Evaluation of the functionality of the virtual platform in the teaching process: analysis based on the usability factor

Omar Chamorro-Atalaya¹, Dora Arce-Santillán¹, Guillermo Morales-Romero², Beatriz Caycho-Salas³, Teresa Guía-Altamirano⁴, César León-Velarde⁵, Risley Rengifo-Tello⁶

¹Faculty of Engineering and Management, Universidad Nacional Tecnológica de Lima Sur, Lima, Perú
²Faculty of Science, Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle, Lima, Perú
³Faculty of Business, Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle, Lima, Perú
⁴Faculty of Pedagogy and Physical Culture, Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle, Lima, Perú
⁵Faculty of Industrial and Systems Engineering, Universidad Nacional Federico Villarreal, Lima, Perú
⁶Department of Science, Universidad Privada del Norte, Lima, Perú

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ABSTRACT

The use of virtual platforms has been increasing exponentially during the context of distance education, however, there are still limitations to innovate in pedagogical proposals. This can hinder the assurance of student learning, either due to the little planning that occurred in its incorporation, the little knowledge of teachers and students in the educational use or the lack of use of the functionalities that they have incorporated for communication. The purpose of the research is to evaluate the operability of the virtual platform in the teaching-learning process through analysis based on the usability factor, the results will allow us to continue improving the tools linked to distance higher education. At the development of the investigation, a reliability value of 0.985 was obtained by means of Cronbach's Alpha. It was found as findings that 73.8% perceive an improvement in communication and in the exchange of information. Regarding the usability factor, 73.9% fully agree with the information available on the virtual platform and its accessibility. From what was determined, it is concluded that 65.98% of students consider that the functionality of the virtual platform with respect to the usability factor positively influences the teaching-learning process.

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Corresponding Author:
Omar Chamorro-Atalaya
Faculty of Engineering and Management, Universidad Nacional Tecnológica de Lima Sur
Jr. Los damascos 986, Los Olivos, Lima, Peru
Email: ocmathorro@untels.edu.pe

1. INTRODUCTION

In these times, a greater demand for technological infrastructure is perceived in the educational processes of university learning [1]. In the presence of a pandemic scenario and with the strong need to move from a presence mode to a virtual mode of learning, this demand showed greater growth as educational institutions sought to continue the academic service [2]. However, by massively and permanently including this type of technological tools in the day-to-day learning process, it has meant that both students and teachers can adapt to achieve better interaction virtually [3], [4]. Under this reality, the teacher is assuming a preponderant role since they are the ones who initially transmit the characteristics and functionalities of these new learning environments to the students [5]-[7].

Currently, there is talk of synchronous and asynchronous sessions, and that is where the use of virtual platforms becomes relevant, since they are part of the teacher's teaching strategies, which helped some...
educational institutions to modify their curricular design as well as methodological aspects [8], [9]. The use of technological tools, as well as their resources, have allowed the creation of virtual spaces in which an interactive environment is evident that encourages collaborative work between students and teachers [10]. Other aspects, which show the benefits and advantages of working with virtual platforms, is the generation of permanent reflection and criticism in order to promote significant learning experiences [11]. To determine the quality of the service provided to students through virtual platforms, one of the indicators to monitor is availability, a relevant aspect that must be guaranteed in order to ensure that students have efficient learning [12], [13].

Based on what has been pointed out, there is an expectation about how the performance and operability indicators of virtual platforms are measured or monitored in the context of university learning [14], [15]. There are several studies focused on evaluating the functionality of virtual platforms through the opinions of the students themselves, through a questionnaire that seeks to obtain their perception regarding the satisfaction of the virtual environment [16]-[18]. The virtual tools offered by universities should always be optimized seeking to improve student satisfaction [19]-[21]. Based on these assessments, the study of the quality of the technological tools that allowed the continuity of the university academic service is considered relevant [22], [23].

With which it is necessary to measure which aspects are necessary to improve or aspects in which there is a greater dissatisfaction of the students [24], [25]. Educational institutions must focus full attention on permanently evaluating the infrastructure used for virtual teaching, but focusing mainly on the perception of students [26]-[28]. By virtue of the above, the research focuses on evaluating the functionality of the platform in the teaching-learning process through analysis based on the usability factor; the results will allow us to continue improving the tools linked to distance higher education. It should be noted that this research stems from a study conducted in [29].

2. LITERARY REVIEW

Educational institutions need to evaluate the role played by educational platforms in the development of the quality of education, because it is the central axis that requires focusing on the mode of teacher and student interaction, through an interactive work model in a digital environment that increases the interaction of the teacher with his classroom. Currently the platforms are the visible face of educational institutions and the perception of the student public is to characterize virtual education as a cold education and lack of motivation [30]. On the other hand, it is essential to ensure access to learning and its forms of evaluation in times of pandemic, to overcome certain barriers that are still accentuated in the current contexts related to access to information and communication technologies (ICT), to socio-emotional well-being, to the characteristics of learning and apprentice on forms and styles, and to the socioeconomic reality of each student.

