What Remains of Covid-19 pandemic Whirlwind : Sociological Reading of the Effects of Lockdown Education on Master Students, University of Oran 2, Algeria

Dr Wafaa FALI [1]

[1] **University of Oran 2 Mohamed BENAHMED(ALGERIA)**, **fali.wafaa2015@gmail.com**

Abstract:

Confinement imposition during Covid-19 pandemic marked a significant shake in the Algerian educational system by imposing virtual online classes, and therefore, technological realities come to the fore. Master students (LCE) found themselves facing a new educational system that necessitates internet usage via the platform Moodle or E-Learning. This paper aims to provide a sociological reading of the lockdown phase as experienced by Master students at the University of Oran 2 in 2019/2020. This paper also focuses on their reaction and trials to cope with the new « normal » during the pandemic. Drawing upon three primary theoretical perspectives in sociology, this paper is to be conducted in the light of the following tri-standpoints : the symbolic interactionist perspective, the functionalist perspective and the conflict perspective (probing the social impact of postcovid-19 pandemic. This study is based on a qualitative descriptive method based on interviews with students to carry out their appreciations and challenges concerning bridging the gap between mixed models of education (in-present and online) to go in accordance with the needs of the new post Covid-19 pedagogical and socilogical routine

Keywords: sociological perspective, covid-19 pandemic, online learning, university of Oran 2, Master students

*Corresponding author

1. INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the call for human distancing, social lockdown and quarantine practices were imposed by the majority of governments throughout the world in an effort to curb the spraed of the virus. The global educational system, martial law, travel have been halted due to the quick widespread of Covid-19 in the world UNESCO, 2020 : p.1). As an initial reaction to fight the pandemic, lockdown has been imposed ; therefore, most of the institutions were urged to close their doors to employees. However, the interruption of Covid-19 pandemic was not just for the short term bu on the long run. Teaching/learning and educational routine embody a major social activity in educational institutions. Nevertheless, teachers and students would experience drastic change in their peadagogical and social relationships. Confinement imposition marked a significant shake in the Algerian educational system by imposing virtual online classes, and therefore, technological realities come to the fore.

Guaranteeing the pedagogical « routine » has been the major objective during the first emergence of Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the imposition of lockdown by the Algerian government results in the closure of universities across the country. Keeping contact while being physically apart was the current condition imposed on both teachers and students. The educational system has witnessed a quick and drastic shift in an urgent way, shifting from humanism to machanism was inevitable and necessary (Alcoforado : 2020, P.51). In-present classes turned to zoom and google meet classes with a constant problem of net connectivity. A situation that needed thoughtful mechanisms to diffuse the information, to keep the students in touch, and therefore, to save the academic year.

Confienement experience was « inédite » and deemed to be extraordianry in the life of teachers and students alike. However, students have suffered from anxiety of failure especially that the condition to acquire success have been modified and limited to being connected to social networks as a first step then the e-learning platform later on. The educational face has changed and introduced students to new challenges in their pursuit to

succeed as well as the system of input/intake in teaching behind the screen (Alharthi, 2020 : P.16). Psycho-pedagogically speaking, the pedagogical separation between teachers and students marked a breakthrough in education perceptions and the extent to which students have confidence in overcoming this cut. They found themselves amid this whirlwind torn between learning the new strategies to keep contact with their teachers via adopting home-schooling methods chained by the salient problems of net connectivity and digital equipement especially for students who live away from cities, in provinces or villages.

This paper aims to examine the reaction of Master students to learning in distance during the first phase of Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. It also provides sociological reading of this unparelleled experience while probing the positive and negative aspects of distance learning. It also addresses the students' perspective of utilizing digital tools for knowledge acquisition and their feedback on using online learning process in post-covid 19 era since the Ministry of High Education has proposed hybrid learning for the long term learning/teaching process (Bourouiba, 2020, p15). Based on a qualitative approach, this study would report the views of students involved in the process of E-learning during the pandemic era.

