

A Pilot Study on Remote and Online Learning Policies in Colleges in Morocco - To What Extent Do Policies Exist?

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Abstract

This pilot qualitative document analysis study explored policies' formation theory and framework as they relate to online learning at six colleges in Morocco. The study generated a conceptual framework through which six higher education institutions in Morocco were examined. The research used document analysis. The framework analyzed, assessed, and reported on each institution's online learning policies, the presence or absence of education majors, and prevailing environmentally friendly culture. For every institution, it was ensured that consistency in instrument administration would not be marred by carelessness in the administration of the instrument. A table was introduced. It represented the percentages that every institution got relating to the research questions and got their mean score. Advancing via instrument use, it was important to be aware of the fact that there was a threat to internal validity that may be caused by maturation and selection. The collection of the data was cross-sectional. The experiment did not apply to professional higher education institutions. It ignored the services that higher education institutions contracted with. It did not explain the type of ethics that a university observed. It was not useful when data regarding higher education universities were not available. The framework should help secure quality learning and persistence in online learning and should contribute to research regarding remote and online learning policies in Morocco. Conducting a pilot study on Remote and Online Learning Policies in Higher Education in Morocco has yielded key findings that are clear, manageable, and will contribute to the research information about the topic.

Keywords: Online learning; remote learning, higher education, universities, colleges, Morocco, policies, framework, pilot study

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Introduction

In 1998, in the early era of online learning in higher education, a study was conducted in the state of California in the United States at California State University and Western Governors University about online learning as an emerging field and on the stakes that are at risk in its incorporation (Berg, 1998).

Some of the worries of the study were the de-valuing of the skills of faculty (Berg, 1998) and the automation of learning in higher education in the online world. Noble (1998) voiced his worries in an article called Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education. He stated that faculty might be pushed to leave their jobs if the importance given to their subject matter expertise is taken away from them. The second worry listed in the Berg (1998) study was that higher education as a field may be hegemonized by corporations whose aim is to sell technology products.

High-technology corporations, indeed, sell all types of technology and technologically proficient tools that aid in learning, earning a bigger and more reliable market that buys and encourages the purchase of these corporations' products and contracts (Antonucci & Cronin, 2001).

Other worries were about how administrators, due to the competitive pressure they met, wanted their institutions to enhance institutional standing by adopting new technologies at any price- even if it was at the detriment of the quality of learning (Antonucci & Cronin, 2001; Berg, 1998).

In fact, online learning programs create, due to the new learning they get equipped with, the proper intellectual and thereby organizational and leadership boost for the organization they are part of (Antonucci & Cronin, 2001; Berg, 1998).

In 1999, an important study by King (1999) laid the foundations of distance learning policies. This study addressed the elements that need to be observed so that distance education can be streamlined. King developed an interesting framework on the streamlining of distance learning (King, 1999).

In 2001, still during the early times of online learning, a study by Antonucci & Cronin (2001), where a description of the creation of an online higher education institution headquartered in the state of Massachusetts is given, laid out differences and common points in policies between an online higher education institution that was about to be created and a traditional face-to-face higher education program (Antonucci & Cronin, 2001). The study found that an online program could preserve policies relating to a traditional university's framework. The points that would be addressed, though, would relate to US federal laws regarding discrimination, family rights, privacy, equal opportunity, sexual harassment, and academic integrity (Antonucci & Cronin, 2001).

As of 2011, attention to social media became important, especially after a student suicide due to college mates' cyberbullying of him (Gregory, 2011) and after some faculty were subject to cyberbullying at the conclusion of a course (Daniloff, 2009).

Between 2011 and 2018, experimentation regarding online learning in higher education continued its course. However, from 2019, as of Covid-19, online learning became authoritative in higher education as higher education institutions were forced to adopt online learning as a mode of learning in higher education (Akpen et al., 2024; Montenegro Rueda et al., 2024).

The issues stated above converge on the fact that online learning policies are a timely topic that can either boost or hamper the progress of higher education learning (Antonucci & Cronin, 2001; Berg, 1998; Carr-Chellman, 2006; Gaytan, 2009; Terkla, 2001; Johnstone & Tilson, 1997).

Literature

Digital Tools in Online Learning: The tools used in online learning are as follows: Learning Management Systems technologies, video, social media, and mobile technology (Johnson et al., 2019). These digital tools are different from printed tools. Many times, digital tools do not emanate from printed tools (Seaman & Seaman, 2023).

Learning Through Multimedia: The Debate: For a long time, there has been a debate on whether the use of the media for learning is effective (Clark, 1983; Kozma, 1994; Mayer, 1997; Radford, 1997; Jonassen et al., 1994). A study has shown that when students receive both verbal and visual representations in exercises, they do significantly (75%) better than when they receive only verbal representations. They can produce learning and transfer their learning to other problem situations (Mayer, 1997). Also, the use of multimedia tools is more effective and impactful with students with low prior knowledge and students with spatial abilities (Mayer, 1997).

Adding to this, Jonassen et al. (1994) argue that the media debate concentrates mainly on objectivist versus instructionist abilities of the media. What should be explored is the quality of instructional elements along with the learner's proactive role in learning and the encouragement or non-encouragement of learning by the context of learning (Jonassen et al., 1994). Multimedia tools should act as intellectual partners in the process of learning. Only in such a context can constructive change happen in the multimedia-affiliated learning (Jonassen et al., 1994).

It is important that instruction through the use of multimedia is conducted well (Radford, 1997). So, what are the conditions under which good multimedia learning occurs? Learning through multimedia should cater to the specific population it addresses. First, a Canadian-based study has shown that there is a need for studies that investigate the needs of different student populations (undergraduate, graduate, Canadian, international, college, university) in terms of their preferred modes of learning (Johnson & Seaman, 2021). Next, according to Clark (1983), when using

multimedia for instruction, the selection of the type of multimedia feature is necessary. Being able to discern between method (genre of processes triggered by multimedia) and medium (type of multimedia) would help researchers account for the variance in learning (Kozma, 1994). Next, the digital literacy and digital aptitude of learners is important (Cronin, 2017). Next, multimedia instructional messages should be anchored on a grasp of human cognition or how human learning works (Mayer, 2003). Next, as to learning itself, for an online higher education program to succeed, it has to be very rich with opportunities where learners interact with each other (Carr-Chellman, 2006; Dumford & Miller, 2018; Rajabalee, Y. B. & Santally, M. I., 2020). To further ensure the quality of collaborative learning, it is recommended that assessment in online learning test collaborative learning where learners furnish efforts as a community of learners (Williams et al., 2014). Next, as to faculty needs in online learning, faculty and administration need to be knowledgeable about learning in online education (Carr-Chellman, 2006). They should be trained in this domain (Johnson et al., 2019). Faculty should be good in assessment of online learners' learning outcomes (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

In terms of their cognizance of copyright and open source laws, faculty need to ameliorate their cognizance regarding these fields (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Stating this, research has found that positive progress has been noted in faculty's interactions with online learning and hybrid learning (Allen & Seaman, 2012). In fact, online learning makes faculty more productive (Allen & Seaman, 2012). Faculty express enthusiasm about online learning and hybrid learning, and demonstrate a positive disposition towards the use of e-resources and online library resources rather than using print resources (Allen & Seaman, 2012). Faculty are excited about the ongoing assessment of online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2012). They would train more and lecture less when involved in online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2012). Next, to face the apprehensions of online learning, online learning needs to be streamlined or systematized (Carr-Chellman, 2006). Institutional structures for online learning (Gaytan, 2009) need to be in place. The canonization of online education is necessary (Carr-Chellman, 2006). This is regarding advanced countries.

