

Digital inequities in Higher Education: The challenges of technology and online learning for students and educators.

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The evolution of online learning

- Our story and why this study?
- Experience of engaging in teacher education and training during COVID-19 pandemic. What challenges posed by online learning?
- Initial Teacher Education (ITE) during and post-COVID-19 pandemic era.
- Where are we now?
- Threshold leaving teaching after 5 years
- AI experience in teacher education during COVID-19 pandemic

Key information:

- Interconnected factors shape students' ability to engage meaningfully with online learning environments and in many cases can exacerbate existing inequalities in participation and achievement
- Digital divide can affect student outcomes by exploring the influence of key digital determinants, including access (and lack thereof), digital skills, and institutional support

Research questions focused on:

- Exploring changes that occurred in teacher training programmes with the evolution of online distance learning?
- Impact of distance learning on teaching practice and the development of teachers?
- Equity, ethics and access in the digitalisation of teacher training programmes and AI use

Methodology

UTAUT: explore educators' potentials with technology use in terms of their performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions for technology use

EQUIP framework: offers a structured, practice-oriented roadmap for embedding AI literacy and ethical principles into teacher education.

- Qualitative study underpinned by connectivism theory (Downes, 2005); EQUIP framework (Daher, 2025) and UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003).
- Interviews: 10 educators from various HEIs in London and Wales.
- Surveys completed by 7 trainee teachers (who completed training during COVID-19 period).
- Triangulation and relaying questions between educators and trainee teachers
- Data analysis: thematic analysis
- **Unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT)**
- **EQUIP (Ethical Governance, Qualified Professional Learning, Unified Collaborative Partnerships, Implementation Readiness, and Progressive Adaptation)**

Findings in the context of the research questions

x Changes that occurred in teacher training programmes

x Impact of distance learning on teaching practice and the development of teachers?

X Equity, ethics and access in the digitalisation of teacher training programmes and AI use

Themes:

- integrating a hybrid mode of teaching
- redesign and restructure of the curriculum
- resilience and adaptability
- career progression
- promoting innovation and digital literacy
- digital inequality and access to technology
- ethical issues regarding AI use.

Dilemma on AI use in teacher education?

The EQUIP framework our help.

EQUIP (Ethical Governance, Qualified Professional Learning, Unified Collaborative Partnerships, Implementation Readiness and Progressive Adaptation)

(Daher, 2025)

How the framework was used to support our study

- Ethical governance: transparency, fairness and accountability in AI use
- Qualified Professional Learning, which ensures that educators have the necessary AI knowledge and skills for effective integration
- Unified Collaborative Partnerships, which allowed us to network and provide support to our partner schools on various modes of learning using technology.
- Implementation Readiness - accounts for the ethical and practical integration of AI in our practices.
- Progressive Adaptation- ensures that educators are conversant with challenges and opportunities as AI evolves

Our findings emphasise the importance of educational leaders who can strive towards responsive curriculum redesign alongside robust institutional support mechanisms such as digitally inclusive teaching models. Together, these approaches can be used to mitigate digital inequities and ensure meaningful participation and progression for students.

Thank you.

- Questions
- Please tell us about your experience of online/digital learning and AI use