The number of respondants are 50 students Master field at the department of English, University of Oran 2. In-depth interviews were conducted to gauge their reactions and adoption of the new online system. Later, there would be an evaluation of the student's attitudes towards the hybrid learning imposed and implemented by the Ministery of Higher Education on March 2020 for the first time at a national level (Burgess et al, 2020, p.26). In this sense, hybrid learning has become a «fait accompli » that most of students should adopt and cope with the ne norm for the long term. It was put forward that distance education will mark a new effective mechanism in the future along with necessary improvement and in-service training (Bruder, 1983, p.32). This study is expected to enrich and contribute in understanding the pace of distance learning during the first phase of Covid-19 pandemic using sociological theoretical standpoint of reactionalist and functionalist methods. On the other hand, when examining students' attitudes towards the hybrid learning experience in post Covid-19 pandemic era, sociological conflict method is mostly appropriate to detrmine their prospects after getting particiapted in this new educational activity.

Statement of the Problem

After the government's decision of suspending educational activities, in-personal courses have been an option rather than a normal system in most of universities in the world. Being in the midst of the necessity to keep in touch with students during the pandemic, most of teachers started using emails and posting courses on facebook groups. Besides, students found themselves in isolation notably without having the simplest tools such as a good net connectivity and a good mastery of electronic mediated courses (the case of Algerian universities). Lack of equipement and training made the reaction to the pandemic seems to be very slow.

On the other hand, learners felt lost after the closure of university and losing contact with their teachers. They found themselves obliged to shift from pensil and paper to using digital tools and net connectivity was a major paralyse for most of the students especially those living in rural regions where net connectivity is not installed yet. In fact, learners involved in e-learning ; especially those who have succeeded to keep contact with their teachers, were more likely to find a clear adjustment with the new order. Isolation, loss of motivation, stress and enxiety amplified the difficult task left for teachers. Teachers, on the other hand, have been trying to diffuse information through posting courses in form of PDF or powerpoint presentations with audio explanations. Yet, it was not enough especially in modules that necessitate analysis, interaction, interpretation and critical thinking. Most of distance courses programs made use of audiovisual media in an effort to reach students in amore attractive and motivating way.

Stepping back to March 12th, 2020 when the Ministry of Higher Education decided to close the doors of all universities of Algeria in an effort to prevent the spread of Covid-19, the sudden closure of universities has affected millions of students across the country. Therefore, the first and the second quarter of 2019/2020 academic year would not be completed as previously planned by the pedagogical and administrative committees. The insertion of technology as a makeshift to garantee the pedagogical continuity tends « to subvert the traditional based education » (Arora et al, 2020 : p. 48) with all its shortcomings and tends to change its face by setting new norms. As a matter of fact, the fall of a whole

educational paradigm marked a breakthrough in the educational scene where the teacher is no more on the top of the educational pyramid ; the sole source of knowledge. Nonetheless, teachers and learners found themeselves facing a fact life that imposed on them different roles to play, totally different from the norms of the traditional ones. Advances in telecommunications has opened up great possiblities of getting knowledge, yet way difficult to assess (Creswell, 2016 : p.73). Both computer access and audio-visual conferencing courses such as zoom or google meet allow students to engage in group interaction and class discussion.

Review of Related Literature

From a sociological point of view, students, as individuals and part of society, have been socially isolated from the collective interest and have become a production of the pandemic, strictly dictated and limited to the new code (wearing the mask, using the alcohol gel and keeping distance of other individuals). Even though the aim behind distanciation was to control the quick spread of virus, social distanciation and quarantine also meant social isolation and liberty restriction.

