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## Exploring the Impact of Digital Citizenship on TEFL in Higher Education in Morocco

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### Abstract

In the light of the progress in research and innovation in higher education in Morocco, integrating brand new concepts in the Moroccan universities such as Digital Citizenship can enhance university professors and university students' awareness towards their digital experiences and find ways to bridge the digital divide. This being the case, an implementation of Digital Citizenship can provide space for social change and progress in higher education in Morocco. This exploratory study investigates the impact of Digital Citizenship on TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) higher education in Morocco by addressing with some Digital Citizenship elements such as Digital Access, Digital Fluency and Digital Rights and Responsibilities to sensitize to the need for social change and to bridge the gap between university professors as Digital Immigrants and their university students as Digital Natives. The results of this paper show that Digital Citizenship is a prerequisite for higher education in Morocco to keep up with the technological progress, to call for social change and to forge stronger links between Moroccan universities and their peers worldwide.

### Keywords

Digital citizenship, TEFL, higher education, social sciences, Morocco

### Introduction

The concept of citizenship came into light in the post-World War II era. Thomas Humphrey Marshall referred to it in his book "Citizenship and Social Class" (1950) to shed light on the rights and responsibilities of citizens in society and their sense of belonging to a community. In this regard, the concept of Digital Citizenship (DC) nowadays is a result of the rapid changes in the technological field; since the beginning of the Third Millennium, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) created the S3 framework, safe, savvy and social,

to raise the awareness of citizens towards their experiences in the digital world (Ribble and Park, 2019; Whitehead, 2019).

In the Moroccan context, Morocco's Strategic Vision 2015-2030 in Education works on adapting the country's education to meet the requirements of the fast-changing technologies in education to improve the quality of the educational field in the country. In the same vein, the Agency for Digital Development (ADD) launched a report on the best digital practices (2017) to ensure a fair and useful utilisation of technology in the Moroccan administrations. Moreover, Morocco's Digital Plan 2022-2025 aims at generating ADD's digital practices in all the fields in Morocco; COVID 19 has been an essential cause in this process because it pushed the stakeholders in the educational field to find alternatives to keep the teaching and learning process ongoing. Therefore, the integration of the concept of Digital Citizenship in higher education in Morocco is a must to raise the awareness of the future generations as digital citizens towards their own digital experiences and be able to be vigilant towards it.

### **Literature Review**

In order to understand the concept of Digital Citizenship, this section provides a set of scholarly perspectives on this concept to investigate its different aspects and explore opportunities for its integration in the Moroccan context.

Based on Marshall's theory of Citizenship (1950), the book "Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society and Participation" (Mossberger et al, 2008) dealt with the issue of DC in terms of the social, economic and political integration of citizens in a society relying on their digital activism online. Also, Simsek and Simsek's "New Literacies for Digital Citizenship" highlights the different emerging literacies that enhance the spread of information, namely social media such as Facebook and Twitter, hence it is of paramount importance to know how to use it appropriately to get the maximum benefits out of it. In addition to that, the thesis entitled "Development of Scale to Measure Digital Citizenship among Young Adults for Democratic Citizenship Education" (Choi, 2016) created a scale to gauge the level of understanding of citizens of issues related to their DC practices for appropriate use. As well, Ribble and Park (2019) created a five-year workable model for the incorporation of DC in schools based on the nine elements of DC, most specifically at the elementary and junior schools. In the same vein, Whitehead (2019) came with practical DC teaching strategies and practices based on Ribble's DC nine elements.

Ultimately, these studies focused on the integration of this concept in elementary and junior school levels while neglecting the importance of Digital Citizenship at the level of higher education. More than that, they did not seek possibilities to address issues related to Digital Citizenship in the MENA region.

### **Methodology**

This study uses an exploratory design relying on quantitative data to analyse the subsequent results. The setting of this study is public and private universities in Morocco in order to have more coverage in the sampling. The population are university professors and university students of the English departments in Morocco. Based on their willingness and availability, the chosen sampling is convenience sampling. The quantitative data has 221 respondents ranging from males and females, both university professors and university students.

### **Problem statement**

The reason why there is a need to find ways to integrate DC in the Moroccan universities is because of three reasons. First of all, changing educational perspectives is a must because there is a need to shift towards digitized classes/seminars, especially after COVID 19 pandemic which urged stakeholders in education to look for alternatives to keep the teaching learning process ongoing. Second, reshaping people's mindsets in the global era is a prerequisite in order to keep up with the fast-changing conditions, especially in the technological field and to help them become digital citizens who are aware and conscious of their digital experiences. Finally, there are difficulties of opening up on the integration of Digital Citizenship in the Moroccan educational system; hence, it is of paramount importance to look for more chances to integrate DC for the ample opportunities it provides such as internationalising the education system in Morocco and creating more academic encounters for universities with their peers worldwide.

