



APPLYING THE QUALITY MATTERS (QM)TM RUBRIC TO ANALYZE THE QUALITY OF ENT PLATFORM COURSES

Rachid Elaasriⁱ,
Abdelmajid Bouziane
Université Hassan II de Casablanca,
Morocco

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the online courses on ENT (l'Espace Numérique de Travail) (digital working space) comply with the Quality Matters (QM) rubrics. The study used the QM standards, an internationally recognized, research based, and peer-review process designed to certify the quality of online and hybrid courses. For an online course to qualify as a QM course, it must contain specific components in its overall design. The results revealed that none of the seven ENT platform online courses passed the Quality Matters review. However, four courses scored fairly good overall in terms of total points. The study findings suggest that while the quality of the course-based standards was fairly high, the course design quality was low.

Keywords: ENT, online education, course design course quality, quality matters standards

1. Introduction

Not long ago, Morocco in unprecedented move has actively engaged in the development of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), a sector that has become a priority in the growth of the national economy. An initiative inspired and boosted from the highest authority in the country, His Majesty the King. In a message to participants of the national symposium: Morocco in the global society of information and knowledge, the king confirmed the national commitment to promote the use of ICT within the sectors of economy, industrialization, education and job creation (2001). Accordingly, in 2013, the project eMorocco was launched with the objectives of upscaling Morocco as a regionally technological hub and making ICT a vector of Human Development, a source of productivity for other developmental sectors, and a key pillar of the Moroccan economy. As a result of this development,

ⁱ Correspondence: email rachidelaasri@gmail.com, abdelmajid.bouziane@univh2m.ma

several initiatives have emerged, aimed mainly at generalizing their use in education (GENIE programs for the middle & high school cycles in March 2005, Morocco Wide Area Network (MARWAN) was launched in 1997 and activated in 2002, The Moroccan Virtual Campus (MVC) which was launched in 2002, Computer Assisted Teacher Training (CATP) was implemented in 1999 and E-SUP for the graduate cycle) and facilitating the ICT equipment of the various educational actors.

Nafid@, INJAZ and ENT are other concrete fruits of this growth. In 2009, the emergency program was initiated to emphasize the need to put the learner the center of any teaching-learning act; focus on students acquired competencies; and recommend the gradual integration of information technology and Communication in education. Driven by this dynamic, e-Learning projects have been multiplied both at the level of universities and training centers and at the level of public administrations and private organizations. In order to analyze the trends, practices and expectations of these projects, a national study was conducted, with the potential goal to serve as a basis for the implementation of the first barometer of e-Learning in Morocco. The purpose of this barometer would be to establish indicators, quantitative and qualitative, for decision-makers, training managers and e-Learning actors in Morocco (2012). The first barometer of e-Learning in Morocco therefore provided a detailed overview of e-Learning practices in private companies and public institutions. It basically highlighted the rate of e-learning use, the adopted training methods and the content and areas of preference. It can be assumed that in the rush for integrating ICTs in education and the quest for high enrollment rates, many projects and initiatives within the context of e-learning or blended education in Morocco gave little to no concern to the quality of online delivery. Such concern today is central to academic discussions of online learning effectiveness (Lowenthal & Hodges, 2015). Ensuring desirable success of online courses is a continuous process that requires quality norms to guide course design, monitor development, and sustain delivery of online courses.

2. Measuring Online Course Quality

To regulate e-learning practices and to ensure best practices in course designing and course delivery, a good number of quality assurance programs for online courses have been developed. These are some of the mostly used quality tools in the U.S.

- California State University Chico developed the Rubric for Online Instruction (see: http://www.csuchico.edu/roi/the_rubric.shtml);
- iNACOL developed multiple standards and rubrics to measure quality course design, instruction, and programs (see: http://www.inacol.org/resources/resourcesearch/?resource_topics=16);
- Online Learning Consortium (previously, Sloan-C) developed the five pillars of quality framework for quality online course design (see: <http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/about/quality-framework-five-pillars/>); and,

- Quality Matters (QM) developed a faculty-centered, peer review process focused on eight standards to ensure quality course design (see: <https://www.qualitymatters.org>).