E-learning or distance learning emerged as a makeshift or a medium to overcome the physical separation between techers and learners. According to Telli, Yamamoto and Altun, the pandemic has affected all fields of human life sectors among which the educational one was the most affected by the Covid-19 after the health sector (Telli et al, 2020 :p. 87). the lack of preparedness in most of universities in developing countries made it necessary to switch to other alternatives in a short time. In the case of Algeria, e-learning is quite new and has never been introduced or even thought of before Covid-19 lockdown. Stepping back to 1973, E-learning was one of the educational projects in the united states mainly introduced by Moore whose theory of independent study urged scholars to think over the physical or face-to-face educational programs. Distance education is meant to be a computer-based learning method considered as a promising innovation with flexible mechanisms of virtual learning envirenments (Hall and Knox, 2009 :p. 69). Speaking about educational practitioners in distance, Mundy and Harls sugget that a successful teaching may be possible even if the teacher and learners are not in the same atmosphere (2020 : p.9), he adds that the

learning process should transcend « the traditional outdated pedagigical system to more free and flexible ways of learning » (Tam G and AlAzar, 2020 : p.10).

The learners and teachers have become partners, they collaborate together in such a way that the input and intake is no more going in one way. The student is no more a "consumer" of what the teacher proffers rather a part of the process of knowledge production, diffusing and imparting. Flexibility is also one factor that cast aside traditional limitations of time, space and omnipotent source of knowledge (Gillies, 2008 :115). The Corona-virus pandemic period would change the whole world's ways of educational processes of how to receive and be receiving information (Tam and AlAzar, 2020 :p. 10)

What happened during the pandemic was an initiation to the Algerian universities to get prepared to enter the next century challenges. The new generation of learners is expected to be part of the globalised program. In his book « Facilitating Distance Education » (2008), Cantelon proposes that the current generation is expected « to be the fastest growing segment of higher education that will take placeoff-campus through teaching methods of in distance delivery (Cantelon, 2008 :p. 5). Cantelon's projection, before more than two decades, happens to be a bare truth nowadays in an effort to meet the needs of distance programs on a larger scale in the future by implementing blended or hybrid learning. However, many factors, such as lack of equipement and net connectivity, might reflect negative attitudes and the extent to which teachers and learners are ready to be part of this envirenment empede the way towards the insurance of the sustainability of education. In this regard, we find both students and teachers facing this challenge as they were both unprepared to enter the world of digital education. Regional difference is also a major factor of lack of awareness of using information-based technologies among many students living in rural regions where net connectivity is almost inexistent.

Probing the social impact of Covid-19 pandemic on students confined in houses facing a hazy future, dystopian elements represented in lockdown anxiety, as an unprecedented social experiement, brought about unprecedented changes and challenges. Three primary sociological perspectives in sociology would proffer a way to analyse societal

phenomena, social forces and human behaviour and reaction within society such as : symbolic interactionist perspective, the functionalist structural perspective and the conflict perspective to understand the development of lockdown experiences of students. As for the symbolic interactionist standpoint, it focuses on the to social codes usually conventionalised by a general social consenses on a micocosmic level (Cooley, 2016, P.2). it is directly related to the individual's first impression and reaction to a certain « abnormal » situation that may change or shake a static conventional information, event or beliefs. It is the individual's interpretation of a salient situation in which they find themselves as participants not as a recipient. In the case of Covid-19 pandemic's first emergence, it was a choc and shaking for all the constituencies of society. Staying confined at home was in opposition to the « normal » social consensus. However, it has been normalised and appropriated for the sake of problem solving or social collective utility to curb the widespread of the virus.

On the other hand, the functionalist structural perspective is related to social institutions interrelation such as the government ans its different sectors which are supposed to meet the needs of the population (Mooley, 2007, P.10). It seeks to give a « macrocosmic level » of handling problems as. Therefore, lockdown has been suggested for the public sake. Although it was slighly tolerated by the majority of population, it was an inevitable step to at least control and understand the way this virus finctions to set norms and structures on the ground. The conflict perspective is concerned with the extent to which social institutions would be efficient to face the problem and set a common ground that lays a certain, sometimes temporary, stability to face the problem in a more matured way (Cooley, 2016 : p.78). The conflict perspective also serves to understand the students' attitudes after two years experiencing distance learning. There is always a contradiction between what is imposed and what is on the ground. Many formation meetings have been organized to train teachers and students how to be part of this digital experience for the long term. However, there is always a reluctance in accepting and coping with the new digitalized educational system.

