Challenges University Students face in eLearning as a result of the covid19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 has had adverse effects all over the world, not just health wise, but in agriculture, transport and even education. The partial and total lockdown in many counties across the world has brought many economies to near stagnation. In Kenya, like in many countries the world over, all learning institutions were shut down as a precautionary measure to curb the spread of covid19. eLearning was introduced in most universities to sustain the education sector and ensure that learners go on with their studies in a safe environment. The aim of the current research was to investigate the challenges university students face in eLearning as a result of the covid19 pandemic with a focus of highlighting the hindrances towards adoption of the same within the universities. The study used a qualitative research design. Purposive sampling was used to get students involved in eLearning in five universities across the country. The data collected was analyzed using thematic and narrative analyses. Applied research was carried out during this study so as to highlight the challenges university students face in eLearning around the world and recommend the best practices for adoption of the same in learning institutions.

Key Words: Covid-19, Pandemic, eLearning, challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of life causes emerging challenges to in the world. Fighting in quite a number of places which leads to lack of peace and displacement of populations due to war and conflict, climate change, poverty and disease are some of the issues that world populations grapple with in their day to day lives. Since March 2020 to date, the whole world has been dealing with the abrupt emergence of Corona virus disease, Covid-19. Coronavirus disease ~2019 (COVID-19) is an illness caused by a novel corona virus (https://www.medscape.com/answers/2500114-197401/what-is-covid-19). COVID-19 was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency on March 11, 2020, and later a global pandemic. According to Robinson (2020), a **pandemic** is a disease outbreak that spreads across countries or continents. It affects more people and takes more lives than an epidemic. The declaration by the WHO in March of 2020 brought abrupt changes to many spheres of life all over the world. In the education sector, there came an abrupt closure of institutions of learning in many countries all over the world, Kenya included, in order to curb the spread of Covid-19. After eight months of closure, the Government of Kenya (GoK) began a phased opening of institutions of learning which were required to adopt a blended mode of teaching/learning. This meant that teaching

would be done online as well as face to face. The adoption of online classes brought with it a new mode of delivery in teaching and learning.

In Kenyan universities online learning/teaching was introduced and the government, through the Ministry of Education and software companies came up with several e-learning platforms. Most universities sought to use of a Learning Management System (LMS), a software application that is used to plan, manage, and deliver eLearning content. It is used widely in the eLearning industry and acts as a distribution vehicle of course content or training resources for different learning and development programs. Platforms such as Kennet, Kusoma, Musomi, Google meet and Zoom have also been embraced by various universities to ensure that learning is not disrupted indefinitely and that it takes place in a safe environment.

This meant that lecturers and students had to adopt to a new way of giving and receiving knowledge.

2.JUSTIFICATION

The spread of COVID-19 has forced millions of students and lecturers to move their communication online. Learning institutions were closed until further notice and forced to observe social distance so as to adapt to a new lifestyle. Many institutions in Kenya were not Prepared for online learning but with predictions such as of (Donovan et al., 2019) that there will be a rapid increase in such courses over the next few years, universities have had to improve their Information Technology (IT) facilities to cater for the same. During the first phase of the lockdown, Kenyan universities embarked on upgrading their internet facilities to enable a shift to online learning within the shortest time. Although technology evolution now allows many things, the shift to e-learning has not gone as smoothly as it would have been expected. Facing the drawbacks of digital learning may be discouraging and frustrating both for lecturers and students. The current study was, therefore, necessitated by the new lifestyle imposed by Covid-19 so as to investigate the challenges university students face in eLearning around the world and recommend the best practices for adoption of the same in learning institutions.

3.METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in December 2020- February 2021. A survey was conducted amongst University students from five different universities in Kenya who were recruited using purposive sampling via Telegram, WhatsApp and email. The study used questionnaires and interviews as data collection instruments from students and lecturers in these institutions of learning. Observations were also conducted at highly populated areas on these campuses, including around lecture halls, around office areas, around the library and recreation areas where wifi facilities could be accessed. These observations were conducted during lecture hours, including in-between lectures and during meal times, when students would most likely be engaged in eLearning and interacting with others to complete tasks posted on the eLearning platforms. A variety of different interactions between other students and technology were recorded, including those texting, chatting or emailing on the phone, those browsing or googling on their tablets/laptops, and those who did not have such devices to get online. The research population consisted of 100 students and 50 members of staff ,10 from each university. Ten students, who did not form part of the sample of 100, were interviewed to corroborate the information in the questionnaires. Also, five lecturers who were not part of the sample of 50, were interviewed to corroborate the information in the questionnaires. The ages of the students ranged from 20 to 27 years and they were from different parts and towns of Kenya while the members of staff in the sample ranged between the ages of 28 to 50.

The study was guided by Users and Gratification Theory (U & GT). According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), U&GT is among the greatest prevalent theories of mass communication. The theory concentrates on the consumer rather than the message; the audience is presumed to be active and goal directed. They choose media to satisfy their own needs, so media is only used depending on how the needs are met and how they gratify these needs. Fawkes and Gregory further added to the (U & GT) by saying that "the level of gratification depends on the level of the need or interest of the individual (Fawkes & Gregory,2001 p120). eLearning users choose to use online platforms depending on the needs they have and how they wish to gratify these needs. This theory was therefore suitable for this study since it was used to explain the findings from the respondents on the challenges university students face in eLearning as a result of the covid19 pandemic with a focus to highlight the hindrances towards adoption of the same within the universities.

4. FINDINGS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Summary of Findings from University Students

The researcher sought to find out the percentages of the respondents who had the basic requirements for effective eLearning. These included smartphones, laptops, desktops, electricity, study room, WIFI. The findings were summarized in table 1 below: **Basic requirements for eLearning**

		Percentage
1.	Students who have smartphones	33%
2.	Those who have laptops	23%
4	Students who have electricity at home	24 %
5.	Students who have a study room at home /room for listening to a lecture	10%
6.	Ability to attend on-line lectures while at home	10%