



Phenomenological Exploration of Teachers' and Students' Experiences with Digital Learning Platforms

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ABSTRACT

Educational technology has become an integral part of modern teaching and learning, yet understanding the subjective experiences of those who interact with these tools remains underexplored. While existing research has focused on the effectiveness of digital platforms, limited attention has been given to the personal, lived experiences of teachers and students in these environments. This study addresses this gap by investigating how digital learning platforms are experienced in everyday educational settings, focusing on the challenges and opportunities they present. Using a phenomenological approach, this research examines the personal narratives of 12 teachers and 15 students to explore their perspectives on digital platform use. The findings indicate that while both teachers and students value the flexibility and connectivity provided by digital platforms, they also face significant challenges, particularly related to usability and the loss of personal interaction. These emotional and experiential impacts underscore the importance of actionable recommendations for digital platform design, including a focus on improving usability and fostering more meaningful interaction. These experiences highlight the need for more user-friendly platforms and additional support for both teachers and students to effectively integrate technology into teaching and learning. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the emotional and experiential impacts of digital technology in education, with implications for the design and implementation of future digital learning tools.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the integration of digital learning platforms in education has become an increasingly significant development. These platforms, which include tools for online learning, virtual classrooms, and interactive educational software, are reshaping how education is delivered and experienced worldwide (Bender, 2024). The widespread adoption of these technologies has been driven by advancements in digital infrastructure, changes in educational policies, and the increasing need for flexible learning environments, especially in the face of global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the landscape of education is evolving rapidly, with educators and students alike navigating new tools and methodologies.

The relevance of this phenomenon lies in its profound impact on both teaching and learning processes. For educators, digital platforms offer a new set of possibilities for enhancing interaction, engagement, and resource accessibility. For students, these platforms provide a more flexible and personalized approach to learning, allowing them to engage with materials at their own pace and from various locations (Çakmak, 2022). However, despite these advantages, the transition to digital learning is not without challenges. Teachers and students often experience uncertainty and frustration in adapting to new technologies, especially when it comes to using unfamiliar platforms. Moreover,

the shift to digital learning has highlighted a gap in understanding how these technologies influence the day-to-day experiences of both educators and learners.

The need for a deeper exploration of this phenomenon is evident, as understanding the subjective experiences of teachers and students can shed light on the true impact of digital platforms. Traditional educational research often focuses on objective metrics, such as academic performance or platform usage rates, but these measures do not capture the lived experiences of those directly engaged in the learning process. In response to this gap, phenomenology is particularly suited to uncover the personal, lived experiences of educators and students, offering a methodology that enables a deeper exploration of how these individuals perceive and make sense of their interactions with digital platforms (Dong & Liu, 2024). By focusing on how teachers and students perceive and make sense of their experiences, this study aims to provide insights into the ways in which digital platforms are reshaping educational environments from the inside out. Understanding these personal, lived experiences is crucial for improving digital learning practices and ensuring that educational technology serves both teachers and students effectively.

Research into the lived experiences of individuals within specific phenomena has increasingly become an essential area of study, particularly in the field of educational technology. Understanding how individuals—especially teachers and students—engage with and experience digital learning platforms provides invaluable insights that go beyond surface-level outcomes. While existing studies have highlighted the general effectiveness and adoption of technology in education, they often fail to delve deeply into the subjective experiences that shape how these tools are integrated into everyday teaching and learning practices.

One of the major challenges in exploring these experiences is the methodological limitation of quantitative approaches, which often rely on numerical data and predefined metrics. These methods, while valuable for understanding broader trends, fall short in capturing the intricate, personal, and contextual factors that influence how technology is used and perceived in educational settings. The essence of human experience—whether related to the challenges faced by teachers in adapting to new tools or the way students perceive digital platforms—remains largely underexplored through traditional quantitative measures.

These limitations highlight a significant gap in the literature, where existing research often overlooks the deep, subjective meaning that emerges from individual interactions with educational technology. As a result, previous methods have not fully captured the complexity of the phenomenon, and thus, a more nuanced, qualitative approach—specifically phenomenology—becomes necessary to uncover the underlying dimensions of these experiences. Phenomenology, with its focus on the lived experience, provides the appropriate framework to explore these meanings, offering a comprehensive understanding of how digital learning platforms impact those directly involved.

While many studies have explored the practical application of digital learning platforms in educational contexts, the existing literature predominantly relies on quantitative approaches or generalized surveys (Gómez & Gómez, 2021). These approaches, although valuable for assessing overall effectiveness, fail to delve into the nuanced, personal experiences of teachers and students. The general solutions provided by these methods, such as measuring platform usage or success rates, do not capture the deeper meanings or emotional impacts that these platforms have on users' daily lives. As a result, there is a lack of rich, qualitative understanding of how digital tools truly shape the teaching and learning process at the individual level.

