

The Challenges of Implementation of Digital Platforms as a Medium of Teaching and Learning Process in the Times of Covid-19 Pandemic: Case of Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Mozambique Island, 2021

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to find out challenges faced by the teachers and students in using digital platforms as a means of teaching and learning process, since it was a new phenomenon at the Faculty under study. The study employed pragmatic paradigm and case study strategies,. Moreover, it used triangulation for data analysis, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approach. For data collection, the research used questionnaire and semi-structured interview and it had 92 participants,. Therefore, the results show that teachers and students face challenges such as lack of compatible devices, lack of airtime for interne and effective internet signal, lack of mastery of the DLP etc. and among the suggestions that were given is that the managers should train teachers and students in the digital learning platform and equip the computer room with enough computers and strong internet signal.

KEYWORDS

Challenges, students and teachers, digital learning platform

1. Introduction

It is commonly believed that the mode of study at majority of universities in Mozambique is presential. This mode consists of teachers and students presence in a classroom, where teaching and learning process occurs. This fact can be found in many universities' regulations as a bond that students make with the teaching establishment. So, the idea behind the bond is that students have rights to have their teachers in the classroom in due time (RCD, 2011). Additionally, majority of schools and universities, in particular the ones found in the districts, where there are no sufficient conditions for learning and teaching, moreover teachers and students rarely master ICT, find presential mode as the most viable option. However, with the disrupt of Covid-19 pandemic in Mozambique, where the first case was confirmed in 22 March 2020 (Momade, 2021 as cited in Vio & Mudender, 2020), a lot of universities, in particular, Lúrio university-Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Mozambique Island, implemented the blended learning to respond positively to the Covid-19 turbulence in the education sector. Therefore, being the use of digital learning platform a new phenomenon in teaching and learning process at the Faculty under study, the research intends to find out the challenges faced by the teachers and students in using such platforms so that suitable means may be proposed for effectiveness of teaching and learning process in times of Covid-19. The research results will be beneficial to awaken the faculty's directors and managers to take into account the points that will be listed and seek to position themselves in order to create appropriate strategies in order to provide efficiency and effectiveness in the use of Digital Learning Platforms and in turn promote a quality of teaching and learning process as long as Covid-19 pandemic prevails.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Concept of the term *challenge*

According to Walter (2008), the term *challenge* depicts a situation that need a great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and which therefore tests a person's ability.

Therefore, taking into account the concept, it can be concluded that a *challenge* is a difficult, complicate situation, circumstance or blockage that needs an effective strategy to overcome.

1.2. The term Implementation

Woodford & Jackson (2003) state that implantation can be seen as an act of put a plan or idea into practice. In the same line of though, Summers (1983) conceptualize implementation as an act of doing or starting something that has been panned.

Thus, the sense is that the implementation is the act of establishing, inaugurating or starting something. Thus, the term implementation seeks to address the meaning of ensuring the realization of something, such as a plan, a task, a strategy, etc.

1.3. What is Digital Learning Platform?

According to Project (2013 as cited in FAO, 2011), Digital Learning Platform is a set of interactive online services that provide learners with access to information, tools and resources to support educational delivery and management through the Internet.

Thus, it can be stated that the Digital Learning Platform is a tool that presents students with a virtual learning environment, aim of replacing or complementing the physical environment. The learning experience, however, can be quite different from the traditional one. Digital Learning Platform offers many interactive features that make digital learning more productive and collaborative.

1.4. Blended Learning- main ideas.

According to Avazmatova (2021), blended learning consists of a combination of traditional face-to-face learning with online learning. In the same line of thought, Lalima, & Lata Dangwal (2017) view blended learning as teaching and learning process that incorporates both face to face teaching and teaching supported by ICT.

Thus blended learning means a pedagogical practice that considers the possibilities of using traditional education and digital culture, whether at workplace, at home or in other spaces, at any time.