### **Research objectives**

In order to understand this study, one of the objectives is to investigate how Digital Citizenship as an online and face to face course in a TEFL context raises university professors and students' awareness in university classrooms in Morocco towards becoming global citizens. As well, it is important to identify the impact of Digital Citizenship on TEFL in higher education in Morocco and highlight the importance of Digital Citizenship in rendering university students as digital citizens. Finally, it is significant to identify the role Media plays in digitising higher education in Morocco.

### **Research questions**

This study has three main research questions:

- What impact does Digital Citizenship have on higher education in Morocco?
- Why is there a need to integrate Digital Citizenship in higher education in Morocco and what are the expected outcomes?
- How can TEFL classrooms in the Moroccan universities become efficiently digitized?

These research questions discuss the influence of DC on higher education in Morocco as well as the necessity to incorporate it in the Moroccan institutions to digitise its classes/seminars.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for two main reasons. firstly, Covid 19 pandemic and its impact on higher education has been very problematic for higher education in Morocco; the problems faced during covid 19 in higher education helped in providing alternatives to overcome the repercussions of Covid 19 on higher education. Second, the role of media in sensitizing with the importance of digital citizenship helps in reconstructing people's mindsets through social media as well as moving from local to global citizens.

### **Results**

This section highlights the results of the study at three levels. The first one is about COVID 19 repercussions on higher education in Morocco. The second one is about integrating Digital Citizenship in higher education in Morocco. The last one is about media's role in higher education and sharing information about Digital Citizenship.

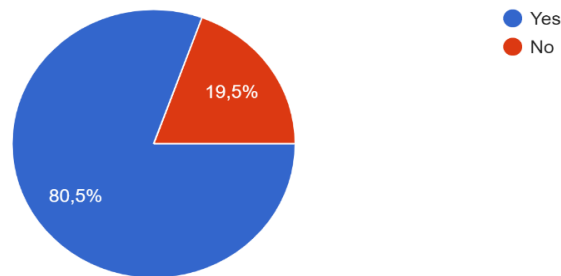
### **Covid 19 repercussions on higher education in Morocco**

This section contains three parts related to COVID 19 in higher education in Morocco. The first one is about the problems caused by COVID 19. The second one is related to Professors

and student's adaptation during COVID 19, and the last one is linked to students' awareness concerning global issues.

Figure 1  
*COVID 19 Problems in Higher Education in Morocco*

1. Do you think that COVID 19 caused problems for teaching/learning process in Higher Education?  
221 réponses



When asked if COVID 19 caused problems for the teaching/learning process in higher education, 80,5 % of the respondents agreed with this statement while 19,5 % disagreed. This can be justified with the inability of some professors to use technological tools to teach students and/or students' commitment was very low, especially that some of these students lack digital access and were unable to connect to study online.

Figure 2  
*Professors and Students Adaptation during COVID 19*

2. Do you think that university students and professors have been able to adapt their teaching/learning during COVID 19?  
221 réponses

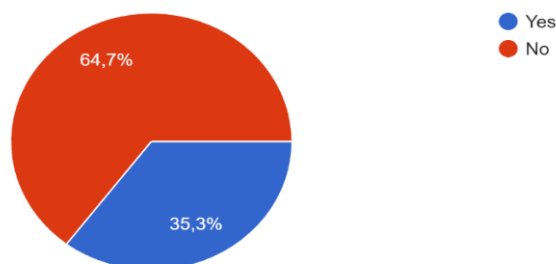
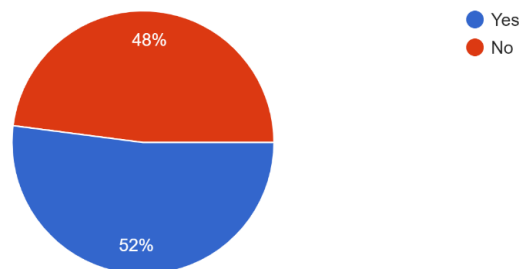


Figure 3  
*Students' Awareness Concerning Global Issues*

3. Do you think that Covid 19 helped English departments at the Moroccan universities improve students' awareness concerning global issues?