The gap in knowledge lies in the absence of research that truly explores the subjective, lived experiences of educators and learners. Previous methods have not sufficiently captured the personal and contextual factors that influence how these individuals experience digital platforms. To fill this gap, it is crucial to adopt a phenomenological approach, which focuses on understanding the essence of these experiences. Phenomenology allows for a more in-depth exploration of the meanings, challenges, and emotions that teachers and students associate with digital learning environments. By focusing on their lived experiences, phenomenology offers the potential for a richer, more holistic understanding of how these platforms affect teaching practices and student engagement.

This research, therefore, aims to address this gap by using phenomenology to explore the personal, subjective experiences of teachers and students in relation to digital learning platforms, allowing for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

Research on the use of digital learning platforms in education has been a growing area of interest, with a focus on understanding how these platforms influence teaching and learning. Studies have primarily examined the effectiveness of these tools from a technical or quantitative perspective, exploring factors such as student engagement, performance, and platform usability. However, few studies have explored the lived experiences of teachers and students, and how these tools shape their daily educational practices (Haleva dkk., 2021). The existing literature on educational technology highlights the importance of exploring subjective experiences, as these provide valuable insights into the real impact of digital tools on education. This research aims to address this gap by focusing on the personal narratives and meanings that teachers and students attach to their interactions with digital platforms.

The phenomenological approach was chosen to explore the experiences of teachers and students because it allows for a deep, rich understanding of their lived experiences. By focusing on the meanings that individuals assign to their experiences, phenomenology enables a thorough exploration of how these participants perceive and engage with digital learning platforms. This method is particularly suited to uncovering the essence of human experience, offering a more holistic understanding of the challenges, benefits, and emotional responses related to technology use in education. The study aims to fill the knowledge gap identified earlier by providing a detailed examination of the subjective, personal experiences that are often overlooked in traditional research.

This article is structured as follows: The introduction presents the context and relevance of the phenomenon being studied, followed by a discussion of the methodological approach, specifically phenomenology, and how it will be applied to explore the experiences of teachers and students (Hershkovitz dkk., 2019). The next section outlines the data collection process, including the use of semi-structured interviews and the analysis of data through thematic analysis. The results of the study are discussed in relation to the emerging themes, and the paper concludes with an interpretation of the findings and their implications for future research and practice in educational technology.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a phenomenological approach, which is particularly suited for exploring the lived experiences and subjective perceptions of individuals. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals, and it allows for a deep exploration of meaning that may not be easily captured by other methods (Hetmanenko, 2024). The chosen approach enables an in-depth examination of how teachers and students make sense of their interactions with digital learning platforms, providing rich insights into their lived experiences. Given the emphasis on capturing personal, first-hand accounts, a descriptive phenomenological approach was adopted. This method was selected because it emphasizes the detailed description of experiences without interpreting or imposing pre-existing theories, making it ideal for understanding the nuances of technology adoption in education.

Participants

Participants in this study were teachers and students who had direct experience using digital learning platforms in educational settings. Purposive sampling was employed to select individuals who could provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon being investigated. This sampling technique was chosen because it allows for the intentional selection of participants who have specific knowledge or experiences directly related to the research question, ensuring a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In addition to gender balance, efforts were made to ensure diversity in the participant pool by considering factors such as age, teaching experience, and the type of digital platforms used. The sample included teachers of various disciplines, from different educational institutions, and students from diverse academic backgrounds, ensuring a broad range of perspectives

on the use of digital learning platforms. Inclusion criteria for teachers required them to have at least one year of experience using digital platforms in their teaching. For students, inclusion criteria included active participation in courses that utilized digital platforms for learning. The study included 12 teachers and 15 students, with an average age of 35 years for teachers and 21 years for students. Gender was balanced among participants, with both male and female teachers and students represented. Exclusion criteria included individuals who had limited experience with digital learning platforms or who were not actively engaged in courses using such platforms.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while maintaining a focus on key research questions. The interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable environment to ensure participants felt at ease when sharing their thoughts and experiences (Liu, 2022). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, depending on the depth of the responses. Interviews were conducted at participants' preferred locations, either in their classrooms or via video conferencing for remote participants. A semi-structured interview guide was used, with questions designed to explore the participants' perceptions, challenges, and experiences related to the use of digital learning platforms. The interview guide was adapted from existing literature on technology adoption in education.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows for the identification and interpretation of patterns or themes within qualitative data. The analysis was carried out in a systematic manner to ensure that the essential meanings underlying participants' experiences were captured. First, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then read multiple times to familiarize with the data. Themes were generated through a process of coding the data and grouping similar codes into broader categories (Pedrosa, 2024). NVivo software was used to assist in organizing and managing the data, but the focus remained on the manual process of identifying key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. This approach allowed for the extraction of meaningful insights into the ways in which teachers and students perceive and experience digital learning platforms.