As to emerging countries, checking that online learning is going well is done through the following system. The regulation of online learning is done in two ways. First, national bodies recognize and validate, or do not recognize and validate, online or remote programs at a given university. Second, regarding students who studied online overseas, the latter apply for recognition of their degrees in their respective countries (Bates, T., 2001).

Addressing an advanced country again, a study based in the United States has found that the state and US federal government need to find models of online learning; otherwise, the corporate world will find those models (Berg, 1998).

Now that we have an idea about the Multimedia debate and the good conditions of multimedia and online learning, let us explore the good culture in which optimal online learning can take place. As

cited in Kozma (1994), Greeno, Pea, Perkins, and Salomon state that all the dynamics of the learning process are encouraged or discouraged by the external resources and environment. As Rogers (2006) puts it, being culturally sensitive implies being institutionally and pedagogically effective. The use of Open Educational Resources or OERs, for instance, is complex, depends on the context or culture it is in, and is thus regularly worked out (Cronin, 2017).

Regarding recommendations relating to assessment in online learning high-stakes exams, assessment in online learning should not be in the form of high-stakes exams where individuals' aptitudes are assessed (Williams & al., 2014). Adding to that, assessment in online learning should be all-inclusive, catering to the learning demands of each learner (Williams et al., 2014)

The literature presented thus far covers the multimedia debate, the promising areas of learning through multimedia, the good conditions of learning through multimedia, the culture where online learning should operate, and the instructional designer's role in all this. Stating this, there are many arguments against the use of multimedia for learning: Research done on online learning stipulates that there is an issue of non-consensus on the definitions of online learning to streamline data and advance in this field (Johnson et al., 2019). A study has listed nineteen terms representing online learning. They are: Online learning, e-learning, blended learning, online education, online course, distance education, distance learning, web-based learning, computer-assisted instruction, web-based training, web-based education, web-based instruction, computer-based training, web-enhanced learning, resource-based learning, e-tutoring, computer-based learning, distributed learning, and finally computer-assisted learning (Sing & Thurman, 2019).

Many of the critics of online learning in higher education are skeptical regarding the success of online learning. Some of them have been fixated on established methodologies in face-to-face education (Lim, 2007; Parisot, 1997; Swail & Kampits, 2001). Adding to this, constituents of a higher education venue are not always prepared and accustomed to online learning (Lim, 2007; Parisot, 1997; Swail & Kampits, 2001). In addition, there should be an understanding of the standpoint of young people and instructors before a change in the educational system is called for (Bennett et al., 2008). Traditional methods of instruction should be preserved (Bennett et al., 2008), and new ways of instruction tailored to new media of instruction should be introduced (Bennett et al., 2008).

Regarding learning goals, online learning features are not always clearly linked to learning goals (Koszalka & Ganesan, 2004). Many times, it is not clear what adequate instructional and learning strategies to use in online learning are (Mayer, 2003) described as 'intuitive tools' (West, Waddoups & Graham, 2009). Next, while Open Educational Resources or OERs are increasingly used (Seaman & Seaman, 2023), no evaluation of OERs is available (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Next, arguments against multimedia and online learning highlight the learner's isolation (Sleek, 1998).

Studying in isolation makes the online learner face the challenge of maintaining the drive to learn and the persistence edge (Dupint-Bryant, 2004).

The issue of persistence in online learning is a problem (Dupint-Bryant, 2004) more than it is in face-to-face learning. Persistence is key because it is the fuel that drives the entire industry of education to go on (Dupint-Bryant, 2004). Next, another argument against online learning stipulates that online learning is less accepted as good as face-to-face learning is (Seaman & Seaman, 2023). Next, there is not enough rigor in Research assessing online learning (Meng et al., 2024). There are no agreed-upon benchmarks to evaluate online learning effectiveness (Meng et al., 2024).

As to discipline, a pillar of online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2014), it is a concern in online learning and is expressed by 88.8 percent of respondents in a 2012 survey (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Next, student retention is more of an issue in public institutions than in private ones, as public institutions attract more mature students belonging to the workforce (Allen & Seaman, 2014). In addition, learning persistence is more challenging for online learners than it is for face-to-face learners (Allen & Seaman, 2015).

As for the issues and problems that take place in online learning platforms, they are numerous. Pertaining to online learning and the culture to which they relate, many times, bureaucratic policies and systemic efforts do not help the canonization of e-learning (Lee, 2006). Rewarding mechanisms should be in place to encourage faculty to prepare their classes (Allen & Seaman, 2012). Teaching online requires more time in preparation than face-to-face teaching does (Allen & Seaman, 2012). Next, there is always the dilemma about the extent to which faculty should receive training in online learning to create a program that is conducive to program accreditation (Gellman-Danley, 1997). There are questions around pay, remuneration, and benefits for instructors' needs involved in online learning (Parisot, 1997). There is the issue of how to approach human and financial resources (Kovel-Jarboe, 1997) and issues of release time (Parisot, 1997).

There are issues of quality assurance (Kovel-Jarboe, 1997)- the benchmarks that ensure quality in learning- and issues relating to the installation, authorization rules, and control panel change of features authorization (Lim, 2007) while putting an online program or course in place. Next, there are issues relating to student support (Kovel-Jarboe, 1997), learner privacy issues (Lin, 2007), learner confidentiality (Gaytan, 2009), privacy protection, security, and safety in online learning (Gaytan, 2009). Next, there are the issues of credit and transferability (Berg, 1998). There are the issues of plagiarism and the authentication of the learner (Gaytan, 2009). Next, there are issues regarding assessment in online learning high stake exams. Assessment in online learning should be all-inclusive, catering to the learning demands of each learner (Williams et al., 2014). Next,

there is the issue of learners' need for assistance in personal and financial issues (Rovai, 2003). The argument that online learning is cheaper is not true (Seaman & Seaman, 2023). Books are pricey (Seaman & Seaman, 2023), and so are open educational resources or OERs (Johnson et al., 2019).