221 réponses



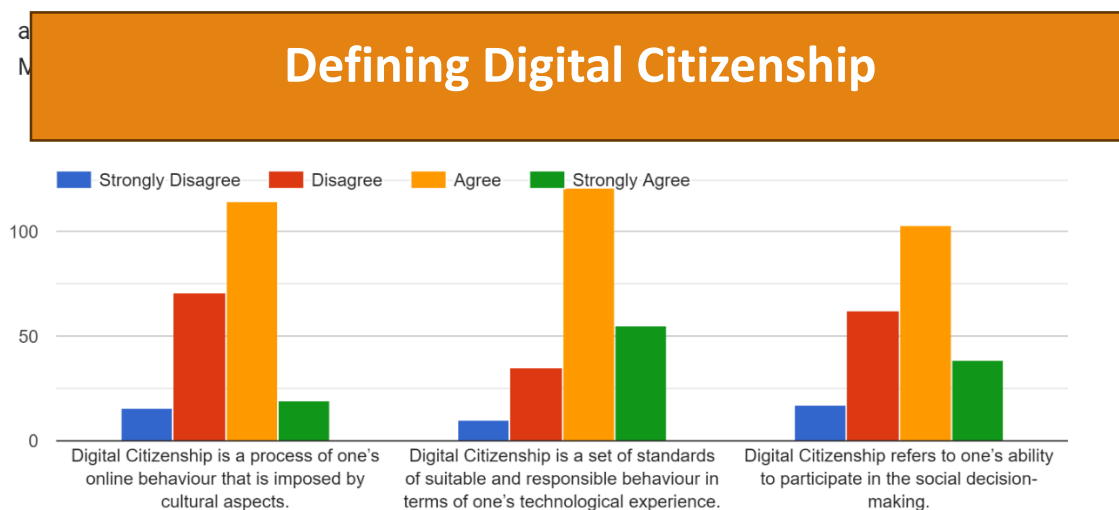
When asked if professors and students have been able to adapt their teaching/learning during COVID 19, 64,7 % disagreed with this statement while 35,3% agreed. This means that it was very hard for both university professors and university students to adapt during the pandemic, most probably during its first year because it took time to find alternatives to keep the online courses going on.

When asked if COVID 19 helped English departments at the Moroccan universities improve students' awareness concerning global issues, 52 % of the respondents agreed with this statement while 48 % disagreed. This means that the shock that COVID 19 caused to people around the world, most specifically students has been great because it urged them to understand and adapt to the new system of education, which is relying more on online courses.

### Integrating digital citizenship

In terms of integrating Digital Citizenship, it is important to understand the possible definitions provided and see which one is more useful for the Moroccan context.

Figure 4  
*Defining Digital Citizenship*



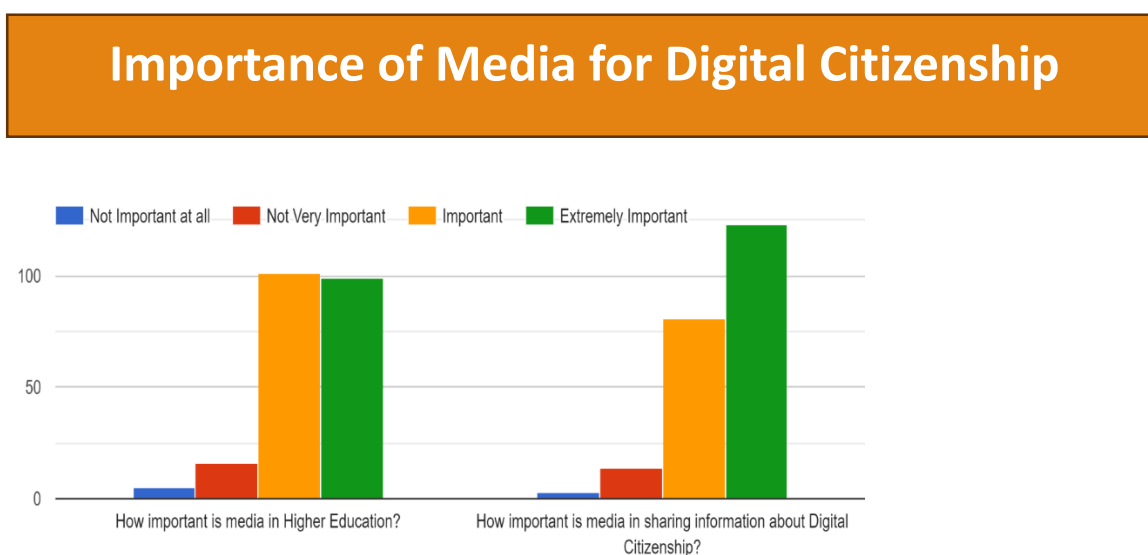
In order to see which DC definition is more suitable for the Moroccan context, three definitions have been provided. The first is that “Digital Citizenship is a process of one’s online behaviour that is imposed by cultural aspects”. The second one is “Digital Citizenship is a set of standards of suitable and responsible behaviour in terms of one’s technological experience”. The last one is “Digital Citizenship refers to one’s ability to participate in the social decision-making”. The respondents classified the second definition as the most useful for the Moroccan context and the first definition as the most suitable, while the last definition was the least suitable in terms of the respondents’ answers. This means that what digital citizens require nowadays is appropriate behaviour, especially with the spread of memes and bullying online.

