Article

Rethinking the Education Paradigm in Morocco in the Covid-19 Context- Assessment of Resilience Curricula in Higher Education.

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted mental and emotional health in significant ways, and has worsened the already existing crisis of rising anxiety, chronic stress and depression among the youth. This was particularly marked by the drastic lockdown measures, the incessant stream of bad news, and the sudden shift to online education. Faced with stressors, resilience is a skill-set that aids with adapting, coping, and bouncing back from adversity while maintaining or quickly returning to a relatively healthy psychological functioning. This article therefore aims to explore the past, present and future situation regarding emotional and mental resilience skills in Moroccan higher education curricula. To this end, structured and semi-structured interviews have been conducted with four senior officials at the Ministry of Education in Rabat, Morocco. Furthermore, surveys have been collected from faculty members in eight public universities. The findings reveal that resilience education has not been officially implemented yet in Moroccan universities. However, the national vision shows the rising awareness in the need to shift to a more holistic educational paradigm, especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, to better prepare students for the uncertain and fast-changing future.

I. INTRODUCTION

On the 20th of March 2020, Morocco has declared an unprecedented state of sanitary emergency due to the Covid-19 virus. Consequently, the novel situation has drastically changed different aspects of the citizens' everyday life (work, economy, technology, relationships, education). As a matter of fact, The Covid-19 pandemic has been impacting the entire world for over a year, and Morocco is no exception. More discretely, a second pandemic has been simultaneously spreading and exponentially growing worldwide, threatening individuals' mental and physical health: chronic stress and anxiety. In order to face the latter, and as a preventative measure to be better equipped in the future, psychological resilience is a key concept and a vital human capability. Defined by

the neuro-psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnkik (cited in Anaut, 2005) as the capability to cope, live, succeed and develop despite adversity, this capability can be taught, practiced and strengthened. In fact, an increasing number of universities worldwide have included the resilience skill-set in their curricula with the sole objective of providing the necessary tools to students to be better prepared in facing life's challenges, and maintaining a healthy psychological functioning and overall well-being. What about resilience education in Morocco? Are there modules aimed at developing the students' mental and emotional resilience? What is the past, present and future situation regarding these skills in Moroccan universities? The main purpose of the present article is to examine these questions in light of the Covid-19 global and national context.

The year 2020 has been marked by a global pandemic taking the whole world by storm and leading to unprecedented lockdown measures in contemporary history. The Covid-19 virus has been first discovered in Wuhan, China in December, 2019 but has rapidly spread to the rest of the world with 177 108 695 confirmed cases, including 3 840 223 deaths as of June 19th, 2021 (World Health Organization, 2021a). As a result, extraordinary measures were taken by world leaders, and recommended by the World Health Organization in an attempt to contain the virus, and flatten the curve of infections, including lockdowns of more than one third of the global population (Grover et al., 2020).

Covid-19 has shaken all corners of the world, and Morocco is no exception. Thus, the Moroccan government declared a state of sanitary emergency in March 2020, and the country was under a very strict lockdown for a few months. In fact, schools and universities closed unexpectedly, facing the challenge to rapidly shift to online learning. Companies and organizations asked their employees to start working from home. In addition, all entertainment centers, gyms, cinemas, coffee shops, restaurants and shopping retailers were closed. To this day, June 19th 2021, the country has registered around 525 443 confirmed cases, including 9225 deaths (World Health Organization, 2021b). The primary concern for the population and authorities alike has been the physical consequences of the virus. Conversely, the second pandemic of psychological distress and rising anxiety has not been on the authorities' radar so far.

Shaw (2020) discusses the magnitude of the negative psychological consequences of the pandemic, highlighting that the dangerous effects of Covid-19 will be faced by a few, but that the mental health effects will be endured by most. Researchers have studied the impact of the Covid-19 in China and Japan (Zheng et al., 2020), and the findings have conclusively shown a high prevalence of psychological issues due to the pandemic. In fact, the fear of the virus, the extended quarantine, the state lockdowns, the lack or absence of social interactions, the temporary or definite loss of jobs, the financial precariousness for some, and the uncertainty surrounding this crisis are among the risk factors leading to an impaired mental health. Typically, fear and anxiety are considered the most common reactions during uncertain times like this one (Dong & Bouey, 2020). In addition, the impact extends to depressive states, insomnia, lower self-confidence, substance usage, etc. (Asmundson & Taylor, 2020). The current pandemic has taken a toll on the population, and the extent to which it has will be clearly visible in the upcoming months and years.