Methodology, Research Design and Data collection Process

As already mentioned, this study is a case study that relies fundamentally on collecting opinions and attitudes of a certain number of population to « explore a real-life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time by collecting detailed, in-depth information and reports case themes and case descriptions » (Creswell and Poth, 2016 :87). Accordingly, this study targets basically the reactions and attitudes from the students' (receivers) point of view to the distance learning during the lockdown and in post-covid-19 pandemic. In this sense and by using a qualitative approach, an in-depth interview consisting of 6 questions from which this study hypotheses stem. The sample of this research is a non-random sampling type, that is, the population represented here is a class of master students consisted of 50 students. The general information are age, gender, education level (master students vary between students and workers), and their residence (distance), see Table1

Variables	**Table 1.**	
Age	Veries from 21 to 45	
Gender	Male 15	Female 35
Students	Male 10	Female 20
Workers	Male 5	Female15
Residence	City 30	Province/rural regions 20

The case study data has been collected through direct questions and discussions over the major themes of this paper. There are questions related to the demographic information of the selected population and other questions concerning their reactions and the process of coping with distance education along with their opinions on the implementation of hybrid education in university curricula for the long run. The interview questions were not sent via email, instead, the interviews have been carried out in class during in-personal sessions. This allows to gauge their reactions and serves in effective discussions to be able to compare the different experiences, and therefore, the different reactions to this pandemic effects.

Students' views on the effects of Covid-19 pandemic from social and educational point of view were gathered under 6 questions that reveal 6 major themes :

1. What was the first reaction to the government's decision of lockdown and the eventual closure of university ?

2. How was your contact with your teachers before and after the lockdown ?

3. Was it easy to get the courses online as far as time sufficiency, session content length, adequacy and effectiveness, monotony as opposed to in-present classes ? Have you ever heard of e-learning before ?

4. What were the first ways of contact between you/the delagate of the students and teachers ? Have you found problems to acceed to different digital applications ?

5. What are the major problems that you face during the lockdown concerning courses aquisition and sitting for exams as far as flexibility and autonomy ?

6. Did you find difficulty to adapt with the new « norm » of education ? Do you see that hybrid learning during post-covid-19 pandemic is efficient and can meet the needs of university students ?

Findings of Students' Views

1. What was the first reaction to the government's decision of lockdown and the eventual closure of university ?

The first question in the interview is related to the reactionalist sociological view of lockdown situation. All of the 50 students (male/female) share the same reaction of surprise, choc and evetually panic after the decision of the Algerian government to close universities. Their first concern was the future of their educational process since the lockdown was imposed in the half of the year precisely the beginning of the second semester. The first reaction was out of a sudden for the students who live away from their houses and were urged to leave campus without knowing what they should do next.

2. How was your contact with your teachers before and after the lockdown ?

Most of the students, precisely 47 students/50 have not had a direct contact with their teachers before the lockdown. Roughly, they do no even know the name of their teachers. There was the role of the delegate (the student responsible for camarades' doleances) to play the role of the intermediate between students/teachers and the administration. This lack of communication between the two partners made a gap in terms of the information acquisition and added to students' anxiety and sense of isolation. The students' delegate stated that *« we did not know our teachers' names before the lockdown and found difficulty in getting in touch with them before and more after the lockdown, we were literally lost ! »*

3. What were the first ways of contact between you/the delagate of the students and teachers ? Have you found problems to acceed to different digital applications ?