Quality Matters standards have been one of the most widely used and adopted guidelines in maintaining and assuring of quality online courses; QM rubric has been also recognized as diagnostic tool that can be used to monitor and analyze information for online courses (Florence Martin, Abdou Ndoeye, and Patricia Wilkins (2016), Van Harmelen & Hoffman, 2012). It is worth noting that Quality Matters began under a Department of Education Fund for Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) grant. QM is now an international organization set up to improve the quality of online courses for K-12, Higher Education, and Professional Education levels (qualitymatters.org). QM current has more than 600 institutional subscribers and 22,000 faculty and staff members in 46 states. QM provides guidance for quality control of online instruction via three main mechanisms. (Ibid). In junction with providing the QM Rubric Workbook for Higher Education and various professional development opportunities on-site, and on-line, QM provides for a peer review process whereby trained QM peer reviewers provide constructive and specific comments for course strengths and areas of improvement. (Maryland Online, 2013).

The QM Rubric has eight standards:

- 1) course overview and introduction;
- 2) learning objectives;
- 3) assessment and measurement;
- 4) instructional materials;
- 5) learner interaction and engagement;
- 6) course technology;
- 7) learner support and
- 8) accessibility (Maryland Online Inc., 2011).

Note: A revised set of the standards was released in August 2014.) The rubric has three categories of standards: Essential (3 points), Very Important (2 points), and important (1 points), (Jennifer Kreie & Susan Bussmann, 2015).

Each of these general standards has a number of related and more specific sub-standards that give detailed information on how and what should be done to meet the main standard. In the literature about online course design, the QM) Program focuses on the concept of “alignment” for General Standards 2-6, which must work together to facilitate student achievement of desired learning outcomes (Dexter R. Woods Jr., 2014).

3. E-learning in higher education in Morocco

The integration of e-learning in higher education in Morocco begins to grow due to technological development in the field of educational technology and in part to respond the need and to adapt the training provided by universities to new teaching and professional requirements. Several projects are financed and implemented to strengthen

the technological equipment, develop digital content and improve administrative and educational management in the university. To name but a few; e-Sup (2006) is meant to provide professors, students and researchers with modern and scalable means to improve their work and help them meet the level of international standards; Bring a dynamic trend to higher education and develop applied research and technology and use modern information technology to improve the educational system.

In 2004, Ibn Zuhr University in Agadir, with the aim of creating a space for dialogue, exchange and sharing of media and instructional practices in e-Learning, launched The Moroccan Virtual Campus (CVM). In the same year, Moroccan universities made use of the application for the organization and management of teaching and students (APOGEE). Among the basic objectives of making use of this software are promoting a digital workspace, providing a comprehensive and unique system in the university, allowing better control of the supply of training and facilitating internal communications and with external partners. Actually, these projects are considered as strategic imperatives to improve the quality of education in Morocco.

4. Methodology

The survey was interested in evaluating the quality of online courses on ENT platform. In an effort to provide a picture of the status-quo of online courses in Morocco, we decided to analyze courses from varied disciplines: science, medicine, language teaching, history, economics and management. We then reviewed eight active courses from a course design perspective; the reviews were applied to the courses that are actually open and have larger numbers of subscribers. Courses on the platform that are open but are no updated or have no subscribers are not reviewed.

The eight identified courses were evaluated using the 2014 edition checklist of the Quality Matters Rubric Standards with already assigned score values; that is, 3 points for essential standards, 2 points for very important standards and 1 point for important standards. Abiding by the QM evaluation procedures, a course passes the review with success if all the essential standards are met with an overall score of 85 % and above. The completed checklists were processed on the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the notes taken during the review served as secondary data.

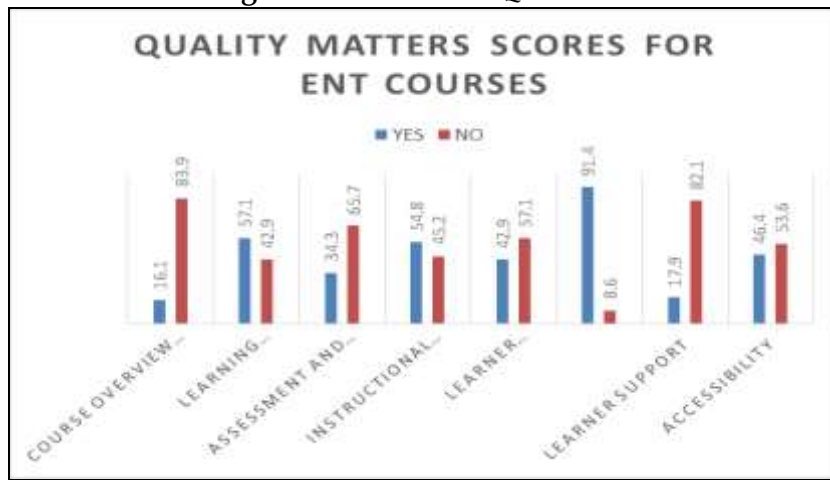
5. Results & Discussion

For an online course to pass the review, it must meet all of the essential standards and get at least a score of 85%. None of the seven ENT platform online courses passed the Quality Matters review (see Table 1). However, four courses scored fairly good overall in terms of total points as shown below in table 1. On the other hand, course one, which basically was very active and had the highest rate of subscribers, scored the lowest.