Throughout centuries, the human race has had its share of crisis-sanitary, economical, ecological, or political. Human beings worldwide face challenges, from grief over loved ones, to unemployment, poverty, conflicts, divorce and relationship breakdowns, burnout due to working conditions and so on and so forth. Struggle and trauma seem to be an inherent and unavoidable aspect of the human experience, and no one seems to be spared from this often-unwelcomed guest into one's life. Acknowledging and gracefully accepting the existence of the emotional trauma and psychological struggle is important, and should drive the creation of more scientific, literary and artistic spaces of reflections on the mechanisms to better cope and face stressors, as well as potentially growing from it.

Covid-19 is not the first, and probably won't be the last sanitary crisis the world faces. In 2004, researchers had claimed that globalization will likely lead to outbreaks of infectious diseases worldwide (Van Der Hoek et al., 2004). It is only expected to predict potential future pandemics, lockdowns and crises similar to Covid-19. Currently, the world is witnessing the unfolding of the current crisis and its consequences. The question that arises today, and that will be addressed throughout the present article is: could there be a way to prevent the disastrous consequences of the global mental and psychological crisis? In order to cope with the current anxiety-inducing context, and as a potential anticipatory tool, psychological resilience may be an effective skill-set to develop. So, what is resilience education? And how it can be used as a preventative measure?

Resilience

The purpose of this section is to clarify the meaning of psychological resilience, and the factors contributing to it. Once predominantly used in physics and economics, the term resilience has

gained popularity among researchers in psychology and educational sciences in the past decades in regard to mental health and stress reduction (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Cefai, 2004; Windle, Benett & Noyes, 2011; Winwood et al., 2013; Foster et al., 2018; Banerjee et al., 2019). According to some researchers, psychological resilience is defined as the individual's ability to cope, adapt and grow despite facing adversity (Garmezy, 1974; Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990). Later on, other researchers added that it is also a dynamic outcome of the relationship between protective and risk factors (Bernard, 2004 in Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011). Ultimately, resilience can be referred to as the ability to better adapt to the uncomfortable situation, and bounce back after experiencing stress and adversities.

In the current context of Covid-19, resilience could therefore be described as the skill to sustain psychological health while facing the numerous negative experiences due to the pandemic. It is important to draw attention to a potential misconception; resilience does not mean immunity from stress or the absence of negative emotions (Luthar, Doernberger & Zigler, 1993; Layne, Warren, Watson & Shalev, 2007). What is generally labeled as 'negative' emotions are necessary human responses to external or internal stimuli, and are part of the diverse spectrum of human emotions that should be felt and addressed. Importantly, developing a sense of awareness towards those 'negative' emotions, identifying them, accepting them and expressing them is psychologically sound, and actually contributes to developing one's resilience. Allan et al., (2014) draw attention to normalizing the existence of perturbations in functioning in resilient individuals.

According to the scientific literature, there are two categories of factors that come into play and influence one's resilience: 'protective factors' and 'risk factors' (Soylu, 2016; Werner, 2000). Understanding these factors is key to developing a more holistic understanding of the term resilience, and what makes one more resilient that another. Individuals are not equally resilient, so what makes some people more resilient than others? Researchers have answered this question by examining protective factors and risk factors (internal and external). On the one hand, protective factors can be defined as a buffer of adversity, reducing its negative effects, and increasing the likelihood of an effective adaptation and a maintained sense of mental health (Rutter, 1987; Gizir & Aydin, 2009). For instance, the protective factors include the following elements (Werner, 2000): "a loving and supportive family; positive self-concept; talents and hobbies; internal locus of control; advanced self-help skills; spirituality; strong achievement; sociability; physical health; communication skills; community and friendship" (p.125). Werner (2000) reports the results of longitudinal studies with empirical evidence showing that adolescents with higher resilience have some common attributes. Namely, a strong belief in their ability to positively impact their environment, an ability to reframe an unpleasant situation, and a capacity to distinguish between what they cannot or can control and the willingness to dedicate their energy to the latter. In addition to a higher self-concept, self-awareness and emotional regulation skills, they also have at least one close and healthy supportive inter-personal relationship. On the other hand, risk factors are negative or even traumatic life experiences that can compromise the individual's reaction to prolonged stress (Masten, 2001; Gizir & Aydin, 2009). They vary from a struggling relationship with parents, neglect, health issues, loss of loved ones, to wars, natural disasters and financial hardships (Werner, 2000; Basım & Çetin, 2010). Rising empirical evidence shows the role of the dynamic relationship between protective factors and risk factors in coping with stressful situations, and recovering efficiently later on (Werner, 2000). Therefore, maximizing protective factors and minimizing risk factors seem to increase one's resilience. Bernard (2004) supports this view claiming that resilience is not a definite trait but a dynamic construct resulting from the dynamic interaction between both category of factors. It is during difficult times, however, that we can test one's resilience by noting the presence of a relatively healthy functioning. It can be an ability, or a process as well as a result of an efficient adaptation while being exposed to the risk factor (Luthar, 2006; Masten, Burt & Coatsworth, 2006).

