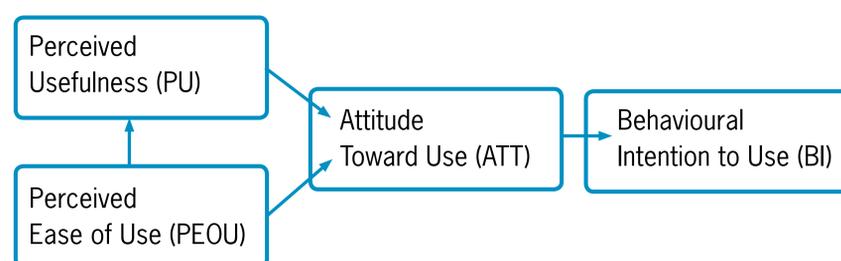


# Charting Teachers' Perspective on Utilizing Distance Learning in Higher Education

IN THIS PAPER WE PRESENT OUR ONGOING WORK ON EXPLORING CURRENT USAGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS USING ELEARNING TECHNOLOGIES IN TEACHING. THE RESEARCH IS RELATED TO OUR PROJECT CREATO. THE AIM IS TO INVESTIGATE CHALLENGES AND NEEDS FOR SUPPORT AMONG TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION. IN OUR CASE, WE DECIDED TO CONCENTRATE ON DISTANCE LEARNING MORE THAN E-LEARNING IN GENERAL.

## Research method

In this work, TAM (Technology Acceptance Model, Davis 1989) and TATUM (Teacher's Attitude towards Technology Use Model, Nair & Das 2012) were used as a basis for the research inquiry (51 respondents). Teachers were asked to describe how they saw using distance learning tools as useful in their work and what challenges they had encountered. Attention was also paid to what kind of previous experience teachers had and what methods of support they would consider useful concerning the educational project.



Picture 1. Teacher's Attitude to Use Technology Model (TATUM)

## Results of current state analysis

### ADVANTAGES

- Independence concerning time, place, flexibility, and individual options.
- It's flexible and it enhances students' freedom of their studies.
- More surprisingly, distance learning was perceived more activating than traditional learning in increasing presence, participation and both communal and individual learning.

### CHALLENGES

- Pedagogical issues included individual mentoring and providing feedback whereas technological perspective was perceived problematic for both teachers and students.
- Despite the skills of participants, technology itself may have major problems.
- One perceived challenge from the teachers' perspective was students' lack of commitment, motivation and independent learning.
- Teachers were also concerned about communication learning material and intellectual property rights.

### METHODS OF SUPPORT

- Most teachers felt that peer support was the major element of cooperation between teachers concerning distance learning. It included sharing ideas and experiences and having discussions of technological and pedagogical issues.
- Some teachers had created digital course material together but only a minority had experience of co-teaching or planning together.
- Few teachers were acting as mentors to other teachers.

### IDEAS FOR FUTURE IMPROVEMENT

- The kinds of support that teachers would like to receive from employer were varying. Some teachers requested pedagogical training whereas others lacked technical skills.
- Hands-on workshops, best practices of colleagues and training of material production including intellectual property rights were all commonly mentioned.
- Some teachers were not interested in training or support at all due to their good basic skills or lacking knowledge of eLearning in general.



## Conclusions

The results revealed that there is an emerging need for building deeper understanding of challenges faced by teachers utilizing distance learning. It is important to take into account that continuous and relevant training as well as peer support for educators are key factors in increasing usage of eLearning methods. More straightforward tools and services are also required in order to support learning gains for both teachers and students.

## References

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