Ethics

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee prior to the commencement of the study. All participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were also assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants' identities were coded to ensure that their responses remained confidential throughout the study. The research adhered to ethical standards for qualitative research and complied with both local and international ethical guidelines.

RESULTS

Experiences of Teachers in Adapting Digital Technology in Teaching

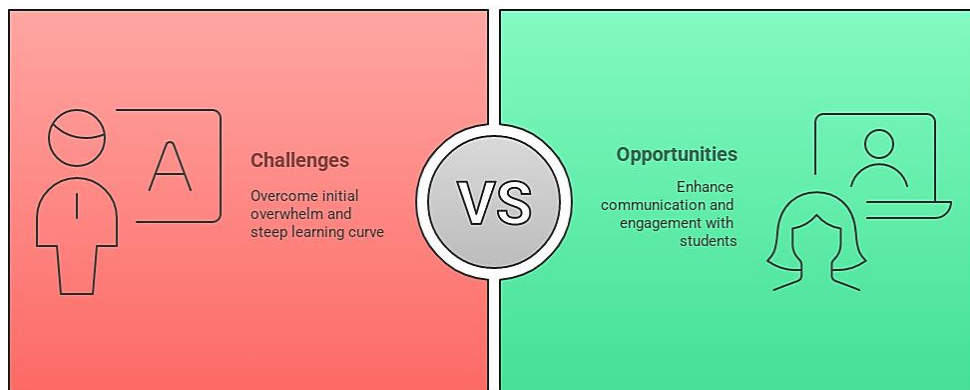
The adaptation of digital technology in teaching was described by teachers as a journey of both challenge and opportunity. Many teachers shared their experiences of initially feeling overwhelmed by the sudden need to incorporate digital platforms into their classrooms. One teacher noted, "At first, I was uncertain about using digital tools, but I realized that the students responded well to interactive platforms, and gradually, I became more comfortable." This sentiment was echoed by several teachers who spoke of the steep learning curve they faced, particularly with tools they had

never used before. However, despite the initial difficulties, the overall experience led to a sense of empowerment as they became more proficient in using technology to support their teaching.

Key Theme: Overcoming Initial Challenges

Teachers highlighted the role of digital technology in facilitating communication and engagement with students. One teacher remarked, "The use of online platforms allowed me to maintain better communication with my students, even outside of class hours. It felt like a bridge that helped us stay connected during difficult times." This reflected a shared perception that digital tools not only provided logistical benefits but also fostered stronger, more consistent student-teacher relationships. It was clear that the integration of technology helped teachers feel more connected to their students, even as traditional face-to-face interactions were limited.

How should teachers approach the integration of digital technology in teaching?



Students' Perceptions of Digital Learning Platforms

Students' experiences with digital learning platforms were characterized by both enthusiasm and frustration. Many students found digital platforms to be a useful way of enhancing their learning experience, particularly during periods of remote learning. One student explained, "The digital platform made it easier to access materials anytime, anywhere, which helped me manage my time better." This highlighted the flexibility that digital platforms provided, allowing students to take control of their learning and study at their own pace.

However, students also shared concerns regarding the challenges they faced in using these platforms. Several students reported feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of some tools. As one student expressed, "I sometimes feel lost with the interface. It's hard to find all the materials I need, and it can be frustrating." The lack of user-friendly interfaces in some platforms seemed to create barriers for certain students, making the learning process more challenging.

Impact of Digital Learning on Teacher-Student Interaction

Both teachers and students reflected on how digital platforms impacted their interaction. Teachers emphasized that while digital platforms allowed for more frequent and efficient communication, it often lacked the personal touch of in-person teaching. One teacher shared, "I can send emails or post messages on the platform, but it's not the same as having a face-to-face conversation. There's something about seeing a student's expression or body language that you miss." On the other hand, students felt that while digital communication was convenient, it sometimes lacked the immediacy and personal connection of classroom interactions. A student commented, "I miss the direct feedback from teachers in class. Online feedback can be slow, and it's not always easy to ask follow-up questions."

Despite these challenges, both teachers and students agreed that digital platforms had transformed the way teaching and learning were conducted. The convenience and flexibility of digital tools were seen as invaluable, especially in facilitating learning during disruptions such as the pandemic.