### Media's role in higher education and sharing information about digital citizenship

This section highlights the results of the study in terms of the importance of media for Digital Citizenship.

Figure 5

*Importance of Media for Digital Citizenship*



The respondents were asked two statements. The first one is how important media is in higher education; the majority of the respondents stated that it is important and extremely important while very few respondents stated that it is not very important or not important at all. The second statement is how important media is in sharing information about DC; the majority of the answers stated that it is extremely important, moderately important while very few answers showed that it is not important or not important at all. This means that media in general, social media most specifically, plays an important role in the lives of people nowadays as far as they rely on it to get news and share information as well.

### Discussion

Based on the results, there are three main elements to discuss. Firstly, the impact of Digital Citizenship on Moroccan Universities is prevalent because there is a need to integrate DC in the Moroccan higher educational system /University courses vs E-learning platforms during Covid 19 in higher education in Morocco. That is to say, an integration of DC in the English departments most specifically in the Moroccan universities will have a great impact on professors and students through generating e-learning platforms in a hybrid mode of education. Secondly, the role of media in digitizing higher education in Morocco is of paramount

significance because it helps university students to become digital natives in the Third Millennium; hence, bridging the digital divide between university students and university professors. Lastly, integrating DC in higher education in Morocco will boost the internationalisation of the Moroccan higher educational system via creating more academic encounters with their peers worldwide.

### **Pedagogical implications**

Pedagogically speaking, integrating DC with other curricula will help in boosting the educational system in higher education Morocco; this doesn't mean letting go the face-to-face courses but to update some of the educational modules and subjects to keep up to date. Also, one of the elements of DC is digital wellness and awareness of one's digital footprint; this means that one of the reasons of integrating DC is to sensitise university professors and university students alike to their digital health and be cautious towards their online traces/digital footprints in their digital experiences. As well, an important aspect of DC is online collaboration and communication where students and professors improve their communication skills online and face to face. In addition to that, DC enhances our understanding of global citizenship of accepting others and being able to adapt in global circumstances to coexist, and this entails that digital citizens are socially responsible. Finally, a pillar in the education of DC at the level of universities is project-based learning; students are required to discover to multifarious elements of DC through projects for a better understanding. The following is a figure highlighting the pedagogical implications of DC in the Moroccan universities.

Figure 6

#### *Digital Citizenship Pedagogical Implications for the Moroccan Universities*



### **Conclusion**

It is of paramount importance to integrate the concept of Digital Citizenship in Morocco for the ample possibilities it provides for university professors and university students to address global issues and understand one's own digital experiences and be vigilant towards it.

### **Limitations of the study**

There are two main limitations of this study. The first one is related to data collection limitations; the willingness of participants to answer and/or share the research instruments has

been lengthy. the second one is related to upgrading higher education in Morocco; the slow process of digitization of higher education in Morocco make it very hard to generate DC courses at large.

### Recommendations

This study has two main recommendations. Firstly, considering coursebooks that cover the concept of Digital Citizenship at every educational level will enhance students' awareness towards global issues; teaching digital literacy/fluency is not enough nowadays because there is need to consider the other elements of DC as well. Secondly, addressing issues related to Digital Citizenship at the level of the Moroccan universities is a must nowadays in order to sensitise university students and university professors as to the necessity of bridging the gap between university professors as digital immigrants and university students as digital natives.

### Suggestions for further studies

One of the suggestions this study offers address Digital Citizenship elements in higher education in Morocco by adding Digital Communication and Collaboration to enhance collaboration on research between institutions; this will boost international collaboration between universities and will help internationalise the educational system in Morocco. Also, initiating more discussion about Digital Literacy/Fluency to raise awareness because there is a need for social change. Finally, encouraging university students and university professors to work on more possibilities to bridge the Digital Divide; this will foster inter-generational communication between professors and students as digital citizens.

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