Resilience education

The birthplace of formal resilience education focusing on developing students' mental fitness and overall well-being is the United States, with the creation of the Positive Psychology field by

the president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998, Dr. Martin Seligman (Froh, 2004). Seligman has been a psychology researcher and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, USA. When appointed president of the APA in 1998, one of his most celebrated, impactful and well-known achievements is the creation of a sub-field and a global movement of the broader psychology field known as positive psychology. In fact, a more holistic approach to human mental health was starting to emerge, allowing researchers to gather the studies aiming to investigate human well-being and flourishing under the same umbrella while being subject to the same rigorous scientific methodologies applied in other existing domains of research. The field has been growing exponentially the past two decades in the west, with a significant number of scientific research and university courses on the subject in leading universities. Taught in the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia or Sweden, the course titles vary from: 'Introduction to Positive Psychology', to 'The Science of Well-being', or 'the Psychology of Adjustment', and are offered to university students regardless of their major or minor.

Resilience is not a fixed trait that some individuals are born with and others are not, but rather a skill set that can be developed with targeted interventions, and a holistic approach. Researchers consider it as a competency that can be learned and enhanced (Windle et al., 2011; Winwood et al., 2013; Zwack & Schweitzer, 2013). The value and critical importance of building resilience has long been established, and the role education plays in skill-development is key. Cefai (2004) argues that schools and universities have a crucial role in building the students' resilience through resilience education. In the recent years, and since the creation of the positive psychology movement by the American Psychological Association in 1998, there has been a tremendous rise in publications regarding mental well-being curricula (Waters & Rusk, 2013). Indeed, the courses include a variety of strategies including healthy lifestyle habits; nutrition, sleep, exercise, as well as mindfulness, empathy, emotional-regulation, gratitude, strengths, healthy communication, relationships, etc. (Beresin et al., 2016). It has been shown that resilience education builds the individuals' protective factors, and enhances the students' resilience and overall well-being (Shochet et al., 2011; Robertson et al., 2015).

As described, the empirical evidence in the west shows the role of resilience courses in developing the protective factors necessary to build students' resilience.

The current pandemic has shed some light on the importance of resilience to overcome the present and future challenges. Is the Moroccan youth being trained in resilience and learning how to better care for their psychological health in order to be prepared to face uncertain times like these? The purpose of the following section in the present study is to examine the Moroccan case, with a focus on public universities as they have the largest portion of the country's youth.

II. METHODS

The field work component of the present study was conducted between July 2020 and March 2021, and aimed to assess the past, present and future situation regarding resilience education in Moroccan higher education. To this end, and for methodological triangulation purposes, two complementary methods were used. On the one hand, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four key senior officials and decision-makers at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Rabat, Morocco. On the other hand, a questionnaire with closed-ended questions and one open-ended question at the end was collected from nine professors- one professor per university. Out of the eleven public universities with open access in Morocco, eight universities were included, which represents 72.73%. The latter include: The Mohammed V University in Rabat; The Hassan II University in Casablanca; The University of Moulay Ismail in Meknes; The University Ibn Tofail in Kenitra; The University of Cadi Ayyad in Marrakech; The University of Chouaib Doukkali in El Jadida; The University of Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah in Fez; and The University of Ibn Zohr in Agadir. However, the Hassan II University in Casablanca was the only one with two faculty members participating in the study.