1.5. Teaching and learning Process

Munna and Kalam (2021) state that teaching and learning process consists of transmitting or exchanging of knowledge from teachers to students and vice- verse in a suitable setting. Additionally, teaching and learning process is based on the combination of various elements within the process, where the teacher establishes the learning objectives, designs and develops teaching resources and implements the teaching and learning strategy for enhancement of students' skills.

Taking into consideration the idea behind the teaching and learning process, it can also be stated that teaching and learning process starts with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes through study, teaching or experience. However, it is believed that the construction of knowledge in the classroom must be built gradually, adapting to each stage of the student's development

1.6. Covid-19 pandemic- overview

According to Momade (2021 as cited in Hopkins, 2020) coronaviruses (CoVs) is a family of RNA viruses that typically cause mild respiratory disease in humans. In this light, CMScript (2020) discloses that coronaviruses are a huge family of viruses that are common in many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats, causing illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as bronchitis, pneumonia and respiratory and multi-organ failure.

Today, the disease has expanded globally and in Mozambique, the first case was confirmed in 22 March 2020 (Vio & Mudender, 2020). Therefore, to contain the spread of the Virus, the WHO recommended preventive measures which should be obeyed. Gennaro, et al. (2020), among the preventive measures established by WHO, the most crucial for this research are: (1) avoiding contact with infected people, and (2) maintain an appropriate distance from people- social distancing. Thus, considering the described preventive measures, it can be concluded that in small classroom of about 30 students without a good ventilation system, it will be very difficult to contain contamination. Thus, it let us believe that this issue should be cause of implementing blended learning to reduce contamination risks.

1.7. The Challenges faced by Teachers and Students in Using Digital Learning Platform

Habibu, et al. (2012) states that some challenges faced by teachers and students in using DPL as are:

- **Lack of sufficient training-** Teachers and students face problems in digital learning Platform for not having enough training opportunities.
- **Lacks of knowledge-** teachers have superficial knowledge of the ICT consequently they face problems in operating the DLP effectively.
- **Teachers' reluctance to new technology-** teachers and students do not make effort to learn how to use ICT, even with opportunities they just ignore.
- **Lacks of learning equipment tools and resources-** most of the teaching establishments have computers but they are very few to support all the teachers and students.

2. Methodology

This research opted for pragmatic paradigm and case study strategies, which allowed an in-depth understanding of the situation under study. Moreover, it employed triangulation for data analysis, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approach (Dawson, 2002). This approach was useful not only for the effective usage of the data collections instruments, but also for researcher's personal

reflection based on literary form. To materialize the study, two instruments were used, namely questionnaire and semi-structured interview.

2.1. Participants and sampling technique

The study had 102 participants of which 7 were multi-disciplinary teachers and 95 were students from year 1-4. The teachers were interviewed, whereas the students were administered questionnaire. The research employed *chance sampling technique*, so every participant was apt to provide their insight to the research under study.

2.2. Procedure

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences. The data collection process lasted for three weeks. Therefore, teachers were interviewed in the first week, and the two last weeks, the questionnaires were administered to students. Thus, the questionnaire was given to students in the second week and collected in the third week to give them time to respond accurately.

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

For the data analysis, the research used triangulation. Turner and Turner, (1970 as cited in Altrichter *et al.* 1996) state that triangulation helps to achieve detailed picture of the situation. Therefore, content analysis was employed for data from interview and statistical analysis for the data from questionnaires, which were presented with tables and provided its description.

3. Data presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion

This section presents analyses and interprets the data from the interview and questionnaire. Thus, for the research ethical issues, the participants were considered anonymous and they were codified in Tr – teachers and St- students.