Table 1: Quality Matters Review Results

| Courses | Percentage | Final decision |
|--------------|------------|----------------|
| Course One | 27% | FAIL |
| Course Two | 46% | FAIL |
| Course Three | 38% | FAIL |
| Course Four | 36% | FAIL |
| Course Five | 44% | FAIL |
| Course Six | 49% | FAIL |
| Course Seven | 60% | FAIL |

Figure 1: All Courses QM Scores



In Figure 1, it is noted that the Course Technology section is rated as the highly scoring standard of all of the components in the seven courses. The second score is allotted to the Objectives section. The instructional Material component is rated third in score. While course technology, instructional materials and learning objectives are the only met standards, accessibility and learner interaction and engagement scored almost the average rate that they can be considered somewhat met standards. The sections that scored low rates and that seem to need more attention are Learner Support, Course Overview and Assessment and Measurement.

Figure 2: The Courses that Succeeded to Meet the QM Standards

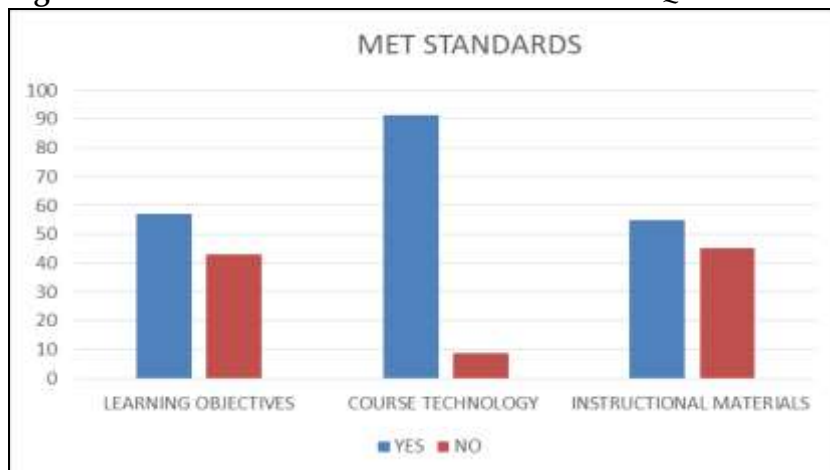


Figure 2 displays the scores achieved by the three met standards where the sixth section, course technology, is rated almost 100%. This rubric includes all the technologies being used to support the course and any other tools used for course content, interaction, or student projects. Nearly 60% was the percentage of Course Objectives as shown in the figure above. The objectives, both at the course and module levels, are expected to be posted from the learner's perspective, summarizing the set of competencies that any successful subscriber to this course will demonstrate by the completion of a given module. The last standard to achieve a passing score is Instructional Materials. 55% of the seven reviewed courses provided materials that are carefully chosen, current, and demonstrate varied perspectives.

