

# E-Learning Readiness Assessment on Distance Learning: A Case of Tanzanian Higher Education Institutions

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## ABSTRACT

The adoption of e-learning systems has been associated with various challenges to the users, particularly the higher learning institutions (HEI). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the HEIs were subjected to lockdowns that resulted in the stimulation of using e-learning to deliver learning materials and perform assessments. This adoption of e-learning technologies has been associated with several challenges that span from the unfamiliarity of the technologies to the implementation or usage challenges. This study employed a qualitative research method which involved conducting interviews with the lecturers, students, and ICT experts to gain an understanding of the key issues associated with the use of e-learning systems at Tanzanian HEIs. Among others, this study has identified the key distance learning alternatives, the challenges which are associated with the use of such techniques, and the impacts of using e-learning on HEIs.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, E-Learning Systems, HEIs, ICT, Tanzania

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of e-learning systems in developing countries opened up alternative platforms for teaching and learning. Since 1990, most developing countries have started to adopt e-learning technologies in learning institutions particularly in universities and other learning institutions (Naresh & Reddy, 2015). In Tanzania, for instance, the e-learning systems were initially adopted in the year 2000 where the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) were the champions in this movement (Lashayo & Gapar, 2017). It is nearly twenty years now since Higher Learning Institutions (HEI) in Tanzania were started adapting to e-learning systems as co-learning platforms.

An E-learning system in this context means exploiting technologies (web-technologies) to deliver learning or learning materials (Gerhard & Mayr, 2002). Higher Learning Institutions (HEI) means any institutions accredited by the National Council for Technical Education's (NACTE) or Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) to grant degree certificates. Adoption means accepting and

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using the e-learning system in HEI as a platform for learning and teaching (Maina & Nzuki, 2015). The scope of this study, therefore, is on the applicability of E-learning systems within the HEI of developing countries such as Tanzania especially in the situations where the technology is needed most, particularly during the Covid 19 pandemic.

The outbreak of Covid 19 disease was caused by viruses in the early year 2020 and later on announced by WHO as a pandemic disease (Allo, 2020). Among the measures taken by the majority of the countries to control its spread include upholding the lockdown of human activities, asking people to stay away from each other for up to two meters apart and washing hands frequently with clean water or using sanitisers to ensure that their hands are clean all the time. Among the aspects which were suspended in such lockdowns include traditional teaching and learning. In Tanzania, the government announced to close all HEIs with effect from March 17, 2020, to June 2020. In the education sector only, more than 1.2 billion students from 186 countries were out of school since this outbreak (WEFORUM, 2020). As a result, the use of e-learning seems like an ideal global solution for traditional teaching and learning.

Despite the existence of a vast majority of E-learning systems, their applications to the HEIs in Tanzania were very minimal. It is through this lockdown period where schools started to find the best way of using the E-learning systems to cover learning and teaching materials online. Previously, 46% of 33 public and private universities have managed to have e-learning systems in Tanzania (Lashayo&Gapar, 2017). Irrespective of this statistic, there were only a few circumstances of the HEI utilising such systems to deliver education during this difficult time of the Covid 19 pandemic. This means that there might be unprecedented issues that are still affecting the smooth adoption of E-learning systems that need to be addressed for future consumption. Objectives of this paper are to explore awareness of the key E-learning systems amongst Tanzanian HEI stakeholders, the extent to which ICT readiness is associated with the use of such systems, identifying the leading E-learning possibilities which experts expect to have been opted by the Tanzanian HEIs and identifying their user settings and issues which matters most on the successful applications in the pandemic time such as during the Covid19. Therefore, this article addresses the following main questions:

- Q1:** What is the awareness and understanding of stakeholders of HEIs in e-learning systems before and during the Covid 19 pandemic in Tanzania?
- Q2:** What are the practical applications of E-learning systems in HEIs during the Covid 19 pandemic in Tanzania?
- Q3:** What were the challenges to fully e-learning systems application in HEIs in Tanzania during the Covid 19 pandemic?
- Q4:** What are the negative impacts associated with the use of e-learning systems in HEIs?

The rest of this article is organised as follows: Section two discusses the leading distance learning application and systems which are more applicable to Tanzania followed by section three, which discuss the usage context of E-learning in Tanzania. Section four discusses the methodology which was used when conducting this study followed by section five, which presents the results and discussions. Section six is the conclusion of this article.

## **2. DISTANCE LEARNING APPLICATIONS**

UNESCO list several applications which the lecturers, students and schools may use during the year 2020 pandemic time to offer school administration, learning for students and provision of social care and collaboration in the time of school pandemic closure (UNESCO, 2020). These include Mobile Phone Systems, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and E-learning systems.

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