3.1. Data from teacher's interview

3.1.1. Level of Interest in using digital learning platform as means of learning and teaching process

The purpose of this section was to assess teachers' interests in using digital learning platform as means of learning and teaching process. Thus, find their responses below:

Tr1 and T2, said that: "*I am very interested in using the digital learning platform*"

Moreover, Tr 3 T4, T6 and T7 said that: "*I am very interested in using the digital learning platform to meet the objectives of my lesson, not only that but also with the disrupt of Covid-19, using DLP is the best method*"

However, T5 declared that: *“My interest is medium, it does not motivate me.”*

Scrutinizing the respondents' answer, it can be concluded that the teachers' level of interest in using DPL is major.

3.1.2. The challenges faced by the teachers in using digital platform as means of learning and teaching process.

This section intended to identify challenges faced by the teachers in using digital platform as means of learning and teaching process, thus the responses were the following:

T1 and T2 said that: *“we face various challenges, for example lack of compatible devices, lack of airtime for interne and effective internet signal to make use of the platforms activities ”*

T3 and T4 stated that: *“ Lack of internet with strong signal, insufficient learning equipment tools and resources (computer and cellphones),*

The same way T5 said that: *“That lack of strong internet signal and financial problems to buy internet is the only challenges”*

Also T6 said that: *“I face the following challenges: internet oscillation, lack of mastery of the DLP and reduced number of participation on VLE ”*

Finally, T7 said that : *“ Lack of learning equipment tools and resources, weak internet signal and the mastery of the platform“*

Scrutinizing the responses, it can be declared that challenges faced by the teachers and students in using DPL are lack of compatible devices, lack of airtime for interne and effective internet signal to make use of the platforms insufficient learning equipment tools, financial problems to buy internet, lack of mastery of the DLP and reduced number of participation on VLE.

3.1.3. The best method for effectiveness in using digital platform and for effectiveness of teaching and learning process in the times of Covid-19

Here teachers were asked to suggest what should be done to effectiveness in using digital platform and for effectiveness of teaching and learning process in the times of Covid-19. So, find the answers below:

T1, T2, T4 and T6 said that: *“Training in using the digital learning platform ”*

For T3 said that: *“ I think, if there is a possibility, the telecommunication companies should support teachers and students with airtime monthly”*

T5 and T7 said: “It should be better to equip the farm room with computers and strong internet signal, and sensitize students to learn how to operate the DLP.

The suggestions provided for effectiveness in using digital platform can be found the teachers and students training in the digital learning platform, support teachers and students with airtime monthly to buy internet, equip the farm room with computers and strong internet signal and sensitize students to learn how to operate the DLP.

3.2. Data from students’ questionnaire

3.2.1. Level of interest in using digital learning platform as means of learning and teaching process efficiently and effectively

This section was mainly to assess the student’s interest in using digital learning platform as means of learning and teaching process efficiently and effectively. The majority of students have clearly stated that their interested in learning how to use the platform. Look at the following table:

Table: level of interest

Ord.	Description	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
01	higher interest	60	62.3%
02	Medium interest	35	36.8%
03	Minor interest	0.0	0.0%
Total		95	100%

Therefore, the table clearly shows that of all 95 students corresponding to 100%, the outcomes haven unveiled that 60 students ,corresponding 62.3%, show that they have a higher interest in using digital learning platform as means of learning and teaching process efficiently and effectively. Whereas 35 students corresponding 36.8% showed average interest. This is because they are not motivated to use the digital learning platform.

However, the analysis of the outcome let it clear that the majority of students are interest in operating the DLP. This fact is also happening to teachers (for more details, confirm on page 6).

3.2.2. The challenges faced by the students in using digital platform as means of learning and teaching process

This section aimed at identifies the challenges faced by the students in using digital platform as means of learning and teaching process. Therefore, the answers from the students are clearly presented in the table as follows below:

Table: challenges

Ord.	Description	Number respondents	Percentage (%)
01	Lack of training	20	21.1%
02	Internet problems	75	78.9 %
03	Lack of resources	0.0	0.0%
Total		95	100%

Analyzing the table, it can be concluded that 20 students, which corresponds to 21.1%, disclosed lack of training as the challenges faced by them, and 75 students, corresponding to 78.9 %, disclosed internet problems. However, none of them looked at lack of resources, for example dive to access the platform as a challenge.

