Nedjim Sata[1]

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study

Nedjim Sata[1]

[1]PhD in Contemporary Arabic Literature, College of Arts and Languages, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Mohammed Khider University - Biskra (Algeria).

Email Author: sattanad@gmail.com

Abstract:

In the aftermath of the appearance of the COVID-19 virus and its rapid spread worldwide, the trend toward distance education has become one of the hallmarks of the era. This is due to its ability to reestablish communication between students and professors, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic prevented direct interaction. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the nature of distance education, its challenges, and its effectiveness, especially after the declaration by the Minister of Higher Education, Mr. Abdelbaki Ben Ziane, that the system of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic has yielded positive results at an early stage.

Based on the boldness of this statement, the research raises several closely examined questions: Does distance education ensure the achievement of effective learning without compromise? Can distance education replace traditional (in-person) education in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic? Is distance education merely an educational measure to overcome the pandemic crisis, or does it serve a more extensive purpose? Does distance education guarantee the quality of higher education?

The research relied on a descriptive approach based on analytical and retrospective methods. Regarding the significance of the study, it focused on examining the flexibility of measures taken by the Ministry of Higher Education in Algeria to combat the COVID-19 virus and shedding light on the rapid evolution that has impacted the system of distance education.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Distance Education, Traditional Education, E-Learning, Ramifications, Challenges, Effectiveness.

Nedjim Sata[1]

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study

Introduction:

Distance education, in one of its various forms, has long been an academic instructional strategy adopted by nations to expand and democratize access to knowledge. In recent times, this method has gained significant popularity due to its highly satisfactory outcomes in the realm of education. It has alleviated numerous financial and psychological burdens for learners. Furthermore, the need for distance education has surged as nations responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated reducing gatherings and physical proximity. In response, countries found distance education to be an alternative solution that could both mitigate the spread of the virus and ensure the continuity of the educational process. It also upholds the world's commitment to "ensuring education as a fundamental human right[1]".

As we begin, it's important to clarify the detailed difference between regular distance education and distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two are not equivalent. Distance education during the COVID-19 crisis does not eliminate the need for physical presence, nor does it require the payment of monthly or yearly fees and subscriptions. In essence, it does not exclude the possibilities of traditional education but serves as an assisting intermediary to overcome the current pandemic crisis, as mentioned earlier.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred many nations, including Algeria, to intensify their efforts towards the widespread adoption of distance education. This move aims to alleviate economic burdens, such as the construction of universities, job creation, and expenses related to food and transportation. There is no better evidence of this than the statement made by the Minister of Higher Education, Mr. Abdelbaki Ben Ziane, confirming the significantly positive results achieved through distance education.

Based on the provided text, the research aims to define the concepts of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance education, as well as address the challenges and effectiveness of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study's problem:

Is distance education capable of ensuring the success of the educational process pursued in the traditional (in-person) education system? Is the distance education implemented during the spread of the COVID-19 virus the same as the distance education known for a long time? Can distance education replace traditional (in-person) education in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic? Or is distance education merely an educational measure to help overcome the pandemic crisis and nothing more?

The First Axis: The COVID-19 Crisis

The world today is witnessing a crisis on multiple fronts—health, psychological, economic, educational—due to the widespread spread of the coronavirus, known as COVID-19. Beyond the course of events of this contagious virus that threatened the world with paralysis, institutions

Nedjim Sata[1]

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study

of various kinds have developed meticulous strategies to limit its spread as much as possible.

Among the conscious and serious efforts adopted by the higher education sector in Algeria is the shift towards a distance education system. Has the latter been able to achieve the desired aspirations, even to a relative extent?

The Second Axis: The Concept of Distance Education

The concept of distance education has varied and differed according to the resources and circumstances of each country. One interesting paradox is that distance education implies the existence of a certain distance, while its aim is to shorten and reduce distances (bringing knowledge closer to the learner).

Therefore, distance education in its simplest concept is "the process of transferring knowledge to the learner at their place of residence[2] or work," meaning that students can learn according to their available time and in the location of their choice (at home or at their workplace[3]), as opposed to the past when they made strenuous efforts to access knowledge, involving travel and adhering to a fixed schedule.

Among the closely related concepts to what we have mentioned about distance education is: "It is any model, form, or educational system in which students are away from their university for most of the period during which they are studying[4]".

Distance education eliminates the traditional daily attendance and mandatory presence system, which will help curb the spread of the coronavirus. As we discuss the role of distance education in confronting the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to monitor the overlap and integration between distance education and e-learning. This includes strategies and techniques that facilitate communication between students and professors, such as video conferencing technology and the distribution of lectures and exams through the online portal. The latter allows for posing questions to students, tracking their answers, and directing them to the supervising professor. This technology has recently been implemented by Algerian universities under the Ministry of Higher Education's decision number 288 dated February 29, 2020, which permits the conduct of practical session exams remotely and mandates the distribution of lectures on the Moodle platform.