Next, there are issues of the lack of students' privacy and the risk of the non-integrity of students' work. A study has shown that teachers do not accept the use of social media for educational purposes due to two reasons: the first reason being a worry for users' privacy, whether teachers or students, and the second reason being the non-integrity of students in assignment submissions (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). Also, there is the issue of academic integrity in an environment of AI. Academic Honesty is trickier with Artificial Intelligence or AI (Johnson et al., 2024). There are the issues of the non reliability and integrity of programs (Gaytan, 2009), the integrity of student records (Gaytan, 2009), governance, mission of an institution, the programs and infrastructure of an institution (Kovel-Jarboe, 1997; Picciano et al., 2010), issues of planning and accountability assurance (Gellman-Danley, 1997), issues of ethics (Lim, 2007), issues relating copyright laws (Gellman-Danley, 1997; Noble, 1998; Lin, 2007), intellectual property (Carnevale & Young, 1999; Young, 1999). There are issues of fair use (Gellman-Danley, 1997), and the sanctioning of playing games in the course of a lesson (Lim, 2007). There are problems with the integrity of course materials (Gaytan, 2009). And there are finally issues relating to assessment in online learning. Several times, because of time and/or budget constraints, assessment in online learning is not allocated proper time (Rogers et al., 2007).

All these issues are problematic due to the fast nature of online learning and the stakes lost in case they are not well-implemented (Carr-Chellman, 2006).

COVID-19:

COVID-19 necessitated that attention be given to online learning in higher education and that a regulation of this medium of learning take place. Globally, Spring 2020 was a turning point for teachers' methodologies and for instruction at colleges and universities. 56% of teachers transitioned to teaching in ways they had not been cognizant of before (Johnson et al., 2021). As of December 2020, teachers felt that they reached their teaching goals using new online mediums. They also expressed their willingness to continue using online tools after the pandemic (Johnson et al., 2021). A study showed that teachers who had taught online before the pandemic were better prepared to administer online assessment tools (Seaman & Seaman, 2022). Another study has shown that a student population committed to completing their degree during COVID-19 found it hard to meet their goals while balancing work and family concerns (Venable, 2021). Some students suffered from apprehensiveness, distress, problems with sleep, a disruption in their life satisfaction, and suicidal ideation (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Czeisler et al., 2020; Duong, 2021; Watanabe & Tanaka, 2020).

In a study conducted in China, border closure impacted the vacation and internship prospects of international African and Asian students. International students had fewer opportunities for communication with others, had a minimal social life, had a weaker academic life, and felt homesick, especially when they were unable to attend family marriages and family funerals (Mekonen, 2023).

Ultimately, students adapted to COVID-19 and built resilience in the face of the new demands of studying while working and meeting family requirements during the pandemic (Venable, 2021).

The pandemic caused higher education institutions to speed up their move to online learning. Alterations in pedagogical processes took place. Students' and teachers' skills in using online tools improved. Integrity and privacy concerns were addressed (Turnbull et al., 2021).

The Situation of Higher Education in Morocco during COVID-19:

Morocco witnessed a complete confinement between March and June 2020 (Royaume du Maroc- Conseil Supérieur de l'Education, de la Formation et de la Recherche Scientifique & UNICEF, 2021). Schools and universities closed in Morocco starting March 16, 2020 (Ouajdouni, 2024). The post-confinement year took place in 2020-2021 (Royaume du Maroc- Conseil Supérieur de l'Education, de la Formation et de la Recherche Scientifique & UNICEF, 2021). Higher education institutions were pushed to create alternative modes of learning when COVID-19 settled in (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). This is how e-learning started in Morocco (Ouajdouni, 2024). A lack of technological infrastructure was noted before Covid-19 (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). This issue was manifested in developing countries (Roumell & Salajan, 2016). As COVID-19 settled in, universities had to equip themselves with e-learning tools and methodologies (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). An evaluation of e-learning in Morocco has not been done enough (Ouajdouni, 2024). Research has found that the Moroccan educational entities were taken by surprise at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and were not prepared for a move to distance learning (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025).

There was a growth of literature about remote education in Morocco in the aftermath of Covid-19, but a decline in such literature after the pandemic when brick-and-mortar learning resumed (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). There was resistance towards distance learning on the part of learners and faculty (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). The latter deemed the stalling of face-to-face classes as a way to contain the pandemic ineffective (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). Eventually, distance learning was embraced (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). There was the belief that distance learning is better than tumultuous face-to-face learning during the pandemic (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). Faculty and students started to perceive the merits of distance learning (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025) and perceived online learning as a good annex to brick-and-mortar learning (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). Online learning was viewed as not good enough, as there is a lack of infrastructure and a lack of faculty training in the matter, as well as problems of connectivity (El Aasri & Bouziane,

2025). Learners fairly content with online learning were from highly selective public schools, private institutions, master's programs, or professional bachelor's programs (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). They constituted a minority of learners (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). They were mostly from middle-class families who could afford private education (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). They benefited from courses on technology (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). They also had educated parents and constituted 20% of all higher education students in Morocco (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). The use of MOOCs was at the experimentation stage and was not under the umbrella of a state vision (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). Individual initiatives were capitalized on (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). And the myriad of tools used by faculty could be minimized to only some sure tools (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). Online learning lacked a legal framework (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). Gaps noted in the literature that should be addressed include quality of learning, personnel expectations, evaluation, and acceptance of ill-served learners (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025).

Regarding online and hybrid learning during and after COVID, research recommendations are as follows: Blended learning is obligatory in the post covid era. Learners and teachers should be continually coached in online learning (Turnbull et al., 2021). Next, being part of learning communities is important for learners so that they feel that they have a community they are part of (Turnbull et al., 2021) and are engaged in their learning (Davis et al., 2018). Next, supporting faculty by providing time and resources is important (Johnson et al., 2020). Next, designing, testing, and assessing approaches to online learning would give constituents of a university authority in the field (Davis et al., 2018). Next, experts and governmental constituents should create frameworks for online learning (Meng et al., 2024). These frameworks should be for different stages of learning, higher education being among them (Vlachopoulos, 2011). They should target efficient methodologies and intended learning outcomes.

Issues Identified by the Paper:

Holistically, these are the limitations that a reading of the literature relating to the topic of online learning policies has come up with: First, there are not enough qualitative studies on online learning (Gilbert, Morton & Rowley, 2007). This means that future studies on universities should be qualitative in the sense that they would seek to read individual websites of given higher education institutions in a given country or across different campuses worldwide. Second, the study of online learning issues such as those about intellectual property rights and ownership of material is sometimes biased (Carr-Chellman, 2006). This explains why future studies should focus on these angles in individual schools.

And last, the available frameworks inspecting online learning policies (designing, analyzing, delivering, and assessing distance education) are not sufficient (Gaytan, 2009). This is why future studies should attempt to generate a visual framework and see if it can inform the research community on the online learning policies in given universities.