Figure 3: The Courses that Failed to Meet the QM Standards

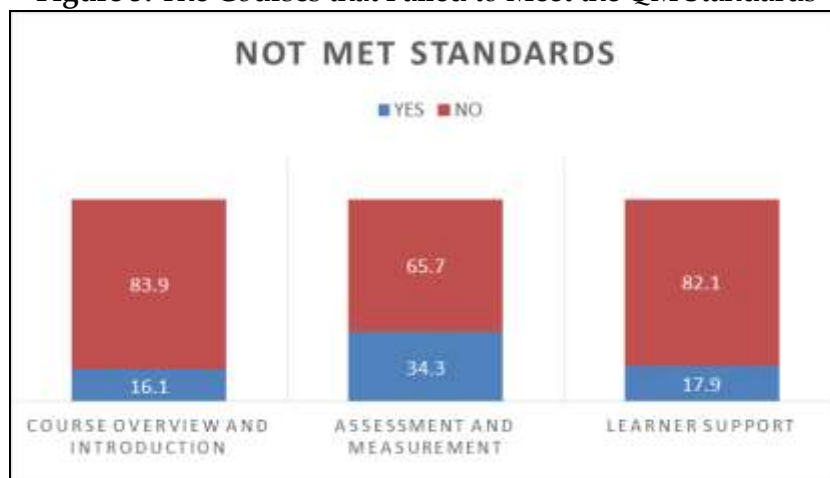
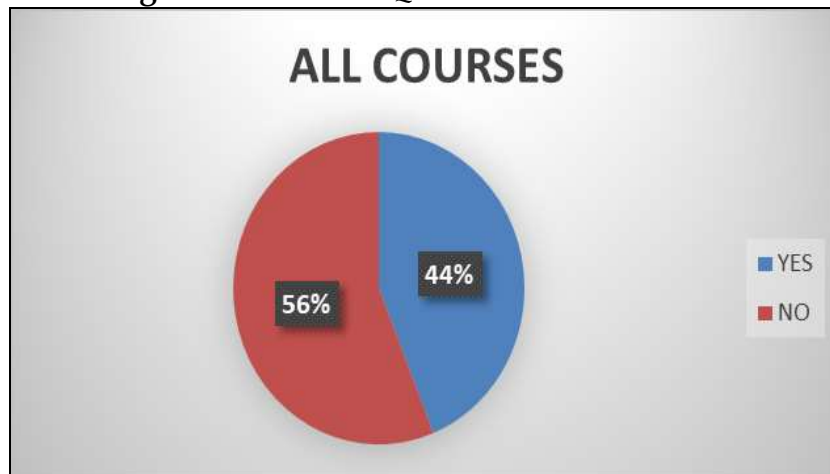


Figure 3 displays the lower rates scored by Learner Support, Course Overview, and Assessment Measurement standards. Almost all the reviewed courses failed to provide guiding information about or links to academic policies and services as well as student support services offered by Hassan II University, and show how students can access them. 16% of all course had a course overview section while more than three quarters of the course designers did not inform the students about how to begin the course, what the course is about, who the instructor is, nor did they provide information on what the student and instructor can expect from each other. 66% is the percentage of the ENT platform courses that did not describe to the students how their work is going to be assessed and how its progress is going to be measured.

Figure 4 shows that more than half of the courses on the ENT platform failed to qualify as a QM course in all general standards. Though all the reviewed courses failed to meet the QM standards and reach the international quality of instruction for online courses, 44% of them succeeded to meet some sub-standards of QM rubrics.

Figure 4: The Total QM Scores of all Courses



When carrying out a study of this type, it is recommended to review the specific standards within the general standards to start off and effective improvement of your course design and teaching in those areas. Importantly, the fact that all the seven online courses failed to pass the review and meet the general standards does not mean all of them were inadequately designed. As a matter of fact, all the courses on ENT platform met these specific standards:

| |
|---|
| 3.1 The types of assessments selected measure the stated learning objectives and are consistent with the course activities and resources. |
| 4.2 The purpose of instructional materials and how the materials are to be used for learning activities are clearly explained. |
| 4.4 All instructional materials are current. |
| 5.1 The learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives. |
| 6.3 Navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient. |
| 6.3 Navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient. |
| 6.4 Students can readily access the technologies required in the course. |
| 6.5 The course technologies are current. |
| 8.3 The course design facilitates readability and minimizes distractions. |
| 8.4 The course design accommodates the use of assistive technologies. |

At the same time, though, all the reviewed courses failed to meet the following standards:

| |
|--|
| 1.1 Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components. |
| 1.3 Etiquette expectations (sometimes called “netiquette”) for online discussions, email and other forms of communication are stated clearly. |
| 1.5 Course and/or institutional policies with which the student is expected to comply are clearly stated, or a link to current policies is provided. |
| 1.6 Minimum technical skills expected of the student are clearly stated. |
| 1.8 Students are asked to introduce themselves to the class. |
| 3.2 The course grading policy is stated clearly. |
| 3.3 Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of students’ work and participation and are tied to the course grading policy. |

4.3 All resources and materials used in the course are appropriately cited.

7.3 Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's academic support services and resources can help students succeed in the course and how students can access the services.

With regard to the general standards ENT courses failed to meet, we have the first section, *Course Overview and Introduction*, where the instructor is supposed to make clear to the course subscribers how to get started and where to find various course components; provide students with adequate information of what to do first; and inform them about institutional policies with which the student is expected to comply with. The reviewed courses could easily be updated with a "Start Here" section (Kreie & Bussmann, 2015) whereby the instructor would attach a course description providing the student with the general course overview, navigational instructions for the course, course schedule, type of delivery, modes of communication, types of activities, and how learning will be assessed.