The students started receiving courses via email, always from their delegate, no contact with their teachers in the beginning. Facebook groups and whatsapp were the first applications to rely on to guarantee the continuity of educational process. Then teachers proposed zoom/google meet/google class applications to finally get in touch directly with their students. This was the first step towards e-learning implementation. The problem persists with the students who live in rural regions where there was no internet conection. 16 students (5 male and 11 female students) did not even have digital tools except phones. This lockdown unveiled the un-preparedness and the shortage of the equipements to overcome the effects of this pandemic. One student declared that *« receiving courses as « takaway meals » via mail or facebook was not enough, it widened our isolation gap. The presence of the teacher would be rather consoling and necessary »*

4. Have you ever heard of e-learning before ? Was it easy to get the courses online in terms of time sufficiency, session content length, adequacy and effectiveness, monotony as opposed to in-present classes ?

It seems that e-learning, as an educational tool has never been exposed or presented to the students before. 15/50 of the students among whom 10 female respondants have heard of e-learning process. The experience of e-learning in Algeria started and was imposed with the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic. 50/50 students prefer in-person courses and showed their concerns and anxiety of being away from their teachers, considering them as the source of knowledge. One student stated *« it is just difficult to shift from the traditional method of learning to the digital tools in such a prompt way. »* Starting to learn on their own pace seems to be a challenge to manage time since most of the courses were like « take-away » courses delivered by email and left to the students to read and understand them. The session content and time were eventually squeezed and most of information were shrunk. As for effectiveness, 54/50 students see that the courses sent via email or presented via google class seem to be inadequate and general.

Critical thinking was needable, yet there was no room to reveal it, as in their viewpoint, the teacher was not interested in their feeedback but focused on accomplishing certain curricula by the end of each semester. Most of the students highlighted the monotony of many courses that seem to be redundant and sometimes cushioned without knowing how their evaluation would be. Things started to slightly change with the use of Zoom and Google meet applications where students could see and hear their teachers. However, lack of equipement and problems of net connectivity were still persisting.

5. What are the major problems that you face during the lockdown concerning courses aquisition and sitting for exams as far as flexibility and autonomy ?

Using digital tools for the first time was not that easy. 15/50 students insisted on their incapability of coping with the situation due to basic technical problems. 35/50 are slighly satisfied with the flexibility of doing homeworks and take home exams. They agree that *« time management and homework flexibility are there* ». However, they face the problem of norms of evaluation and feedback. Teachers themselves face such a problem of evaluation and feedback since the exams are in distance.

6. Did you find difficulty to adapt with the new « norm » of education ? Do you see that hybrid learning during post-covid-19 pandemic is efficient and can meet the needs of university students ?

The new « normal » has become part of students/teachers life not just a makeshift to cover certain educational shortcomings of the post-covid effects. Technology implementation has modified the face of education. Most of the students show concern about being isolated and alienated. They feel the need to be part of the macrocosmic university community.inspite of inadequacy, the equity of educational opportunities reflect that students are not versed in the use of technology for the short term. They complain and feel frustrated of distance learning course materials. They face real challenge/change to adversities while not being undergone any training. They want to not only know « what » but also « how » to employ programs where the technological tools, applications, audiovisual media to facilitate the pace of hybrid learning as a new study habit in an effort to moving into the needs of this century.

Discussion and Conclusion

The sociological effects of the pandemic shows the reaction of students to a phenomenon that cannot be separated from the pedagogical challenge of learning in distance. In this paper, students show their anxiety and alienation, as a sociological effect of the remains of Covid-19 pandemicrepresented the human aspect of the distance learning experience. Distance learning empowered with internet accebility seems to be an effective medium of information delivery that facilitates carrying out knowledge at the students' convenience. However, lockdown imposition left its traces on the face of education and students' attitudes to distance learning, and later on the hybrid learning. On the other hand, the pacing techniques of flexibility and autonomy contends with structural technology into a highly personalized level.

The aim behind this study was to follow the process of in-distance learning implementation from its beginning with the lockdown till the partial opening by September 2020. This qualitative approach touches upon the interactive dimention of the students'

experiences in both the short and long terms. During the interview, most of the students agree upon in-distance learning as an additional pressure and showed their nostalgia to the traditional in-personal courses where information acquisition is more structural and effective.