In line with the shortcomings of research stated above, this is the heuristic made of a set of recommendations of research that has been generated from a reading of the literature of this topic: (1) The necessity of having longitudinal studies (Menchaca & Bekele, 2008); (2) the need to conceive studies that are quantitative (Gaytan, 2009; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008); (3) The importance of carrying out qualitative studies in online learning (Gilbert et al., 2007; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008); (4) the necessity of having visual frameworks for online learning (designing, analyzing, delivering, assessing distance education) (Gaytan, 2009; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008), (5) the necessity that policy relating to online learning address problems of crédit, transferability (Berg, 1998), (6) the necessity that policy of online learning address issues of financial aid (Berg, 1998), (7) the necessity that issues relating to plagiarism, the proof of the identity of the learner, confidentiality, forthrightness of student records, programs, course materials, reliability, privacy guardianship, security and safety be resolved (Gaytan, 2009); (8) the importance of the existence of clear policies (Montenegro Rueda, 2024) to make sure that constituents of a university are not taken advantage of (Carr-Chellman, 2006); (9) the importance of carrying out follow-up interviews of students who dropped out of an online program (Dupint-Bryant, 2004); (10) the necessity that instructional and institutional components be studied to see what pushes a learner to quit an online program (Dupint-Bryant, 2004; Allen & Seaman, 2017), (11) the necessity of studying variables that affect persistence in online learning (Dupint-Bryant, 2004; King, 1999; Allen & Seaman, 2017) and finally (12) while aiming to regularize online learning not fall in the trap of surveilling, monitoring and monopolizing online learning (Roumell & Salajan, 2016).

While Questions 8, 10 & 11 will be addressed in our study, Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 12 will not be studied in this research for logistical reasons and will be saved for later in more advanced versions of this study.

The main problem detected in this study is that while literature relating to online learning policies in higher education is plentiful, there is no policy framework that would act as a medical chart and check whether healthy online learning policies exist in Colleges.

The problem questions that this study will seek to investigate are (1 emanating from issue 8 in the literature) Are there clear online learning policies in Higher Education institutions in Morocco-policies relating to (1) students, (2) courses, (3) degrees (in addition to students' affiliation with education majors), (4) intellectual property, (5) social media, (6) fiscal issues, (7) environment-friendly matters and (8) faculty; (2 emanating from issue 10 in the literature) Is there information about what pushes learners to quit higher education programs? And (3 emanating from issue 11) what keeps learners persistent in a higher education program in Morocco?

The Framework for the Inspection of Policies in Online Learning:

Online learning needs to be systematized (Carr-Chellman, 2006), and there should be institutional structures for online learning (Gaytan, 2009). These structures are exemplified in policy frameworks. Policy frameworks' job is to help in the inspection of online learning policies (designing, analyzing, delivering, and assessing distance education) (Gaytan, 2009). These policies are necessary so that constituents of a university are not taken advantage of (Carr-Chellman, 2006).

A framework should inspect how much access learners have to a post-high school program (King et al., 1999). A framework also needs to measure students' persistence in learning, as that is a main measure of the success and therefore continuity of a program. A framework should see how many education majors are followed in a community and how the pursuit of education majors benefits a community (King et al., 1999). A framework should look at the majors that are pursued in institutions (King et al., 1999). A framework should cater for students (King et al., 1999) and the quality assurance of their deep and complex learning (Berg, 1998; Kovel-Jarboe, 1997). Learners need to learn in a community (Carr-Chellman, 2006; Rovai, 2002), and be active agents in the construction of their knowledge (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). Issues relating to student support, (Kovel-Jarboe, 1997), learner privacy (Lin, 2007), learner confidentiality (Gaytan, 2009), privacy protection, security and safety in online learning (Gaytan, 2009), plagiarism, the authentication of the learner (Gaytan, 2009), the integrity of student records (Gaytan, 2009) and issues of ethics (Lim, 2007) are of concern. A framework should inspect matters relating to faculty (King et al., 1999). Actually, faculty and administration need to be quality-like knowledgeable about online education (Carr-Chellman, 2006), master the contents of a course (Carr-Chellman, 2006), use the right strategies in instruction (Mayer, 2003), be trained to teach online (Gellman-Danley, 1997), be remunerated for involvement in online learning projects (Parisot, 1997), receive adequate release time (Parisot, 1997), be knowledgeable and observant of copyright laws (Gellman-Danley, 1997; Lin, 2007), intellectual property (Carnevale & Young, 1999; Young, 1999) and ownership of material (Noble, 1998). A visual framework should cater for an eco-friendly environment. A framework should cater for fiscal issues (King et al., 1999), especially those relating to financial aid (Berg, 1998). A framework should cater for social media. A framework should cater for intellectual property (King et al., 1999). A framework should cater for degrees (King et al., 1999) and should address issues of credit and transferability (Berg, 1998). Finally, a framework should tackle issues of courses (King et al., 1999), the reliability & integrity of programs (Gaytan, 2009), fair use (Gellman-Danley, 1997), the sanctioning of playing games during a lesson (Lim, 2007), and the integrity of course materials (Gaytan, 2009).

The Tool: Framework/ Instrumentation:

The name of the survey instrument/tool used to collect data is the Octagon framework for the inspection of online learning policies. It has been called so because it attends to eight areas in online learning policies that emanate from the literature. These eight areas relate to (1) students, (2) courses, (3) degrees, (4) intellectual property, (5) social media, (6) fiscal issues, (7) environment-friendly matters, and (8) faculty. It should be noted that the Octagon framework is inspired by the work of King et al. (1999). Though attending to eight areas in online learning policies, the framework also attends to matters relating to student access, persistence, dropouts, and students' affiliation with education majors, also coming from the literature (Dupint-Bryant, 2004; King et al., 1999). These last four elements are not elements of the online learning policies, but are indicators that an institution is doing well or not well (Dupint-Bryant, 2004; King et al., 1999).

This framework can be replicated for the following reasons: In terms of the way it looks, the framework is simply drawn and designed so that it is practical to use. The framework relies on symbols that are universally recognized, such as arrows, smileys, crosses, and suns. Universally recognized signals help a lot in understanding. The framework also relies on color to display information. For instance, a yellow smiley means that the information herein is fully available, while a grey smiley means that the information herein is not all-inclusive. The round shape of the framework alludes to the fact that it is a field of information that the researcher has access to. It is also easy to administer and re-administer regardless of time changes.

Beneficiaries of this Study:

Several parties would benefit from this study: Subject matter experts, instructional designers, and instructors would benefit from this study since they are directly involved in the production of courses and courseware for online contexts. Corporate agencies involved in marketing and sustaining online learning by providing support, free trials, and online assistance would benefit from this study. Constituents of a higher education venue, especially those affected by online learning issues such as the non-comprehensiveness of policies in place (faculty, students, staff), would benefit from this study. Administrators, decision-makers, and stakeholders in higher education would benefit from this study since they will know what policies the higher education venue they administer should implement. Last but not least, higher education assessors (accrediting agencies, the printed press, magazines, the media, credible social networks involved in writing reports of higher education online schools on a regular basis would benefit from this study. Indeed, they will be better informed on the points to pay attention to while conducting their assessments of online learning programs in post-high school contexts.