Distance education has kept pace with the rapid technological advancements, leading to the development of communication techniques that go beyond the traditional correspondence model. Furthermore, distance education has become closely intertwined with e-learning to the extent that distinguishing between them can be challenging, especially in the current context focused on combating the COVID-19 virus through various means and methods.

However, a clear distinction between them is evident in terms of funding sources. In distance education, universities bear the costs of courses and electronic programs within the scope of distance learning. In contrast, in e-learning, students are responsible for the expenses associated with courses and electronic programs[5].

Nedjim Sata[1]

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study

For example, Algerian universities have shifted towards a distance education system in response to the COVID-19 virus. In this system, universities provide lectures and various educational programs to students free of charge. Additionally, universities offer students and professors the opportunity to use video conferencing technology for free. On the other hand, students enrolled in the e-learning system are responsible for the costs associated with these technologies and educational programs.

Returning to the initial point, it becomes apparent to the researcher from the outset that the distance education system adopted by Algeria with the aim of curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic relies on "integration between different educational systems[6]". This is often referred to as blended learning[7], which encompasses the traditional distance education system known for a long time + e-learning and the traditional + in-person education system.

The Third Axis: The Effectiveness of Distance Education

-Distance education works to shorten both time and geographical distances. It integrates learners into communication technology, requiring them to acquire communication skills and become familiar with various ways of accessing information and knowledge from online sources.

-Therefore, it can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic served as a significant catalyst in enhancing skills related to computer literacy and everything related to social media. On the other hand, the pandemic also contributed to the consolidation and promotion of remote learning culture.

-Distance education is considered a necessary educational strategy for modernizing the higher education sector. It urgently requires keeping pace with technological advancements within the framework of cultural globalization, which has turned the world into a small village. Additionally, university students have reached a level of awareness that enriches their learning experience and goes beyond the traditional direct teaching process.

-The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the gaps and weaknesses within the Algerian higher education system. This is evident in the complete halt that affected Algerian universities following the spread of COVID-19. It became necessary to establish a flexible educational system that ensures the continuity of education amidst the ongoing pandemic. Thus, distance education emerged as one of the systems sought to transform higher education into a safe space during these challenging times.

-The COVID-19 virus has plunged the world into "the deepest global recession in living memory, with lasting effects on economies and public finances[8]". As a result, countries, including Algeria, have adopted distance education systems as they are less costly, saving on expenses such as transportation and meals.

-The current era has witnessed an explosion of information and remarkable technological advancements that have permeated all fields, emphasizing the idea of enhancing public facilities and modernizing sectors, including higher education. Higher education is seen as both a

Nedjim Sata[1]

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study

producer and controller of technology. Therefore, distance education emerged as one of the strategies that higher education sought to represent, develop, and promote. This strategy has achieved success and garnered significant interest, especially in universities offering continuous education programs such as) online bachelor's and master's degrees).

-Therefore, we can say that the distance education system adopted by Algeria is "the best achievement in this field," as it leverages technological advancements and applies them in the educational sector. This has made learning opportunities available to everyone through new methods and approaches that quickly meet the growing needs[9].

-The Ministry of Higher Education in Algeria has recognized that shifting towards a distance education model not only helps prevent the spread of the coronavirus but also works to shape an ideal student who is "responsible for their own learning[10]". By this, it means empowering students to engage and interact with the "new digital culture that focuses on knowledge processing" in accordance with constructivist learning theory[11].

-In summary, distance education managed to cope with the COVID-19 crisis and adapt to the current economic and scientific conditions. This led to attention being paid to it by enhancing its mechanisms and procedures and connecting it with the latest technological advancements.

The Fourth Axis: Challenges of Distance Education

Among the obstacles that have prevented distance education from reaching its peak in measuring the effectiveness of available educational systems, we note:

-The inability of regular university students to adapt to the distance education system because its strategies and mechanisms are foreign to them. Consequently, the transition from the traditional in-person learning to distance learning requires a certain period of time for students to understand and adapt to this type of education.

-The difficulty of assessing practical sessions related to evaluating students' skills in presentation, dialogue, and their ability to engage in discussions poses a challenge. Such sessions cannot be conducted remotely, and the technology required for remote visual communication may not be accessible to all students.

-The researcher is aware that the academic material presented to students in traditional teaching differs from that presented in remote teaching. For example, university professors create their course materials and lectures using strategies like intensification, economy, encryption, and encoding. They enrich the academic content during the lecture. Therefore, transitioning from traditional teaching to remote teaching requires professors to review their academic material quickly. Moreover, the challenge increases when the administration assigns professors criteria that were not originally part of their curriculum and then asks them to publish lectures in the online portal within a short time frame, citing -the transition to remote teaching to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

In light of this difficulty or complex equation, it becomes challenging for professors to complete

Nedjim Sata[1]

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study

four lectures for each course every month. In response to this difficult situation, improvisation finds its way, and mediocrity may prevail among faculty members.

