

Teacher Attitudes towards the Use of a Learning Management System for Teaching Performing Arts Undergraduates During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract — The sudden and unplanned shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to online modes due to the unprecedented increase in COVID-19 patients resulted in many challenges faced by both teachers and students. This situation became even more compounded for educational institutions that offered courses in performing arts subjects since these subjects demand the tangible presence of the teachers and students in a single physical environment. The primary purpose of this research was to find out whether educators teaching these subjects had a positive or negative attitude toward the use of a learning management system in a Sri Lankan University that offers degrees' programs in performing arts. The descriptive research design was adopted for this purpose, and data were gathered using a survey-type online questionnaire from a sample of academic staff from the University. Firstly, the survey intended to find out the respondents' attitudes towards using an LMS in general. Secondly, it considered how effective such a system is concerning teaching practical-oriented subjects such as dance and drama. Although the teachers had positive perceptions regarding the effectiveness of using an LMS during emergency remote teaching, they appeared to be uncertain whether it was an effective tool for teaching performing arts subjects. In addition, the findings indicate the need for the teachers to be provided with further training on using an LMS for teaching practical-oriented subjects. According to the findings of this study, there is a clear indication that an LMS has limitations when it comes to teaching subjects that demand the physical presence of teachers and students. A mechanized system cannot fully accommodate tangible interactions that are required for the development of practical knowledge of these subjects at the undergraduate level.

Keywords — *emergency remote teaching, online learning, learning management system, performing arts*

I. INTRODUCTION

A Learning Management System (LMS) or e-learning platform is a software system that includes a range of services to assist teachers with the management of their courses [1]. Technologies that facilitate the provision of courses over long distances are broadly termed "learning management systems" or "LMSs." According to Turnbull et al., LMSs are defined as web-based software platforms that provide an interactive online learning environment and automate the administration, organization, delivery, and reporting of educational content and learner outcomes [2]. Ortega & Arcos, defines them as "a computing device that groups several tools and ensures the educational lines across dedicated platforms to the ODL (open and distance learning). All conduits are preserved and expanded for the learner, tutor, coordinator and administrator within the e-learning platform" [3]. Given the above explanations of what an LMS is, there is a need also to understand that the system is not an all-inclusive, well-packed replacement to formal education even in crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic that prevented students physical access to their educational institutions.

As a result of the Covid19 pandemic, Universities have been forced to remove/limit physical access to students. As a result, University teachers were compelled to learn to use LMSs such as Moodle as well as online video conferencing tools such as Zoom. This was the mandate given by the Sri Lankan education authorities and the University administration to continue teaching using distance education methods such as synchronous and asynchronous teaching. Only a short time period was provided for adjusting to this new paradigm of teaching. Therefore, teachers have felt challenged by this 'new normal' system of education. However, they appear to make every attempt to adopt and instruct their students to the best of their capabilities given the unwarranted conditions of the pandemic.

Under these circumstances, performing arts teachers were introduced to teaching University-level performing arts courses in subject areas subjects such as dance, music,

theatre, and drama, which are heavily dependent on face-to-face teaching of complex practical aspects related to these subjects. Therefore, a for performing arts educators to adjust their teaching practices to suit a digitalized teaching environment is a challenge. The main questions that these teachers have repeatedly asked but found no comprehensive answer to is "How can one teach dancing, singing, playing instruments and acting, all of which essentially require one-on-one teaching and learning including human-to-human observation and whole-body involvement, be taught through the third-hand mediation of a screen?" Teaching online entails technical issues such as connection disruptions, unavailability of devices, lack of signals as well as practical issues such as not being able to see or hear the students, or check for the aptness of pitch, tune, movement or gesture. These are next to impossible to achieve with the limited range of the camera angle of a computer or a smartphone. Such concerns expressed by dance, music and drama teachers are investigated in this study.