It seems essential to examine and assess the past and present situations and gain insights regarding the starting point today in order to make informed decisions as to how and where to go moving forward. Given the emergence of the resilience and well-being curricula in many parts of the world,

it seems important to shed light on the topic in Morocco, especially given the current Covid-19 context, calling for reflections on education and potential paradigm shifts. As a starting point, the researchers had the opportunity to arrange interviews with the senior officials in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education since the decisions, policies, reforms, approvals to all university programs and curricula take place there. The semi-structured interview process had started with the minister of Higher Education in Morocco, Dr. Driss Ouaouicha. The other three experts interviewed were Dr. Mohamed Tahiri, the Director of Higher Education and Pedagogical Innovation at the ministry; Dr. Anas Bennani, the Director of International Cooperation and Partnerships and Dr. Fouad Chafiqui, the Director of Curricula Development in charge of primary, secondary and high school education. The expert interview method is effective and relevant given the aim of the study; according to Libakova & Sertakova (2015):

> *When authoritative opinions and serious professional estimations relating to the research are taken from people whose competence is not questioned due to the fact that respondents in the expert interviews are highly qualified in the investigated area, it eliminates the need for additional verification procedures. Application of the expert interviews gives access to the information that gives an opportunity to create a holistic view of the significance* (p.117).

All interviews started with a general question: "please describe how the ministry would define resilience education". Additional questions were: 'what were the ministry's practices regarding resilience education in the past? What about today? And in the future?'; 'what are the ministry's motivations to include 'life skill' curricula in the future of Moroccan universities'; 'what is the percentage of universities teaching resilience or a similar course?'. A last question included in both interviews and surveys addressed their personal reflections on the covid-19 pandemic and resilience skills. Two of the interviews were conducted face to face, and lasted between 45-60 minutes; while the two others experts preferred to respond to the questions after further fact-checking, and send in their comprehensive answers via e-mail. On the other hand, the survey questions were mostly closed-ended, and aimed at exploring the pedagogical practices of the universities when it comes to resilience education or similar courses (wellness, well-being etc.).

III. RESULTS

This section presents and discusses the findings following a chronological order: past, present and future. It is an attempt to not only provide a global understanding regarding resilience education in Moroccan higher education in the past, but also learn about the current situation, and future projects from key stakeholders.

1. The past and present

In Morocco, according to all four experts, resilience education has never been part of the university curricula or culture. According to the Ministry, resilience is considered part of the 'life skills' category of competencies; a notion that has been officially inexistent up until the educational reform issued in 2019, but not yet implemented. It is noteworthy to mention that both the Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Ouaouicha, and the Director of Pedagogical Innovation at the Ministry, Dr. Tahiri drew attention to the fact that the past and current absence of life skills in the Moroccan university does not exclude its potential unofficial existence in some public or private schools and universities. For the ministry and in its books, none of the approved academic programs include a resilience/well-being or a life skills course in broader terms.

Since the senior officials were referring to resilience and well-being education as life skills using the current ministry's jargon, when asked about the definition of life skills, the answer given by the Director of Pedagogical Innovation, Dr. Tahiri, was the following: "skills aimed at developing an optimal self-knowledge and awareness, discovering techniques of auto-motivation, as well as acquiring relationship skills". The following components were listed:
Self-knowledge;

- Collaborative work/teamwork;
- Stress management;
- Problem solving, conflict prevention and management;

- Initiative and creativity;

- Leadership;

- Critical thinking; and

- Psychological resilience.

They emphasized the importance of psychological resilience as one of the key life skills.

In accordance with the ministry's statements, the surveys conducted with nine academics in eight public universities confirmed the assessment of past and present existence and spread of resilience education in Morocco. In fact, the survey findings revealed that resilience skills have never been included in the students' curricula. However, there was one exception which confirms the ministry's note that some universities might include it in an unofficial manner. In fact, out of the eight public universities, the University of Fez was the only one to report offering a course entitled "early skills", taught to undergraduate students for the past 7-9 years and targeting similar components as a resilience education course. We can conclude that the findings regarding the past and present situation show that resilience/life skills are not officially present in the Moroccan university curricula yet.

2. The present and future

The Covid-19 context and resilience education

At this critical time, one can also argue that the fallouts of the pandemic represent an opportunity for intellectuals and leaders in the education sector to reflect on future needs and opportunities for innovation. This section presents the academics' reflections on the subject matter.

> P1 (Mohammed V University- Rabat)**:** *there is a close relationship between the Covid-19 crisis and resilience in the educational context. Because of the pandemic, many students had to face a lot of challenges related to online learning. Some of them managed to adapt to the situation because they already have the strategies and the skills to cope with difficult situations, problems or just change. However, many others who lack resilience, felt helpless and could not adjust to this compressive change. So, in a way, resilience is a competence that students and all people need to be equipped*

with to face daily challenges, failures, and moments of crisis. Resilience is life-changing.