Higher Education Institutions in this Study:

Following the categorization of higher education institutions in Morocco into open-door public schools, highly selective public schools, private institutions, master's programs, or professional bachelors (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025), the list of universities under study is from open door public schools and private institutions. Adding to them are a public independent institution (selective) and a semi-public institution. Up to two universities were selected in each group. These universities were picked using random selection. These are the higher education institutions in Morocco under study: In Group A, two Public Universities in Morocco (2): Abdelmalek Essaâdi University and Cadi Ayyad University. In Group B, One Independent Public University Entity in Morocco (1): Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane. In Group C, One Semi-Public University Entity in Morocco (1): The International University of Rabat. And in Group D, two Private Universities in Morocco (2): Euromed University and the International University of Agadir.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to inspect whether the use of the Octagon framework would inform research on two research questions. These questions were about the presence of education programs in those higher education institutions, and the 'comprehensiveness' of the online learning policies. The purpose of the study was also to inspect whether the visual Octagon framework would give researchers quick information about every single higher education institution studied.

After being developed, the framework was used at one university at a time. Since the inspection of online programs was planned for six schools, six copies of the framework were printed. The copies of the framework were empty; i.e., no data was transcribed on them previously. After this, the websites of every school were visited, and pages that contained information regarding the policies of the schools regarding remote learning were inspected. Then the information available on the website was 'plugged in'; i.e., transferred to the paper copy of the framework in the appropriate place for every institution. When information relating to a policy in online learning was available and comprehensive enough; i.e., it clearly addressed what an issue is and what solutions are available for its resolution, a yellow smiley was used. When information relating to a policy existed but lacked description, a grey smiley was used. When information relating to a policy was nonexistent, a red cross was used. After information regarding online learning policies and the existence of education programs in a school was transferred

from the individual sites of a university on paper, that information was copied to the soft copy of the framework for each school.

For every institution, it was ensured that consistency in instrument administration would not be marred by carelessness in the administration of the instrument. (1) To observe consistency, it was particularly important to read every website at least two times. (2) Also, it was important to follow the same ritual of plugging in data in every empty framework so that no step of filling in the framework with information would be overlooked.

A table was introduced. It represented the percentages that every institution got relating to the research questions and got their mean score. The purpose of laying out this table was to compare and contrast the four categories of higher education institutions and to inspect which of them is the most suitable to be used with the Octagon Framework. This would tell researchers how applicable the framework is. This is important for future studies that would use the framework because the percentage of the data yielded would be an indicator of approximately the rate of information that the framework can get from the individual websites of schools. In other words, any information not found in individual schools' websites that could not be transferred to the framework would give us an assessment of how much the framework was not able to trace. The purpose of keeping track of what fails in the use of the instrument would be to improve the framework and leave recommendations to subsequent researchers on this topic on how to use the framework better or tweak it in such a way that it would ask the same questions but differently. It was important for this research to inspect the validity of the Octagon framework through all the steps the instrument administration observed.

Advancing via instrument use, it was important to be aware of the fact that there was a threat to internal validity that may be caused by maturation and selection- the fact that our instrument may be no longer 'comprehensive' in the case where another novel issue about online learning emerges in peer-reviewed literature and research.

The collection of the data was cross-sectional; in other words, collected at one point in time. The rationale behind that choice is that data collection would have its strengths in being fast, not costly, convenient, and would use primary data that is already available (data from individual schools' websites).

Delimitations of Research:

First, due to time and logistics constraints, the Octagon framework was not mailed to other people to use/try and share their assessment and feedback about. Next, key dimensions of access to learning, such as financial and educational components, were not inspected, and this part of access will be saved for further research. Next, the contracted online support tool Apogée, which was used by most public universities during COVID-19, was not inspected as to whether it has policies (conduct, honor code, third party, and others). Next, the Digital Library launched by the Ministry of Higher Education and the British Council was not inspected as to whether it has policies. Next,

the tools mentioned above might have policies in them. For logistical reasons, inspecting these tools was not possible, but is recommended for future research endeavors. Next, Advisory Councils in Moroccan Universities provide recommendations on the goals of each university. The advisory councils are made up of appointed dignitaries and/or subject matter experts guiding a given university's directions. Due to logistical reasons, contacting representatives of these Councils was not made. These measures are recommended for future research. Next, due to logistical reasons, this research did not look at the Moroccan National Accreditation body (Equivalence) requirements for online higher education degrees earned outside Morocco. It did not look either at students' processes of applying for recognition of their online degrees (UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, n.d.). Next, this study did not look at University Missions from which University Frameworks emanate. Next, student handbooks, whether available online or not available on the respective university sites, were not checked. Next, due to logistical reasons, member checking was not used. People involved in the writing of the site were not interviewed to check whether the information drafted in this study from their website was accurate and in tune with their intentions. Next, due to logistical reasons, gatekeepers such as presidents of universities were not contacted. Next, admission offices were not checked to see if persistence and graduation of all incoming students were tracked. Next, triangulation was not used. Next,

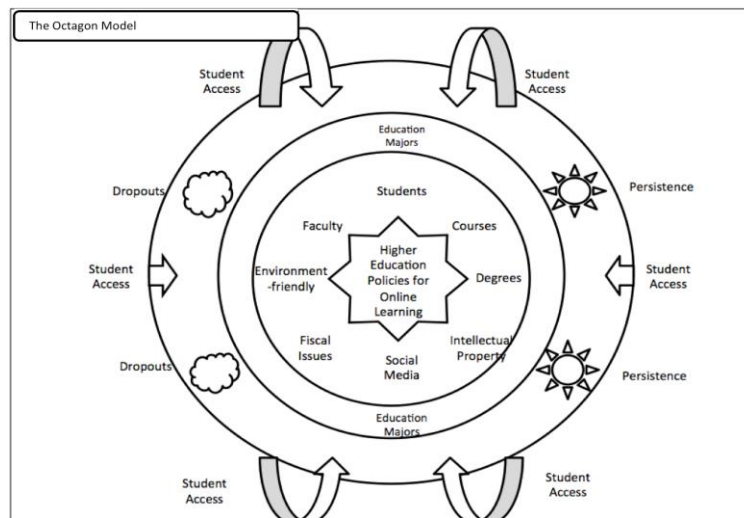
Universities' Code of Conduct statements were not checked. Next, funding was not checked. Next, the Sustainability of Online learning procedures was not verified. Next, the study did not check whether there was fragmentation in information provided by universities' individual websites. Next, the study did not verify whether there was contradictory data. Next, the study did not use a longitudinal method surveying the studied higher Education Institutions in Morocco. Next, the study did not use surveys offered to different constituents of the universities. Next, the study did not look at the element of Culture. Next, the study did not investigate topics that are not researched enough or look at questions that are not probed. Finally, the Higher Commissariat of Planification was not consulted. It has key statistics regarding areas of study in Morocco (Bates, 2001).

The Octagon Framework:

Below is how the Octagon framework looks when no information about a College is 'plugged into it'. Following this is the presentation of the framework as applied to the higher education institutions in this study.

