

E-learning Practices in the Pre-pandemic Phase: Impacts on the Teaching Practices in Higher Education in the Macau SAR

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The 21st century has been marked by several transformations. Technological evolution, the most obvious one, has been used to improve various social domains, in particular contemporary pedagogical experiences and innovative practices. Also, since the current COVID-19 pandemic began, it has never seemed as relevant as now to shift away from outworn rote educational practices. However, with distance learning becoming the 'new normal' in many parts of the globe and having COVID-19 as an inflection point for innovation in the e-learning paradigm, the fragilities an unplanned and rapid shift to online learning bring to the learning and teaching experiences of this nature may also result in the reduction of significant learning and holistic teaching practices, that new fundamental on pedagogies, in harmony with social constructivist theories, have been trying to ensure in the open education movement.

These vulnerabilities — mostly marked by the lack of training, insufficient understanding of the distance education domain, and little preparation — had already been explored, prior to the pandemic in a 2019 case study about e-learning and the integration of emerging pedagogies in two institutions of higher education (HE) in the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR). The questions interconnected with the research are as follows:

- (1) What technologies are being used in the context of higher education teaching/learning by its teachers?
- (2) What is the teachers' 'digital profile'?
- (3) What is the impact on students when they adopt e-learning practices in higher education?
- (4) What are the teachers' e-learning practices?
- (5) What are the reasons behind the adoption of certain technologies in higher education teaching practices?

In this study — which aims at outlining an authentic representation of the dynamics and pedagogical practices of e-learning in two distinct institutional realities — patterns of technological integration in the teaching-learning process, teaching staff digital skills, and methodologies for technological adoption were closely analysed through a structured questionnaire which was filled in, anonymously and confidentially by higher education teachers. The survey focused on the intersection of four axes that combined the problem with the research purposes. A selective blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches was integrated into this research.

The major findings of the study indicated that, overall, the technology being used in these institutions alluded merely to the support of pedagogical practices and were not being incorporated in a significant emerging way. Institutional support and development of such practices were also determined to be inefficient, while concepts of openness were revealed to be not only underdeveloped but typically misapprehended by the participants and institutions.

The research and scope of the study provide valuable insights into the e-learning scene in Macau, which led to the outlining of a feasible preliminary framework on e-learning practices being developed/implemented in MSAR higher education, as well as an accurate digital profile of the teaching staff in the said level of education. Suggestions and recommendations were offered which were intended to improve the findings of the study.