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The perceptions of digital technology at a New Zealand tertiary institution.

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Abstract

The way educational institutions view certain technology has changed dramatically over the years, especially with the world lockdown in 2020. Understanding how digital technology is seen in an educational institution is the path to finding out how to improve and enhance the learning experience for students. A study by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) showed "digitalisation has been one of the main drivers of innovation in educational practices in the classroom in the past decade." (Vlies, 2020)

The study examined how different members of a New Zealand tertiary education institution perceive digital technology in their respective areas of study. It examined how technology is viewed by students from differing degrees and levels, as well as how these views differ within the undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study. The perception of educators was also examined to see how different departments view the tools they use in their respective programmes and how it differs from both past and present students. The methodology behind the research was using a mixed-method research approach to gain both qualitative and quantitative data. This method would allow for the Sequential Explanatory Strategy (Terrell, 2012) to interpret the study. The strategy is done via the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The quantitative data collection used an online survey to collect a large, population of anonymous participants.

The online survey was conducted using the Qualtrics software and was administered amongst the population of the university. A particular focus was put on the undergraduate population, being the largest group of students, given their reliance on distance learning as a result of the lockdowns in New Zealand in 2020/21. The survey featured a multitude of questions to collect a mix of quantitative and qualitative data.

The findings from the initial survey highlighted departments at the institution that have a stronger positive outlook towards using a higher amount of digital technology in their curriculum. There was a subgroup that still preferred a more practical, face-to-face approach. In response to a question regarding whether digital technology adoption may be lagging in certain programmes/disciplines, the majority of participants gave the unknown response with the second-highest group saying it was likely. The main reason participants gave for the lag of adoption of digital technology was the underfunding of programmes, with some participants further suggesting a possible correlation between underfunding, understaffing and inadequate training. The latter coheres with the OECD study, with training being one of two key aspects of education policies: "First, teachers need sufficient training to deploy and teach about digital technologies. Second, countries need a standard for digital skills and literacy for students." (Vlies, 2020)

Ongoing follow-up interviews are currently being conducted to supplement the data from the online survey results. This study will be of interest to curriculum developers, decision-makers, policymakers, future students, educators, technologists, and other educational institution staff.

References

Terrell, S. R. (2012). Mixed-methods research methodologies. *Qualitative report, 17*(1), 254-280.

Vlies, R. v. d. (2020). Digital strategies in education across OECD countries. https://doi.org/10.1787/33dd4c26-en