In this sense, it is vital that educational institutions and government bodies focus on the way in which teaching-learning strategies are significant to achieve inclusion, comprehensiveness, interest, and motivation in students [31]. Following the line of research in Castro et al. [32], the new information and communication technologies (NTICs) and their incorporation into the educational world is a challenge that still needs to be analyzed and debated. Picón et al. [33] admits that adequate pedagogical training in digital methodologies is crucial to provide significant data for the evaluation of the performance of both the teacher and the technological tools used in teaching. Badía et al. [34], the experiences of teachers and students in terms of virtual environments during classes were explored, referring to the teacher-student interaction, the ways of teaching, as well as the needs and the necessary support to cope with this educational modality. In this research, it was found that the students, in general, demonstrated an adequate level of satisfaction with the face-to-face courses, based on a degree equivalent to the face-to-face courses of the faculty and the university as a whole.

3. METHOD

The methodology is of a descriptive level, initially the evaluation of the functionality will be analyzed based on the usability factor of the virtual platform. The evaluation is determined by the satisfaction of 756 students. The Chi-square test was used, as well as cross tables to determine the association of the indicators. The instrument used is a questionnaire, whose validation has been carried out in [6]. Through the SPSS v.25 software, Cronbach’s Alpha was determined, whose value obtained was 0.985. Table 1 shows the indicators used in the evaluation of the functionality of the virtual platform. Table 2 details the indicators used in the analysis of the usability of the virtual platform.
Table 1. Evaluation of the virtual platform indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Evaluation of the virtual platform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>The virtual platform offers resources that contribute to the viability of the learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>The virtual platform provided support to teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>After the class session, the platform provides exchange of information between the student and the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>The platform helped group learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>The platform contributed to optimizing communication between teachers and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6</td>
<td>The platform contributes to the social link and teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F7</td>
<td>The platform contributed to improving the safety of the teaching-learning process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Usability of the virtual platform indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Usability of the virtual platform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Access at all times to the information uploaded on the virtual platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>The platform enhances meaningful learning in students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>The platform offers an individualized learning space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>The platform provides benefits that meet the expectations of the teaching process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>The platform provides educational materials that complement the teaching-learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>The evaluation on the platform allows to achieve the competences defined in the subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>Possesses the main skills to drive the platform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 shows the interaction architecture of the usability factor of the virtual platform with respect to collaborative learning based on student-teacher and student-student interaction, with the purpose of achieving the development of skills and abilities linked to the contents of the subject. Likewise, it is highlighted that among the relevant factors in the evaluation of the platform, accessibility to content, personalized learning, the development of synchronous and asynchronous activities, the ease of uploading and downloading data in different formats (for example, if the platform accepts specific formats of engineering software such as MATLAB, Fluid Sim, Logo Soft Comfort), and finally the resources for student evaluation.

Figure 1. Interaction architecture of the virtual platform with student learning

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It can be established from Figure 2 that 73.8% of the students totally agree and agree with the perception of an improvement in the transfer of information (F5). Likewise, 71.4% "totally agree" and "agree" with the perception that its use made the activities of the teaching process more efficient and safer (F7). While 21.4% indicated that they neither agree nor disagree that the platform helped group learning (F4) and that the use of the platform favored social relations by promoting teamwork (F6). In this regard, the research in Lagunas et al. [27] specifies that 3.44% of students specify that virtual tools did not allow them the necessary communication with their fellow students and teachers, for which they establish as inadequate for virtual learning while 47% totally agree.
Figure 2. Evaluation of the functionality of the virtual platform

Figure 3 shows the findings regarding the analysis based on usability. The results indicate that 73.9% "totally agree" and "agree" with the information available on the platform and its accessibility (U1). Likewise, 73.8% "totally agree" and "agree" that they perceive they have relevant information to manage the platform (U7). On the other hand, 16.7% responded that they "totally disagree" with the available functionalities (U2) and that the platform provides aspects that complement the teaching process (U5). In the same line of opinion in [28], 72.5% of the respondents specify a "low" weighting for the use of the platform, stating that this resource does not satisfy the student's requirement.

Guerrero et al. [35] specified that virtual educational tools that operate efficiently are relevant, in this regard 60% of the sample affirms that the application of these resources allows the teaching process to lead to the development of sessions with greater security of knowledge learning. On the other hand, 65.98% are "very satisfied" with the operation of the platform and affirm that it has a positive influence on educational processes. In relation to the results in [36], it is specified that 62% stated that they prefer their teaching through ICT, since it improves their learning, 62.5% indicated that ICT contributed to the development of the acquired capacities and 59% stated that they agree that ICT contributed positively in class sessions. Likewise, it was found that there is an association between the study indicators, for which the Chi-Square statistic was used. As can be seen in Table 3, for all cases the asymptotic significance turned out to have a value of zero, which establishes that there is an association between the variables.
Regarding Table 3, it is evident that there is a significant level of association between the indicators. Tabassum [37] a moderate and significant relationship between the indicators of technological tools and collaborative learning is specified. Through the analysis of crossed tables, the findings related to the perception of the students will be described. Table 4 shows the association of the students' perception of indicators F4 and U4.