II. OBJECTIVES

Three primary objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To find out what kind of attitude performing arts teachers had towards the use of their University LMS for teaching purposes in general.
2. To discover how receptive these faculty members were to the possibility of teaching performing arts students' subjects such as dance, music, theatre and drama using the digitalized environment of an LMS.
3. To determine whether these teachers were willing and motivated to obtain further training on effectively using the LMS.

III. METHODOLOGY

According to Brotherton [4], descriptive research describes what is known about an issue/context but with increased accuracy and precision. The survey was designed using the quantitative method of inquiry which was adopted to gather numerical data for analysis purposes. The survey was a standardized online questionnaire that used a five-point Likert scale to calculate mean scores for individual statements. Subsequently, mean scores for measuring the attitudes of the performing arts teaching staff were generated. The survey consists of three parts. First, the respondents' response towards the use of the University LMS for teaching purposes in general; secondly, their receptiveness to its use for teaching performing arts subjects; and finally, their motivation for using it were statistically measured. The survey indicated to what extent the respondents agreed or disagreed with a particular statement developed concerning the initial research questions that led to the study.

The purposive sampling method, which is a non-probability sampling technique, was selected as the sampling technique. This gave ease of access to the sample population

and allowed her the flexibility of approaching study subjects without any undue constraints. Moreover, because the sample size was small, using a random sampling technique would have limited the number of research participants when gathering data. Although the total sample size was limited to 48 University teachers in performing arts, given the narrowed scope of the study, the findings can be considered as reasonably representative of others engaged in the same profession within the same context. To cross-validate the results, opinions were elicited from the participants with their perceptions of using the University LMS for teaching purposes stop.

The University in which the study was conducted was purposively selected to represent the Universities where performing arts subjects are taught. The selected University is the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka which is exclusively devoted to teaching performing arts subjects at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The lecturers and instructors who are teaching the undergraduate level performing arts degree courses were approached to collect the required data.

To collect data, the survey was developed in a digital format using a Google form. Subsequently, the link to the data collection instrument was shared among the staff members using WhatsApp and personal email addresses. This type of data collection instrument was regarded as the most appropriate since it provided the best form of inquiry, it was cost-effective as well as time effective, and precise. Moreover, the auto-tabulated facility provided when using Google forms facilitated accurate analysis with minimal room for human error during data entry as well as when the data were mechanically stored and tabulated.

The online administered, self-report questionnaire involved a series of statements on a 5-point likert scale whereby respondents can select their level of agreement to each assertion presented. Here, number 1 stood for "strongly disagree" and 5 stood for "strong agreement". The first 27 items in the questionnaire were in the form of statements for which the respondents selected their preferred choice from the 5-point Likert scale. The final item (28) was an open-ended question which was expected to gather secondary data in order to identify any themes that emerged about the faculty members' candid responses to the question: "Please explain why you think using the University LMS is effective/ineffective for teaching performing arts subjects to undergraduates".

The data were mechanically calculated for each statement to measure the level of agreement. The findings appeared in the form of a report that included representations of the tabulated data through the mode of pie charts. In addition, the data were transported into an Excel file for further analysis. Since the study mainly intended to describe the attitude of the teachers towards the use of a LMS, mean scores were generated for each statement. Consequently, the responses

given to the open-ended question were analyzed by placing each response as under a theme that matches it.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey was categorized according to three sub-themes:

- A. Faculty members' need for LMS training
- B. Faculty members' attitude towards the use of the LMS for teaching and learning processes in general.
- C. Faculty members' attitude towards the use of the LMS for teaching and learning performing arts subjects through the use of this system.

Therefore, the findings and discussion are presented under each category.

A. Faculty members' need for LMS training

There were four statements that aimed to capture the respondents' requirement for further training on how effectively they can use the LMS for teaching purposes. The overall average score for the responses given to the statements indicated high levels of agreement for the need to obtain more LMS training with an average mean score of 4.02. Out of the relevant statements, a significantly high mean score was received ($M = 4.3$) for the statement "I'd like to get more training on how to use Learning Management System (LMS)".