The Octagon Framework for the Inspection of Online Learning in Higher Education:

Figure 1: The Prototype of the Visual Framework Used to Study Policies Relating to Remote and Online Learning in a College



Explanation of the Octagon framework:

This conceptual framework is in the form of a circle. At the very core of the institution is the nucleus of the ball. This nucleus, which is the system's heart of the online higher education institutions, provides for 'all' the issues relating to policies and whose goal is to protect every constituent in the higher education chain; eight areas are in this nucleus: courses, degrees, intellectual property, fiscal issues, faculty, students, social media, and finally environment (ecological-friendly).

The conceptual framework can also be read otherwise- from the inside out. At the heart of the framework, there is an octagon that is inclusive of the eight policies important in the streamlining of online learning. The university system, which is the octagon itself, faces eight directions- each of which is one area of online learning policies. There is no special significance to the placement; whether they are in the top right or top left does not mean anything other than that it is a pillar component of the policies. The octagon- university system, along with its policies, has to function within an atmosphere of higher education where education majors that serve the community thrive (King, 1999). The Octagon, along with the policies are the educational world that learners have 'access to' (King, 1999). The outer layer of the circle represents that area of the admission or non-admission of learners- 'their access or non-access to the online programs'-at the literal level

(King, 1999). Access to learning also has other dimensions such as (financial, educational), but this part of access will be kept for further research.

The Octagon Framework Applied to Two Public Universities in Morocco:

Figure 2: The Framework as Applied to Abdelmalek Essaâdi University:

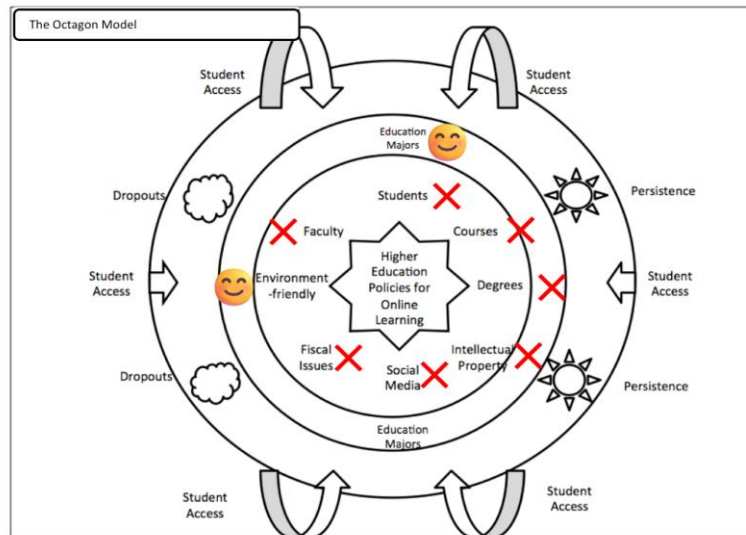
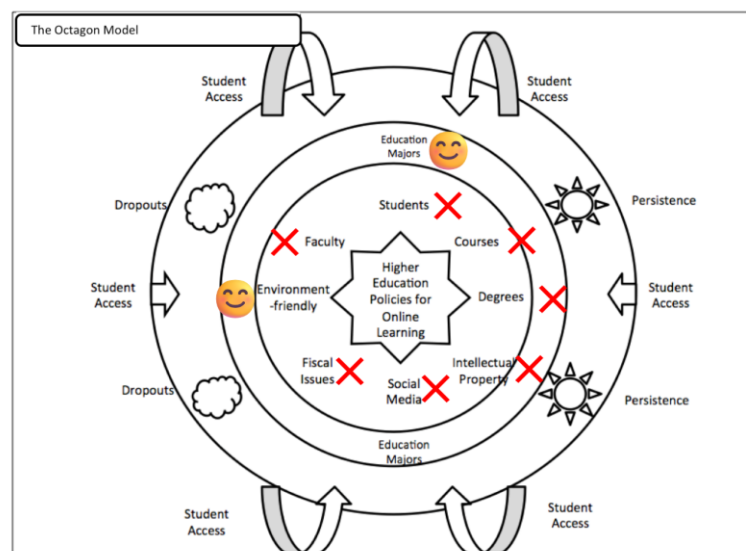
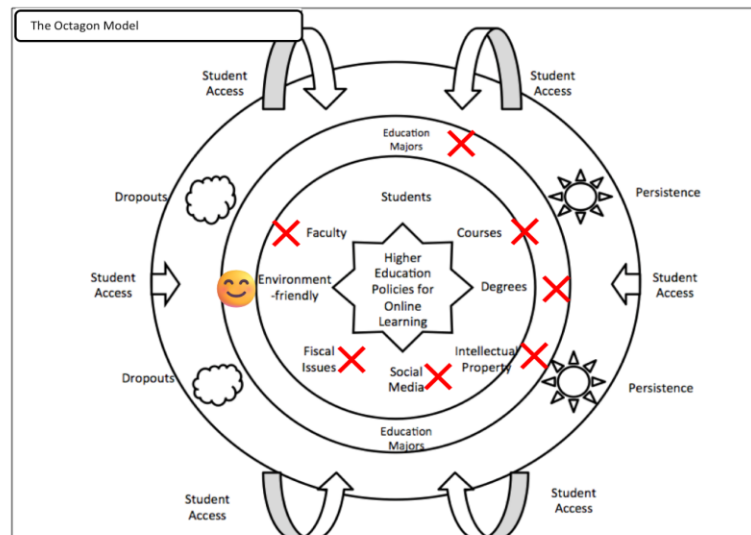


Figure 3: The Framework as Applied to Cadi Ayyad University



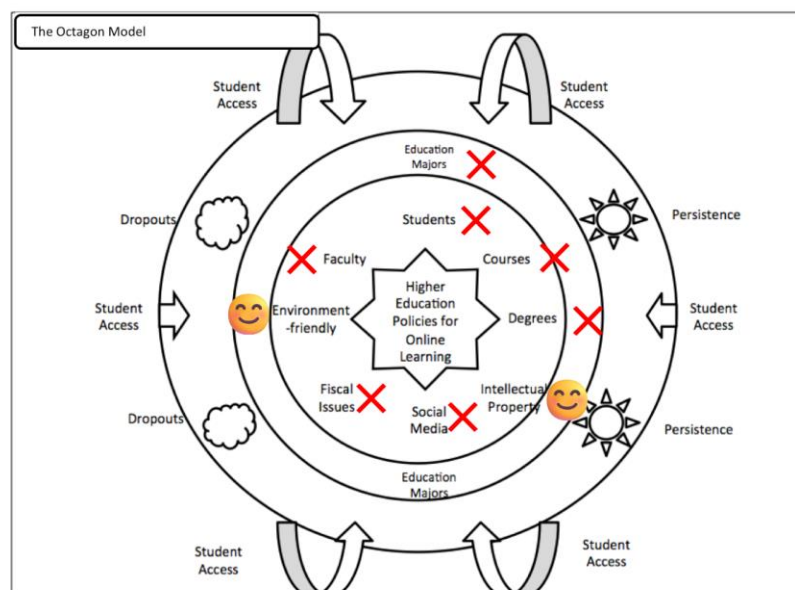
The Octagon Framework Applied to One Independent Public University in Morocco:

Figure 4: The Framework as Applied to Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane



The Octagon Framework Applied to One Semi-Public University in Morocco:

Figure 5: The Framework as Applied to The International University of Rabat



The Octagon Framework Applied to Two Private Universities in Morocco:

Figure 6: The Framework as Applied to Euromed University

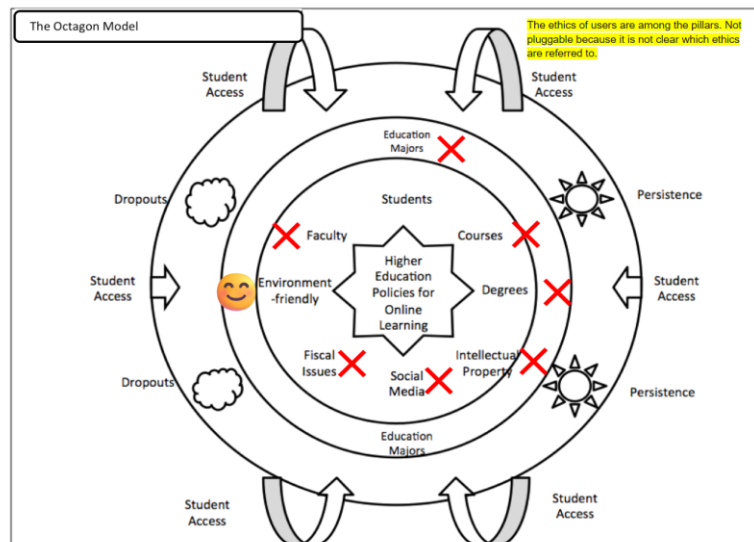
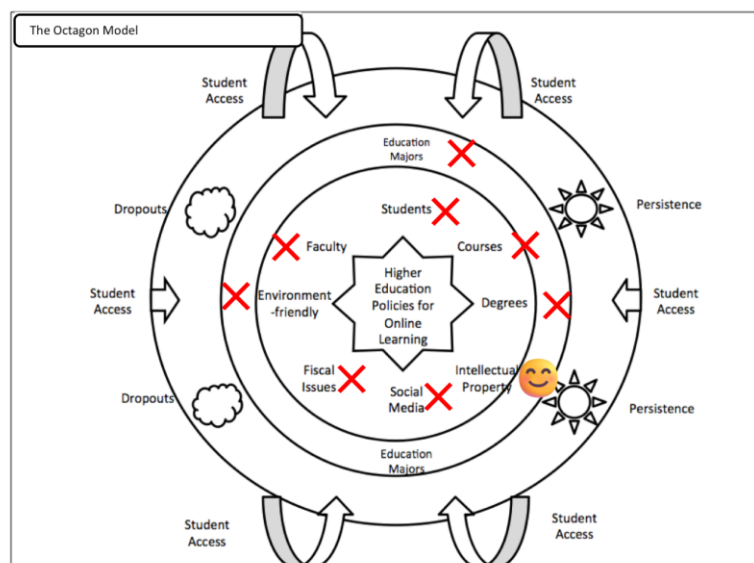


Figure 7: The Framework as Applied to The International University of Agadir



FINDINGS

For the Two Public Universities Under Study:

First, the two universities use Apogée, which includes internal policies; yet, the framework could only partially acknowledge the presence of such policies, not categorically. The universities' websites do not have sites on policies. They use, though, a program, Apogée, that has internal policies. Next, holistically, a public university using Apogée, the World International Digital Library of UNESCO, or the Digital Library by the Ministry of Higher Education and the British Council would have internal policies; yet, the information would not be pluggable in the framework because the policies are not on the given university's website. Next, Environment Friendly means that the campus has environment-friendly facilities or takes environment-friendly measures. It does not mean that a given university offers the Sciences of the Environment majors. Finally, student access, persistence, and dropouts are contingent on the availability of a website or information site that gives information on those numbers- a website such as the NCES (The National Center for Education Statistics in the United States).

For the only Public Independent Institution:

First, Environment Friendly means that the campus has environment-friendly facilities or takes environment-friendly measures. It does not mean that a given university offers the Sciences of the Environment majors. Next, student access, persistence, and dropouts are contingent on the availability of a website or information site that gives information on those numbers- a website such as the NCES (The National Center for Education Statistics in the United States).

For the only Semi-public Institution:

First, Environment Friendly means that the campus has environment-friendly facilities or takes environment-friendly measures. It does not mean that a given university offers the Sciences of the Environment majors. Next, student access, persistence, and dropouts are contingent on the availability of a website or information site that gives information on those numbers. A website such as the NCES (The National Center for Education Statistics in the United States).

For the Two Private institutions Under Study:

First, in the case of Euromed University, information is not pluggable because information regarding a policy is mentioned, but it needs clarification. For example, ethics are mentioned in Euromed University, but they need more clarification. Next, still in the case of Euromed University, Environment Friendly means that the campus has environment-friendly facilities or takes environment-friendly measures. It does not mean that the university offers Sciences of the Environment majors. Finally, student access, persistence, and dropouts are contingent on the

availability of a website or information site that gives information on those numbers- a website such as the NCES (The National Center for Education Statistics in the United States).

Table 1:

A Table Representation of Issues Relating to the Application of the Framework to the Six Institutions Under Study

Average Data acquired through the Octagon Framework	Group A Two Public Universities in Morocco	Independent B Independent Public University Entity in Morocco	Independent C Semi-Public University Entity in Morocco	Group D Two Private Universities in Morocco
Question 8 The importance of the existence of clear policies (Montenegro Rueda, 2024) to make sure that constituents of a university are not taken advantage of (Carr-Chellman, 2006)	Two issues recorded.	No issue recorded.	No issue recorded	Two issues recorded
Question 10 The necessity that instructional and institutional components be studied to see what pushes a	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in persistence or dropouts)

learner to quit an online program (Dupint-Bryant, 2004; Allen & Seaman, 2017)	persistence or dropouts)	persistence or dropouts)	persistence or dropouts)	
Question 11 The necessity of studying variables that affect persistence in online learning (Dupint-Bryant, 2004; King, 1999; Allen & Seaman, 2017)	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in persistence or dropouts)	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in persistence or dropouts)	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in persistence or dropouts)	One issue recorded (Availability of data was contingent on the availability of a site specialized in persistence or dropouts)
Mean of issues recorded	4	2	2	4

Analyzing this table, every group/entity is presented in one column. The mean of the average score of every group of schools regarding all the questions is computed to yield in the bottom row of the table the following results: The number of issues that could be detected using the Octagon framework for 3 questions for Group A (Two Public Universities in Morocco) is 4. The number of issues that could be detected using the Octagon framework for 3 questions for Group B (Independent Public University) is 2. The number of issues that could be detected using the Octagon framework for 3 questions for Group C (Independent Semi-Public University in Morocco) is 2. The number of issues that could be detected using the Octagon framework for 3 questions for Group D (Two Private Universities in Morocco) is 4.