-Distance education has led to a serious issue, namely the dilution of university degrees, especially the Master's degree, under the pretext of having a vast number of pedagogical seats available since the implementation of distance education. Furthermore, the cancellation of the Bachelor's thesis and its replacement with an explanatory supplement that does not serve the purpose has taken place. As for the Master's thesis, it now accommodates three students (University of Abbas Lagraa - Khenchela - University of Abdelrahmane Mira - Bejaia - University of Mouloud Mammeri - Tizi Ouzou...). All of these measures taken to combat the spread of COVID-19 have come at the expense of the quality of higher education.

-Given the current pandemic situation, distance education necessitated the strategic utilization of e-learning methods (communication through online portals, interaction via video conferencing), while still maintaining a minimal level of in-person education. However, it's worth noting that distance education tends to diminish the justifications for traditional in-person education, as attendance is not considered or given much importance in this context.

-The Algerian Ministry of Higher Education adopted a policy of distance education primarily to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. These decisions regarding the shift to distance learning were made somewhat discreetly, as indicated by statements from the Minister of Higher Education, Mr. Abdelbaki Benziane, who mentioned that distance education had achieved satisfactory results and could be considered as a future educational foundation in Algeria.

Conclusion:

The research, after thorough analysis and examination, has yielded a set of closely summarized results:

-Under the current pandemic situation in Algeria, remote learning has become an indispensable educational system. It revived the movement within the higher education sector after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted its mechanisms and closed its doors. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that remote learning has replaced the traditional educational systems, as each system has its merits and demerits.

-The COVID-19 virus has given rise to challenges that could be termed as a crisis of thought. The first crisis was the coronavirus pandemic itself, and the second crisis emerged from the hurried adoption of remote learning without due consideration for the long-term consequences. Thus, current circumstances underscore the necessity of revisiting the university education system, building a comprehensive educational framework that integrates remote learning, e-learning, and traditional in-person education. Priority should be given to the latter.

-The COVID-19 pandemic compelled the Algerian higher education sector to embrace remote learning, despite its drawbacks and enduring challenges. However, this risky endeavor also brought benefits, particularly in enabling students to adapt to remote work settings. The latter,

Nedjim Sata[1]

The Repercussions of Distance Education in The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Higher Education Sector in Algeria as A Case Study
in turn, has seen a proliferation of employment opportunities.

Footnotes :

[1]- Policy Brief: Education During COVID-19 and Beyond," United Nations Printing and Publishing, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2020, Page 4.
[2]- Ben Yousef Al-Hamami, Hamad Hajazi Ibrahim, Distance Learning: Its Concept, Tools, and Strategies," King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Aid, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2020, Page 14.
[3]- Tony Beets, Technology and E-Learning and Distance Education," Dar Al-Ghobeikan Printing and Publishing Library, 2nd edition, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Page 30.
[4]- Saeed Habib Faaeqa, Proposed Administrative System for Distance Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Some Contemporary Experiences," Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt, 1988, Page 22.
[5]- Tony Beets, Technology and E-Learning and Distance Education," Pages 215/216.
[6]- Ben Yousef Al-Hamami, Hamad Hajazi Ibrahim, Distance Learning: Its Concept, Tools, and Strategies," Page 4.
[7]- Abu Musa Mufeed Ahmad, Abdel Salam Assous, Blended Learning Between Traditional and E-Learning Education," Academics for Publishing and Distribution, 1st Edition, Jordan, 2012, Pages 11/13.
[8]- Policy Brief: Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond," Page 4.
[9]- Ben Yousef Al-Hamami, Hamad Hajazi Ibrahim, Distance Learning: Its Concept, Tools, and Strategies," Page 11.
[10]- Halima Zahi, E-Learning in Algerian Universities: Elements of Implementation and Obstacles," Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Algeria, 2011/2012, Page 154.
[11]- Mohammed Zayed, The Importance of Distance Education in the Face of the Spread of the Coronavirus," Journal of Legal Studies, Volume 9, Issue 4, 2020, Page.493"

The list of references:

[1] Policy Brief: Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond," United Nations Printing and Publishing, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2020.

[2] Ben Yousef Al-Hamami, Hamad Hajazi Ibrahim, Distance Learning: Its Concept, Tools, and Strategies," King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Work, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2020.

[3] Tony Bates, Technology, E-Learning, and Distance Education," Dar Al-Ghubaikan for Printing and Publishing, 2nd Edition, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2007.

[4] Saeed Habib Faiqah, A Proposed Administrative System for Distance Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Some Contemporary Experiences," Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt, 1988.

[5] Abu Musa Mufeed Ahmed, Abdel Salam As-Sous, Blended Learning - Hybrid - Between Traditional and E-Learning," Academics for Publishing and Distribution, 1st Edition, Jordan, 2012.

[6] Halima Zahi, E-Learning in Algerian Universities: Elements of Implementation and Obstacles," Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Algeria, 2011/2012.

[7] Mohammed Zayed, "The Importance of Distance Education in the Face of the Spread of the Coronavirus," Journal of Legal Studies, Volume 9, Issue 4, 2020.