In conclusion, this study reveals the multifaceted nature of digital technology adoption in education. While teachers and students initially faced challenges in adapting to digital platforms, they ultimately found value in the opportunities these platforms provided. Teachers noted the increased engagement and communication with students, while students appreciated the flexibility and accessibility of digital learning. However, both groups also acknowledged the difficulties associated with technology, such as user interface issues and the loss of personal connection. These experiences underscore the need for more accessible and intuitive digital tools that can enhance the teaching and learning experience.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal that both teachers and students experienced a blend of empowerment and frustration in their interactions with digital learning platforms. Teachers initially felt overwhelmed by the need to adapt to new technologies but eventually found that these platforms fostered greater communication and engagement with students (Pradana dkk., 2024). Students, on the other hand, appreciated the flexibility and accessibility these platforms provided, yet struggled with user interface complexities and the loss of direct interaction with their teachers. These experiences speak directly to the broader research question regarding how digital learning platforms shape the educational process from the perspectives of those who interact with them.

The results of this research provide valuable insights into the complex, subjective experiences of teachers and students with digital learning platforms. The study highlights the duality of experiences, where empowerment and frustration coexist. For teachers, the platforms facilitated greater connectivity with students, yet the initial learning curve and adaptation process created a sense of uncertainty. For students, while the platforms allowed for greater autonomy in learning, they also faced challenges in navigating complex systems and missing the personal connections inherent in traditional classroom settings. This nuanced understanding of both the positive and negative aspects of digital learning provides a deeper insight into the ways in which technology affects teaching and learning practices beyond the surface-level metrics of engagement or performance.

These findings align with previous literature on the use of digital platforms in education, which has often highlighted both the benefits and challenges of technology integration (Shabur & Siddiki, 2024). Research by Song dkk. (2022) also underscores the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of technology users, emphasizing that while digital tools can enhance communication, they may simultaneously create barriers to traditional forms of interaction. This study contributes to existing literature by offering a detailed, phenomenological perspective on how these platforms are experienced in everyday educational settings. It complements previous studies by providing a deeper, more human-centric perspective on the emotional and experiential realities of technology use, which often go unnoticed in more quantitative approaches.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study provide significant implications for both educational practice and the broader understanding of technology integration in teaching and learning. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that while digital learning platforms can foster greater communication and engagement, they also present challenges related to user interfaces and the loss of personal connection in the classroom (Suwarna & Zulfiani, 2024). This highlights the need for educators and educational institutions to offer more comprehensive training and support for both teachers and students in adapting to digital tools. Additionally, educators should be mindful of the emotional and relational aspects of teaching, ensuring that technology is used to complement rather than replace meaningful personal interactions. The study also underscores the importance of designing user-friendly platforms that cater to diverse learning styles and technical competencies, which can help alleviate some of the frustrations expressed by students. On a social and cultural level, the research suggests that the integration of technology into education must account for varying levels of access to technology and digital literacy, which can significantly influence the success of digital learning initiatives.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of teachers and students with digital learning platforms, it has several limitations that may affect the generalizability of the findings. First, the sample size was relatively small and focused on a specific demographic, which may not fully represent the diversity of experiences in different educational settings or cultural contexts. Additionally, the study was conducted in a particular geographic area, which may limit its applicability to other regions with different educational infrastructures or technological access. Another limitation is the use of self-reported data through interviews, which can be influenced by participants' subjective perceptions and recall bias (C. Wang & Kim, 2023). These factors suggest that while the findings are meaningful within the study's context, they should be interpreted with caution and not generalized to all educational environments. Future research could address these limitations by including a larger, more diverse sample and incorporating additional data collection methods, such as observations or longitudinal studies, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Prospective Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study open up several avenues for future research. One potential direction is to explore the experiences of teachers and students across different educational levels, from primary schools to higher education institutions, to see if the impact of digital learning platforms varies with age, teaching experience, or subject matter. Another area for future investigation is the role of cultural differences in shaping how digital platforms are perceived and used in different parts of the world (H. Wang dkk., 2023). Given the rapid evolution of technology, it would also be valuable to explore how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence or virtual reality, are influencing the teaching and learning experience. Lastly, longitudinal research could help assess the long-term effects of digital platform integration on both teaching practices and student learning outcomes. These studies would contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital education and further inform best practices for educators and policymakers in designing and implementing effective technology-driven learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of teachers and students with digital learning platforms, addressing the gap in understanding the subjective, lived experiences that shape technology use in education. The findings reveal that while digital platforms enhance communication and engagement, they also present challenges related to usability and the loss of personal interaction. Teachers expressed both empowerment and frustration, while students valued the flexibility but struggled with platform complexity. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the dual impact of digital learning tools, moving beyond surface-level metrics to explore the emotional and experiential aspects. The study addresses gaps in previous research by providing a phenomenological perspective on how digital tools are truly experienced in educational settings. Future research could expand on these findings by examining a wider range of educational contexts, exploring the implications of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, and investigating how these innovations—such as adaptive learning systems or AI-powered tutoring—could influence teaching practices, learning outcomes, and the overall student experience.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study. The research was conducted without any financial or personal relationships that could be perceived as influencing the outcome of the study.

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