In fact, most professors and senior officials at the Ministry emphasized the critical repercussions and the challenges faced since the beginning of the pandemic, and how it reinforced the necessity to develop one's resilience.

> P2 (Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University- Fez): *The Covid-19 crisis proved the necessity to develop the ability to be more resilient. Our societies need to do so in order to prevent potential future crises, cope with it and overcome it.*

> P3 (Cadi Ayad University- Marrakech): *Resilience is a psychological competency needed to face critical situations such as Covid-19.*

> P4 (Hassan II University- Casablanca): *Individuals who have had the opportunity to develop their resilience have, in my opinion, been able to better cope, face the challenges and minimize the negative effects of the pandemic.*

> P5 (Ibn Tofail University- Kenitra): *Physical health and the capability to face the pandemic require mental resilience. Developing the latter can allow better planning and allocation of mental resources as well as guide interventions for individuals and communities in order to overcome the harsh consequences of the pandemic on mental health.*

> P6 (Moulay Ismail University): *Resilience education can play a very important role in the students' confidence. It can increase their motivation to learn and study. Incorporating a module or a course on resilience skills will undoubtedly contribute to developing the students' personality, as well as their well-being and academic success.*

> P7 (The Director of Pedagogical Innovation- Ministry of Higher Education): *The complexity of today's world as a result of globalization, rapid technological changes and the importance of interculturality require a resilient character in order to be able to*

adapt. This is equally valid for individuals; as for institutions and even for countries. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for this resilience both at the level of universities and their institutions and at the level of teachers and students. It was necessary to abandon a face-to-face model of teaching in order to adopt a new model of distance education. At the level of the Ministry, it was necessary to switch to working from home to ensure continuity of service without transition.

The main theme from the respondents' answers to the open-ended question seems to be the need to be better prepared to face potential crises in the future, and the uncertain consequences of the rapidly changing world we live in. Even though all of them believed in the necessity to develop the students' resilience, two professors expressed their reluctance towards teaching it or including it as course:

> P8 (Chouaib Doukkali University- El Jadida): *There is an urgent need for this kind of courses and modules in a critical period like Covid-19, but I am wondering what the students will think about it and whether they will take it seriously and attend such classes.*

> P9 (Ibn Zohr University- Agadir): *It is true that the pandemic has impacted all aspects of social life, but I think that the student should develop their own strategies.*

The conversation about resilience and life skills in general has started in Morocco, and both the academics and the ministry officials interviewed believe in investing in training the youth to become more resilient.

The soft skills reform

In 2019, the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education issued a reform targeting undergraduate students in public universities. Entitled the 'Bachelor's Program' reform, it entails the shift from a three-year undergraduate degree to a four- year bachelor program instead. Also referred to as the 'Soft Skills' reform, the new ministerial guidelines include, for the very first time in Morocco, eight 'Soft Skill' modules. Indeed, the ministry officials explained that the soft skill modules would be planned as follow, including two modules per year:

Year 1= Study skills -> Year 2= Life skills -> Year 3= Civic skills ->Year 4= Professional skills.

Based on the data collected, the common existing modules in the 'soft skill category' so far are study skills, including public speaking, note-taking, and time-management. As stated above, life skills are relatively non-existent and unfamiliar nowadays, but they represent an important component of the Ministry's vision for higher education in the upcoming years.

The Ministry's motivations

When asked about the rationale behind the soft skill reform, and the recent conversation about these "new skills" in Morocco, the four experts agreed that the main reason would be to boost employability. In effect, the ministry argues that life skills have become an important component of any university curricula aiming to better prepare its students to the workplace. Ultimately, including these modules in the university curricula for the first time aims at developing the graduates' ability to adapt to the demands of the workplace and to the challenges of collaborative work with higher social intelligence. Dr. Tahiri argues that beyond academic knowledge and competencies, today's employers require graduates to be effective communicators as well, with the ability to harmoniously adapt to a team, to be creative and critical thinkers. The desired outcome, according to him, is to have more flourishing graduates with a massive ability to adapt to increasingly complex realities. In many cases, these competencies matter more than technical knowledge and know-how in choosing who to hire for a job (Khaouja et., al, 2019). In their article, building a soft skill taxonomy from job openings, Khaouja, Mezzour, Carley, and Kassou (2019) provide a definition of soft skills, and how it is a requirement for employment nowadays:

> The term 'soft skills' refers to a broad set of skills, behaviors, attitudes and personal qualities that allow people to adapt effectively to their environment, to work well with others, to perform well, and to achieve their goals. A growing evidence base shows that the value of soft skills rivals that of hard skills in terms of

predicting employment and earnings, among other outcomes (Balcar 2014; Kautz et al. 2014). Unfortunately, a shortage of such skills has been noted by many employers around the world, who report that candidates lack the soft skills needed to fill the available positions (Hurrell 2016; Manpower 2017). (Khaouja, Mezzour, Carley, & Kassou, 2019, p.42)

One of the many consequences of the pandemic is that the Soft Skill reform was put on hold, as other pressing issues had to be prioritized. As of today, soft skill courses and life skills more specifically have not officially been introduced yet. According to the ministry officials, it is projected that the academic year 2021-2022 may be the year the reform is implemented.

IV. DISCUSSION

There are eleven public universities in Morocco with open access to high school graduates, and seven out of the eight universities included in the survey reported having never taught a resilience/ life-skill course, which confirms the Ministry of Education' inputs. Nevertheless, in light of the uncertainty and chronic anxiety induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, the closed-ended question at the end showed that the overwhelming majority holds positive attitudes towards the idea of including such courses in the future, and believe it can be a powerful prevention measure to enable students to better cope with future challenges.

A minority of respondents (15.38%), however, stated that resilience should be part of the extracurricular activities offered to students and not a course taught in classrooms and amphitheaters. Creating a culture around resilience and well-being requires a paradigm and operational shift in the entire school/university eco-system, including the extracurricular activities, the curriculum, the students, the faculty, staff and management. Dr. Chafiqui, the Director of Curricula Development in charge of primary, secondary and high school education, highlighted this point during the expert-interview, arguing that students spend most of their time in classrooms and amphitheaters, so it would reach more students -and perhaps on a deeper level- to teach resilience skills in classrooms. Such courses require both theory and practice, and this is where a collaboration between curricula

developers, faculty and student life administrators would come in handy. For instance, studying the scientific-based benefits of meditation, balanced nutrition and physical exercise is very important to raise awareness. However, awareness has never been enough, even if it is the necessary starting point without which no changes or transformation could occur. Burch (as cited in Peel and Nolan, 2015) mentions that the starting point in his learning model is for one's awareness to move from 'unconscious incompetence' to 'conscious incompetence'. In the same vein, Peel and Nolan (2015) state that "at the unconscious incompetence stage, the individual does not understand or know how to do something, and does not necessarily recognize the deficit. Conscious incompetence is when the learner does not understand or know how to do something, but now he or she recognizes the deficit" (p. 536). These two steps could easily be covered in the classroom with the relevant literature and class discussions. Then, the extracurricular would come into play during later stages involving the practice and implementation to allow moving from 'conscious incompetence' to 'conscious incompetence' and optimally to 'unconscious competence'. Conscious competence is "when the individual understands or knows how to do something; however, demonstrating the knowledge or skill requires concentration. At the level of unconscious competence, the individual has had so much practice with the skill that it requires little thought" (Peel & Nolan, 2015, p.537). This transformation will likely be a lengthy process with significant resistance and challenges as it calls for shifts in the way education has been viewed for a very long time in Morocco. Moreover, considering that resilience skills involve psycho-emotional and social skills requiring the individual a great deal of inner-work, it will likely be a non-linear process involving the constant cultivation of a new consciousness around holistic education.

IV. CONCLUSION

Two main conclusions emerged from the present study. First and foremost, the experts' interviews and the surveys revealed that resilience/life-skill education has been officially inexistent in University curricula in Moroccan public universities so far. However, and for the first time in Morocco, the decision to officially include courses aiming to develop students' resilience has

been planned for the near future (2021-2022) as part of the Soft-Skills Bachelor educational reform issued in 2019.Second, almost all the interviewed government officials and academics involved in the study articulated the role of the Covid-19 pandemic in putting prevention in the front seat, and the immense benefits students would gain from resilience-development modules.

If this field is considered to be two-decade old in the west, resilience education is still an embryonic domain of scientific inquiry and improvement in Morocco. Nonetheless, it seems to be a promising road with a vision coming from policy-makers and supported by many faculty members. "These skills are the future", said the Moroccan Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Ouaouicha.

Future research would be needed to evaluate the implementation of the new life skills modules, and explore its impact on various variables in the short, mid and long term.

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