Given the above findings, it becomes evident that despite the various training programs that the teacher has already been exposed to, they feel the need further training on how best to use the LMS. Also, this brings us to the understanding that they are yet to feel convinced that they are competent users of this system, and this call for help has to be considered seriously and as an urgency by the relevant authorities. Suppose the teachers are of the understanding that they require further training on using the LMS. In that case, this may be one main obstacle that gets in the way of them at least attempting to try to use it for teaching in this case performing arts subjects. Based on the open-ended inquiry, most of these teachers have stated that they have a basic understanding of the system but that it does not empower them to effectively teach practically-oriented subjects through it.

As such, trainers have to keep in mind that merely teaching the functions of the LMS will not suffice under these circumstances but rather that there should be a specific focus on how best to use the LMS for teaching practical subjects and what effective strategies can be utilized to mitigate issues that may arise. There are also various free and open source resources that the teachers can refer to update themselves on using information communication technologies for teaching and learning purposes. For example, the online open-source resource portal titled "Teaching in the context of COVID-19" describes general aspects of online education, as well as

provides tailored resources, activities and assignments, and practical tips for educators.

B. Faculty members' attitude toward the use of the LMS for teaching and learning processes in general.

An average score of 3.5, out of a total score of 5, was received when measuring the academics' expression of the agreement for using this type of mechanized system for pedagogical intent. The finding indicates positive agreement in terms of using the LMS for teaching any subject using this system with the highest mean scores gained for the assertions: "The LMS helps to send information to students quickly" ($M=4.08$), "The LMS helps teachers to organize their courses well" ($M=3.79$) and "I feel that the use of LMS develops the teaching process systematically" ($M=3.79$). Strong levels of agreement with the above statements testify the respondents' awareness of the main functions of an LMS, which is to organize courses systematically and to transfer information and educational material to students rapidly and with minimum hassle.

From this category, the least score of 2.87 was given to the notion that the LMS reduces the role of the teacher in the classroom and increases the role of the student. This moderate level of acceptance indicates that almost half of the sample did not feel as threatened by the presence of this technology as was expected. Of course, the fact that they did not disagree with the statement indicates that more than half the respondents acknowledge the above view, which means that they feel that teachers are gradually becoming redundant as a result of this system's recognizably rapid use in education.

Reassurance that an LMS is merely a carrier of information that cannot be sustained without the presence and mediation of educators has to be reminded constantly to teachers. It is recommended that the training given to the staff should include mostly attitudinal altering workshops that assists teachers to realize the benefits of an LMS instead of perceiving it as a potential threat to their careers as teachers. The findings demonstrate the misconception that a substantial number of educators believe that a digitized system can actually supersede the human presence of a teacher. This notion has to be demystified if the use of the LMS is to be perceived in an endorsing manner.

On the whole, though, we can note that as academic intellectuals who have been selected to teach University-level courses, these teachers are now considerably more aware of the benefits that an LMS has to offer to them as teachers and their students as active learners. Due to its apparent ability to grant autonomy to both these stakeholders, as well as the inevitable need to use an LMS under the present context, the participants of this study have a largely exhibited a positive attitude toward the adaptation of a LMS such as Moodle.

C. Faculty members' attitude toward the use of the LMS for teaching and learning the performing arts subjects through the use of this system.

Despite the presence of relatively high agreement levels to the use of the LMS for teaching and learning as a whole, the responses given to the statements capturing the faculty members' perceptions in relation to the use of it for teaching performing arts subjects is considerably lower. The total mean score obtained for this particular category of the survey is 2.87. Thus, it falls under the scale "neither agree nor disagree". This

particular finding effectively captures the dilemma faced by the performing arts teachers as they try to grapple with the new reality of the changes happening in the system of education as a result Covid 19 pandemic.

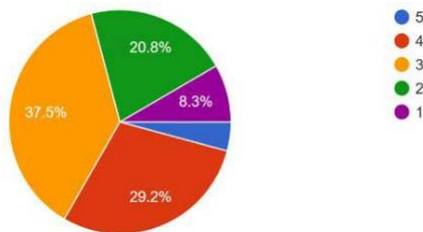


Fig. 1. Responses of the respondents regarding the use of the LMS to generate more positive changes in performing arts undergraduate courses chart.