Thus, if the teachers interview is taken into account, it can be seen that their answers converge with these of students. Therefore, there is strong claim for lack of internet and training to master the digital learning platform.

3.2.3. The best method for effectiveness in using digital platform and for effectiveness of teaching and learning process in the times of Covid-19

The purpose of this section was to provide the suggestions for effectiveness in using digital platform and for effectiveness of teaching and learning process in the times of Covid-19. Through the answers of the questionnaire, was generated the results in the table below:

Table: students' suggestion for effective using of digital

Ord.	Description	Number respondents	Percentage (%)
01	Help Students with computers and Internet	10	10,53%
02	Training for students	50	52.63%
03	Equip the computer room	35	36.84%
Total		95	100%

Thus, the outcomes in the table have clearly stated that of 95 students, composing the total number of the students, 10 students, corresponding to 10,53% suggested that the Faculty should help the poor students with computers and cellphones to access the digital Learning Platform. However, 50 students, corresponding to 52.63%, suggested training for students in using the DLP whereas 35 students, corresponding to 36.84, suggested that the Faculty should equip the computer room with sufficient computers and strong internet signal.

Thus, the teachers' outcomes also show almost the similar results the majority claim for internet and training, supports in resources and equip sufficiently with computer farmer room. Notwithstanding, the results also have shown that the majority of students have resources to access the platform, however the challenges is the mastery of the platform and internet. .

4. Discussion

The results clearly show that teachers and the majority of students have strong interest in using digital learning platform as means of learning and teaching. However, it has been clearly stated that they face some challenges such as lack of compatible devices, lack of airtime for interne and strong internet signal, insufficient learning equipment tools, lack of mastery of the DLP and reduced number of participation on VLE. (See page 7-8)

Thus, if the challenges are careful analysed, they make sense and they sound dependents. Thus, the lack of compatible devices and the lack of airtime inhibit students to access the platform. On the other hand, students may have access to devices but if there are few computers at the faculty, only small number may have opportunity to use. Even, if teachers and students had access to devices and strong internet signal but without the appropriate training to master the use of the platform, it would affect the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process negatively. That is why, Habibu, et al. (2012) declares that teachers and students have superficial knowledge of the ICT, consequently face problems in operating the DLP effectively. Therefore, the reduced number of participation on VLE is the result of each of aspects previously mentioned. So, the question that should be raised is how can students participate in VLE without resources, internet and mastery of the platform? Unanimously, the answer will be negative.

However, to overcome such challenges, the results reveal that there is need of training teachers and students to use DLP, support teachers and students with airtime monthly to buy internet, equip the farming room with computers and strong internet signal and sensitize students to learn how to operate the DLP. Therefore, the suggestions are effective to solve problems, in case their implemented, in particular to equip the farming room with computers and strong internet signal, may facilitate teachers and students because Habibu, et al. (2012) clearly states that most of the teaching establishments have computers. But the computers are very few to support all the teachers and students. This can also cover the issue related to the help of poor students with computers and cellphones to access the DLP, in case the college does not have condition to do it. So, with farming room equipped and strong internet signal, poor students may have access to DLP normally.

Conclusion and suggestions

The purpose of the study was to find out the challenges faced by the teachers and students in using such platforms. The findings of the study demonstrates that teachers and students have strong feelings in using

the digital platform, however they face challenges such as lack of compatible devices, lack of airtime for internet and effective internet signal to make use of the platforms insufficient learning equipment tools, financial problems to buy internet, lack of mastery of the DLP and reduced number of participation on VLE.

Therefore, through such challenges was suggested that the faculty should train teachers and students in the digital learning platform, support teachers and students with airtime monthly to buy internet, equip the farm room with computers and strong internet signal and sensitize students to learn how to operate the DLP.

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