It was quite surprising that none of the seven courses scored well on Standard 3 which focuses on assessment and measurement. Learning assessment procedures are integral to the learning process and are devised to measure students' progress in reaching the learning objectives (Amer, 2016). Clarifying the learning objectives and assessment methods is helpful as well for the instructor to design instructional materials that are appropriately aligned. (Sun & de la Rosa, 2015). As this section is important and serves a greater purpose, it would be intolerable not to provide learners the assessment and measurement descriptions. The failure of meeting Standard 3 is more about transparency and clarity of purpose than whether or not the course was designed without a decisive section assessment and grading policy. For instance, the courses are meant to achieve consistent and measurable learning objectives, but within the course design the instructor does not clearly articulate the measurement procedures to the learner.

The third standard which gained the least score was the Learner Support. It focuses on supporting learners who are attending institutions of higher education for university degree. More specifically, it focusses on information about or links to academic policies and services and student support services offered by the university, and how students can access them. Equally, on-campus students know what building they can go to for such services as tutoring, registration, or computer repair, online students need to be made aware of online resources that will offer them similar services (Marlos & Varonis, 2014). The fact that none of the courses performed well on this standard can be attributed either to the reason that these courses are not 100% online in that students have to have a certain number of face-to-face classes where they may have access to such support, or these types of information are not available in digital formats that can be uploaded as links on the platform. It is recommended, though, that many online courses could be simply updated to meet Standard 7; faculty needs to provide digital formats of both university policies and students support services documents that could be hyperlinked on the courses website, therefore, increase their overall score and, in turn, come much closer to passing a QM review.

6. Implications

Regarding all the excitement surrounding the quality of education in Morocco in general and many promising initiatives to improve online courses delivery in particular, we endeavored to investigate the quality of ENT platform online courses to identify whether or not they can meet the international quality standards. To assess the quality of seven online courses offered by Hassan II University, the study used the QM standards, an internationally recognized, research based, and peer-review process designed to certify the quality of online and hybrid courses. While none of the seven reviewed courses passed our informal QM review, some of the ENT assessed courses scored fairly well and, with some minor revisions, four courses would pass the review in higher scores. Such result would safely suggest that ENT online courses have the potential to be high quality online courses. With continuous evaluation, self-implication, technical support and professional training such achievement would be eventually attainable. It is significant to reveal that our findings suggest that while the quality of the course-based standards was fairly high, the course design quality was low. Therefore, future research, focusing course design frameworks is needed to further investigate the quality of online course delivery.

Keeping our results in perspective is imperative. We only investigated seven ENT courses. As such, our results should not be generalizable nor applicable to all the courses offered by the university platform. A larger courses sample and a QM analysis done by multiple reviewers might reveal different results or similar to that at the same time. Too, the use of another quality assessment tool might have revealed that the seven courses may score even better than a QM review. Further, we analyzed courses from varied disciplines: science, medicine, language teaching, history, economics and management. We then reviewed eight active courses from a course design perspective; the reviews were applied to the courses that are actually open and have larger numbers of subscribers. Courses on the platform that are open but are no updated or have no subscribers are intentionally not reviewed. Our review had basically an exploratory and descriptive purpose. We were simply interested in addressing a gap in the literature about the overall quality of online courses offered by Hassan II University. With this in mind, we found that some courses can be QM quality courses with just a technically minor course design revision. Had the instructors have prior knowledge of QM rubrics, which is part of the QM process, the seven courses could have had high chances to pass our review, thus, be considered high quality online courses. Too, not all the courses were designed to offer the same type of learning experience. For example, some ENT courses are treated as supplementary material to face-to-face classes so the instructor may not devote as much rigor as they do for their on-site- courses; having this optional nature, many students would probably not take the online courses with the same seriousness they allot to face-to-face classes. Third, the online teaching in Morocco is still in its early stages, failing to meet up the international quality standards in the domain might look expected and inevitable. The Quality Matters rubric might focus too

much on the basics of a traditional course such clear learning objectives, grading policy, learn support ... etc. (Hodges2, September – 2015), the thing that online course designers might consider secondary.

7. Conclusion

While the results from this inquiry can by no means be generalized to all Hassan II online courses, they can contribute to the existing literature about the current state of online education in Morocco. The results can then serve to deepen the intellectual discussions about the issue. Questions like: where can we position ourselves in comparison with leading countries in e-learning? What are the necessary requirements needed to offer high quality online education? What is missing in our online teaching and where do they fall short? Finding scientific explanations to questions similar to these is a prerequisite endeavor for the stakeholders to improve online teaching and learning. Course designers may use this data to commend best practices on online course design; administrators may use these results to schedule pertinent online professional training projects; and instructors may resort to the tools and findings of this study in their teaching to design high quality online courses.

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