This study's results show that students' views reflect both the positive and negative sides of distance or E-learning education. Most of the students show their dissatisfaction with distance learning on the premise that they find diffuclty in understanding « take-away » courses, anxiety of being away from teachers along with lack of time and necessary infrastructure. Most of the students agree on the difficulty to understand the subjects of the courses. In the scope of this study, the most importsnat issue that students face during lockdown is social alienation and lack of communication and interaction. The results of this study suggested that the lack of interaction and low participation, lack of communication and training alongside net connectivity shudown represent obstacles that empede the path towards the « normal » integration of the hybrid learning for the long term.

With the results obtained from this study, there is a small category of students, notably the workers, find in-distance learning more useful and flexible. Another issue that all the students complain of is the quality and adequacy of the courses presented on platforms in addition to curriculum and assessment materials. Testing methods vary and this point marks their preoccupations. The fear of failure accompanied students since the beginning of this pandemic and still haunting them. This difficult adjustement with the new distance courses distablized their learning pace. Generally, students respond to the change that the teachers present and facilitate by putting forward that distance education will be used more effectively in the long term. Obtaining proper equipement and training are the major mechanisms to overcome this gap in education during and post-covid era.

REFERENCES :

1. Alcoforado, F. (2020). *The World after coronavirus.* Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/42549068/ THE_WORLD_AFTER_CORONAVIRUS.
2. Alharthi, M. (2020). Students' attitudes toward the use of technology in online courses. *International Journal of Technology in Education (IJTE), 3*(1).

3. Mc Carthey, H (2017). E-learning continuance satisfaction in higher education : A unified perspective from instructors and students. *Studies in Higher Education*, *43*(11).

4. Arora, A. K., & Srinivasan, R. (2020). Impact of pandemic COVID-19 on the teaching–learning process : A Study of Higher Education Teachers. *Prabandhan : Indian Journal of Management, 13* (4).

5. Cantelon, J. (2008). Where did distance education go wrong ? *Distance Education, 29*(1).

6. Burgess S. and Sievertsen *H.H. (April 1, 2020),* Schools, skills, and learning : The impact of COVID-19 on education, VOX CEPR policy portal, https://voxeu.org/article/impact-covid-19-education

7. Bruder, I. (1989). Distance learning: What is holding back this boundless delivery system? *Electronic Learning, 8*(6).

8. Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. New York : Routledge.

9. Cooley, H.C (2016) "The Interactionist Perspective." *Sociology – Cochise College* Boundless, 26 May. 2016. Retrieved 27 Feb. 2022 from https://www.boundless.com/users/493555/textbooks/sociology-cochise-college/gender-stratification-and-inequality-11/sociological-perspectives-on-gender-stratification-87/the-interactionist-perspective-505-6184/

10. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design : Choosing among five approaches.* Sage publications.

11. Gillies, D. (2008). Student perspectives on video-conferencing in teacher education at a distance. *Distance Education, 29*(1).

12. Hall, D., & Knox, J. (2009). Issues in the education of TESOL teachers by distance education. *Distance Education, 30*(1), 63- 85. doi : 10.1080/01587910902845964

13. Mooney L.A., Knox D., and Schacht C., (2007). *The Three Main Sociological Perspectives*, in Understanding Social Problems, 5th edition,

https://laulima.hawaii.edu/access/content/user/kfrench/sociology   /The%20 Three%20Main%20Sociological%20Perspectives.pdf

14. Mundy K. and Hares S. (March 23, 2020), Managing Education Systems during COVID-19 : An Open Letter to A Minister of Education, Center for Global Development, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/managingeducation-

15. systems-during-covid-19-open-letter-minister-education

16. Tam G. and El-Azar D., (2020), 3 ways the coronavirus pandemic could reshape education, World Economic

17. Forum,   https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/3-ways-coronavirus-is-reshaping-education-and-whatchanges-

18. might-be-here-to-stay

19. UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] (2020). *COVID-19 educational disruption and response.* Retrieved from https://en.unesco.org/covid19/ educationresponse