Note: 1 is for "strongly disagree" and 5 is for "strongly agree")

Figure 1 exemplifies the fact that the majority of the study sample are sensing that the presence of an LMS can lead to more positive than negative changes in the performing arts courses. However, about 30% of the respondents disagree with this claim. The lowest mean score received under this category was to the statement; "The LMS increases flexibility in teaching performing arts subjects" (M=2.54), and this was followed by the statement "Using blended learning, including face to face instruction and the LMS, will offer better results than normal teaching practices in performing arts education" (M=2.6). When considering the range attributed to the mean score we can note the teacher's disagreement with the statement.

This can be noted in the figure below, which also indicates mainly an uncertain attitude from the respondents concerning how useful the LMS is for teaching performing arts subjects.

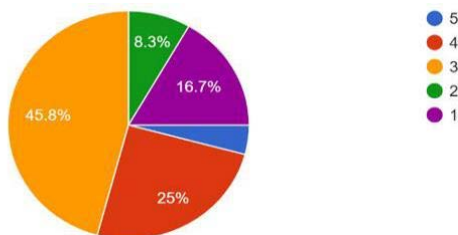


Fig. 2. Respondents level of agreement as to whether the LMS is useful for teaching performing arts subjects to undergraduates

It does not come as a surprise that the teachers have a negative attitude towards the LMS about its inability to be flexible enough to be adopted for teaching performing arts subjects. However, what is an even more noteworthy finding is that the majority of the sample are also hesitant in recommending the use of the blended mode of education for teaching these types of subjects. Given that these faculty members appear to be aware of the multiple benefits of an LMS, their resistance to offering performing arts degree courses using a blended mode comes as a surprise finding. This is because in spite of the restrictions that are present in this computerized system, using the blended mode seems to be possibly the most rational option.

The majority of the teachers (M=3.6) endorse the fact that the use of the LMS can, in fact, bring about more positive than negative changes when teaching these types of practically-oriented subjects. It means that although skeptical concerning the use of ICTs for teaching performing arts courses at the undergraduate level, teachers seem to be hopeful and optimistic about the potential benefits of an LMS for teaching these subjects to a certain extent.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study's key finding is that, performing arts teachers in the University continue to request further training in using the LMS. Based on the levels of agreement given to the various assertions presented in the survey, the performing arts University teachers appear to be already aware of the benefits of an LMS; nevertheless, they want to gain more knowledge of how this system can accommodate the teaching and learning of practical subjects that invariably require a human touch. Also, the other key finding is the negative attitude and perceptions towards blended learning and its use for teaching practically-oriented subjects. This highlight the necessity for LMS training that does not merely look at the technical aspects of the system but also provide coaching in relation to its wider implications, benefits and how it can be effectively used for blended teaching of performing arts subjects.

Based on the findings, it is realized that when it comes to practical subjects such as dance, drama and music, teachers face many challenges due to the incapacity of the LMS to facilitate human interaction. This is required for developing the practical knowledge of these subjects at the undergraduate level. As such, performing arts educators should be conscious of the fact that teaching performing arts using the LMS can be a feasible option until circumstances dictate otherwise. Hence, as with any other pedagogical approach we select, we must focus on the learning objectives of our performing arts courses and use technologies to mediate our delivery by utilizing it both creatively and intelligently.

Given the inevitability of the change in pedagogy due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is beyond human control, the way forward appears to be to overcome

the obstacles and cultivate a sense of resilience through training and attitudinal change in teachers. This will enable them to move forward despite the volatile environment in which both students and teachers are placed during the pandemic. Given that the study population is not simply a group of teachers, as they are professional artists, we can argue that their capacity for being resilient, creative, adaptable, and flexible can help them surmount the obstacles of online education to a large extent.

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