Are Moroccan Free School Support Websites Effective for Learners During the Covid-19 Pandemic?
A Study Based on an Evaluation Grid

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ABSTRACT

In these times of COVID-19, many Moroccan students access websites for their school support needs. The objective of this study is to carry out an evaluation of some Moroccan free school support websites and to verify their effectiveness for learners, from a socio-constructivist perspective. This evaluation is conducted by various teachers using an evaluation grid developed by the authors following a review of literature that identified a number of elements considered as important factors for the proper functioning of an educational website. The approach adopted allowed the grid to be validated (Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.82). The results of the evaluation show several positive aspects but also some weaknesses inherent to the studied websites, especially concerning help with work methodology and pedagogical guidance and also the interactivity. Finally, several recommendations are proposed by the authors.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19 Pandemic, E-Learning, Evaluation Grid, Interactivity, School Support Website, Socio-Constructivist and Interactive Model, Usability

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have entered several sectors, including education, and their use is becoming more widespread. "Computer technologies and other aspects of digital culture have changed the ways people live, work, play, and learn, impacting the construction and distribution of knowledge and power around the world" (UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning). 93% of Moroccan common core students use the Internet to conduct school research, and nearly 80% of their teachers use the Internet for the purposes of their teaching (Conseil Supérieur de l'Education, de la Formation et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2017). By taking into account both learners ' learning styles, their environment, devices and profiles, mobile devices can help them learn (Abech et al, 2016). Ubiquitous learning, increasingly used nowadays, connects the learners, through their mobile device with educational resources, and thus supports continuous

learning (Ferreira et al., 2020). An analysis of an experiment concerning the use of WhatsApp for teaching and learning in a university setting, identified several educational affordances of mobile instant messaging, among them interaction, knowledge sharing, collaboration and flexible learning (Klein et al., 2018). Heidrich et al. (2018) looked at learner dropout (for online distance learning) according to learning styles (global or sequential), and the study showed that learners with a linear thought process tend to cope more easily in distance learning courses than those who prefer to receive information in large leaps. The application of methods and techniques for analysing data on learning and groups of learners allows for the prediction of academic progress and possible drop-out, and enables teachers and managers to make decisions about problems encountered (Silva et al., 2021).

Technological advances and the digital revolution have led to the ubiquity of new technologies in the lives of learners, and thus the use of e-learning and the Internet for learning have become commonplace. They have also led to the emergence of school support websites, in Morocco as elsewhere.

Online school support is a trend that is currently taking hold in Morocco, as in other countries, and it is an alternative to face-to-face school support. Several Moroccan websites define themselves as "school support websites" and offer services to students, including courses, exercises and other supports. The use of the Internet for school support has become essential, especially in these last months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This article addresses the following research questions:

- Are the Moroccan free school support websites studied effective?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Given the lack of studies on Moroccan school support websites, especially during this Covid-19 pandemic, the scientific contribution of this work is to evaluate some Moroccan free school support websites, taking into account the essential aspects of an educational school support website, namely the contents, the resources and the pedagogical strategies, the help in work methodology and orientation, as well as the interactivity and the usability of the website, according to a socio-constructivist perspective. The other scientific contribution of this work is to propose a ready-to-use evaluation grid for school support websites, which would be a substantial contribution to help teachers to guide their students in the right choice of school support websites, and also to help the designers and authors of school support websites to improve the quality of their websites. The article concludes with some conclusions and recommendations. The research methodology will be based on the use and validation of an evaluation grid.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several authors and academic institutions have published grids or pages for evaluating websites and information found on the Internet.

Some of these evaluations are qualitative and are based on questions to ask before using information found on the web. Other evaluations are quantitative or combine a qualitative and quantitative evaluation. The answers are either passable/good/excellent, yes/no, low/medium/well/very well or on a Likert scale 1/2/3/4/5. In the following, we briefly describe the main grids used to establish the evaluation grid.

- The analysis grid proposed by Buisson et al (2004, pp. 45-47) is divided into three parts: the general analysis of the educational site, the services offered, and the nature of the resources proposed as well as the general evaluation of the presentation of the site.

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