressed to the professors and a qualitative exploration addressed to the students with the aim of reflecting on the process of the online evaluation.

We are at the crossroads of "traditional" teaching and the democratization of knowledge; the e-learning phenomenon is now causing many educational opponents to seriously question the future of their practices and the future of their courses. Moreover, e-learning is revealing once again the breakthrough of digital technology in all sectors and, essentially, in the education sector. At the time of COVID, we are still in what PERRIAULT (2012) calls "the diligence effect". In our judgment, the model of knowledge dissemination in an e-learning tool is still at a very vertical stage. It must be noted that in the current state of affairs, there is a huge deficiency in this area in the sense that Moroccan universities do not yet have a broad e-learning policy. Apart from the pedagogical/ instructional designer, the various partners do not yet have a contact person who can negotiate the implementation of training systems.

In an e-learning situation, where the learner's task is to try to appropriate knowledge that is new to him, the content must be structured in a hierarchical way that is clear and adapted to his/her context. As for navigation, it must be linear and guided, going from the simple to the complex. Linguistic and non-linguistic codes can be redundant, and their codes and their mutual reinforcement must be used in an apparent way, and the instructions presented step by step as a sequence of states.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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