Implications:

Holistically, except for access, persistence, and graduation, the results support the hypothesis that the framework would be a good tool to study an institution in terms of the presence of education programs in it and inclusiveness of policies important for online learning in higher education

venues. It was good because, holistically, on a first look at the six institutions' tailored frameworks, differences between every institution's framework (the number of smileys vs. the number of crosses, the number of gray smileys vs. the number of yellow smileys) could be seen. The framework is visual and provides visual support to both the researcher and the data interpreters and readers of research.

The reasons why the Octagon framework worked holistically were due to the fact that the framework is the work of a synthesis of past and present. It takes ideas from researchers on policies of online learning and puts them in a current perception. In terms of its practicality, the framework is easy to use, especially as there is plenty of good university-related data available online that constitutes public information. It is a quick evaluation tool that any researcher or constituent of a university can use. It is easy to administer and does not require a lot of logistics. The framework allows the researcher to discriminate between students, faculty, courses, degrees, and intellectual property. This helps in conveying a clear-cut framework. The framework is like a medical chart form that a doctor or nurse uses and that gives the user an immediate diagnosis of what needs to be looked at. It gives its user a quick grasp of a higher education institution's strengths and can serve as a good prompt comparative tool that allows its user to make comparisons between the strengths of different higher education institutions. It could even be a marketing tool for institutions to use. In terms of its helpfulness, the framework is an information tool that adds to the transparency of information relating to higher education institutions. It could be a good reference for all constituents of a university to refer to. It is a self-use tool that any person can use with no mediators, obstacles, and bureaucratic procedures. It could be helpful for practitioners in online or remote learning. For instance, a course developer, instructional designer, or subject matter expert can know beforehand what his/her prerogatives and obligations are in terms of the ownership of material.

Regarding points that challenge literature recommending the deployment of a policy framework, overall, this study yielded the following results: The framework meets a problem when asking whether students' access to a school is good or not. In fact, students' access to a school is not available in all studied institutions. Universities' websites do offer data on how many students are currently enrolled in an institution. They do not have data on the rate of acceptance in their institution. This can be addressed by creating an institution in Morocco that collects higher education data, an institution such as the National Center of Education Statistics in the United States, exclusively geared to higher education in Morocco. In the meantime, in further studies, the Higher Commissariat of Planning or HCP (Bates, 2001) could be consulted to see whether it provides key information on the higher education scene in Morocco. Data about students' transfer from one institution to another should also be available in an institution like the National Center for Education Statistics in the United States. It should be clear whether the students who transfer to other institutions do so because they seek to move upward in their education endeavors or

whether they transfer to other schools because they are dissatisfied with a program or institution. Though this is not directly linked to the applicability of the framework, this finding is important to let us know the significance of the data that the framework will allow us to access. The framework should explain whether there is a correlation between the existence of policies relating to online learning or remote learning and the persistence of students in online or remote learning. In the case of Euromed University, a policy was available yet needed more clarification. A policy regarding ethics was available yet needed to be clearer. This could be addressed by sketching a framework that branches out into different ethical considerations. The same would apply to other policies. The Octagon framework did not provide for the services that institutions contracted with. This was the case for institutions that offered Apogée, the World International digital library of UNESCO, or the Digital Library by the Ministry of Higher Education and the British Council. This could be addressed by adding a component in the framework regarding contracted services. Last, as stated in the literature review regarding the education situation in Morocco (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025; Ouajdouni, 2024; Roumell & Salajan, 2016), the percentage of remote or online classes and distance programs as of COVID-19 in Morocco was manifested as emergency efforts, not a fully established system. This is a situation to be mindful of. There should be a clear listing in the framework as to whether remote learning is fully developed or not. Applying the changes stated above would improve the framework, which would tell us how remote learning is faring in Morocco.

Limitations:

Regarding Independent Public Universities and Semi-Public Universities, these subsets were made only of one university each. Regarding these two types of universities in Morocco, information yielded by each entity in these subsets cannot be generalizable. Small sample size means that results may not be generalizable. Regarding policies studied in light of the thirteen recommendations, only three questions were probed. In addition, key dimensions to the notion of access to learning, such as financial and educational components, were not searched. Regarding this research, there were key time constraints. The research had to be completed within a certain time frame. If the situation were otherwise, more insightful data would have been reaped. Document analysis through analyzing the Actualités web pages of each university is fluid in that the respective Actualités web pages of each university are regularly fed with novel information. While this research inspected six higher education institutions in Morocco chosen using random sampling, all the listings of each type of university in Morocco were not studied.

Recommendations:

The framework should be designed in such a way it would accommodate services that a higher education institution contracts with. The framework should be designed in such a way that it accommodates majors it offers, such as education, environment, or cybersecurity. Research should

be done on information regarding higher education provided by the HCP- the Higher Commissariat of Planification (Bates, 2001). Next, research should be done on reasons that trigger university students to quit a higher education program. Research should be done on students who persist in their learning and graduate from higher education institutions in Morocco. Research should be done on the amount of access prospective students have to a university. Research should be done on the rate of students' transfer from one institution to another. In this vein, it would be important to study institutions that allow the transfer of several courses to another institution, whether domestically or internationally, versus one that does not allow that possibility. It would be important to know whether transfers out were to improve students' educational standing (such as Math Sup students who transfer to an engineering school or aviation school) or because of a dissatisfaction with their studies. Research should be done on the correlation of the availability of policies in an institution and the persistence of students in their studies. The framework should be designed in such a way that it would accommodate the type of ethics observance the constituents of a university observe. There should be different versions of the framework following the rate of remote learning a higher education institution in Morocco offers. Access to learning due to financial and educational assets should be studied. New data provided by universities through their Actualités page should be collected piecemeal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a pilot study on Online and Remote Learning Policies in higher education in Morocco yielded key findings that contribute to the research literature on the topic. These are the key findings of this research: The framework should accommodate for services that a higher education institution contracts with, should accommodate for majors it offers such as education, environment or cybersecurity, should investigate the Higher Commissariat of Planification (Bates, 2001) for possible information regarding the topic, should investigate reasons that trigger university students to quit a higher education program, should investigate reasons students persist in their learning, should investigate the amount of access prospective students have to a university, should investigate the rate of students' transfer from one institution to another, should probe the correlation of the availability of policies in an institution and the persistence of students in their studies, should accommodate for the type of ethics' observance the constituents of a university observe, should investigate access to learning due to financial and educational assets and finally should be fed piecemeal as the Actualités page of a given institution is equally fed. The framework should have different versions based on the rate of remote learning that a higher education institution in Morocco offers.

These key findings provide data for future researchers regarding online learning policies in higher education.

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