Table 4. Cross tables F4 and U4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that of the total sample under analysis, 7.1% said they "totally disagree" with indicators F4 and U4, 16.7% agree that the platform contributed to collaborative learning (F4) stating that they neither "agree" nor "disagree" that the platform provides multiple benefits that satisfy the teaching-learning process (U4). In [38] it is stated that the indicators of communication modalities and virtual learning environments show excellent internal consistency with relational values of 0.88 and 0.84. In Table 5, the results show that 75% of the students indicated that they totally disagree with indicators F5 and U2, 18.2% that they "agree" that the platform improved communication by exchanging information between teachers and teachers students (F5).

Table 6 shows the association between F3 and U3. In addition, it can be seen that 7.1% indicated that they "totally disagree" with F3 and U3, 11.8% that they "agree" that for asynchronous sessions the virtual platform contributed to communication between teachers and students. (F3), as well as indicating that they neither agree nor disagree with the platform offering a private learning environment (U3).
5. CONCLUSION
From the results it can be concluded that there is a higher percentage of students who are very satisfied with the functionality of the platform and the resources it provides to students. Thus, it was also possible to identify that students significantly consider that it positively influences the teaching-learning process, since they perceive an improvement in communication and in the exchange of learning resources between classmates. They also agree that this type of technological tools applied to the teaching process made the activities more efficient and safer, since the accessibility to the contents is permanent. On the other hand, 16.6% of the population under study are dissatisfied with the functionality of the platform since it did not allow them to improve the teaching-learning process, in terms of the usability factor, it is linked to the material and resources available on the platform virtual that does not enhance meaningful learning.

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REFERENCES
BIographies of authors

Omar Chamorro-Atalaya is an electronic engineer, graduated from the National University of Callao (UNAC), with a Master's degree in Systems Engineering and a doctoral student at the Faculty of Administrative Sciences at UNAC. Researcher recognized by CONCYTEC (National Council of Science, Technology and Technological Innovation – Peru). Research professor at the National Technological University of South Lima (UNTELS), he teaches courses on automatic process control and industrial automation, and design of control panels and electrical control. He can be contacted at email: ochamorro@unteels.edu.pe.

Dora Arce-Santillán is an electrical mechanical engineer, with a Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering with a mention in Engineering Project Management at the National University of Callao (UNAC). She is the author of scientific articles indexed in Scopus and WoS. She reviewer of scientific articles in international journals indexed to Scopus. She can be contacted at email: yvonne.asantillan@gmail.com.

Evaluation of the functionality of the virtual platform in the teaching process … (Omar Chamorro-Atalaya)
Guillermo Morales-Romero is an External Evaluator in University Higher Education at SINEACE. Doctor in Educational Sciences, Master in Systems Engineering, Master in Public Management, Master in Educational Management, Bachelor of Mathematics and Computer Science. Lawyer with specialist in computer auditing, computer security. He has 24 years of experience in University Teaching in the careers of Engineering, Computer Science, Law, Mathematics Education, Statistics. Teacher in the different Postgraduate Schools of Public and Private Universities of the Country. Member of the Scientific Committee of the Scientific Journal: Ciencia & Sociedad Autónoma University Tomás Frias de Bolivia; Member of the Scientific Committee of the Multidisciplinary Magazine Ciencia Latina. Mexico. Member of the Lima Chamber of Commerce and the Lima Bar Association. Former specialist in the AGEBAT Area of UGEL 05 - MINEDU. He can be contacted at email: gmorales@une.edu.pe.

Beatriz Caycho-Salas is a principal professor at the Faculty of Business Sciences of the Enrique Guzmán y Valle University. She is an academic researcher, her lines of research are linked to administration, business and the skills that future professionals require to be strategically linked to issues beyond the highly competitive markets in the world of the globalized economy. She shares teaching with the exercise of various positions such as Head of the Academic Department, Director of Studies, Director of the Research Unit, Dean (e) and currently Director of the Academic Department of Administration and International Business of the Faculty of Business Sciences. She can be contacted at email: bcaycho@une.edu.pe.

Teresa Guía-Altamirano is a Doctor of Educational Sciences, with a Master's degree in teaching and management Educational, Bachelor of Education in the specialty of Mathematics and computer science at the Enrique Guzmán y Valle University, with more than 10 years of experience as Undergraduate university professor in different public and private institutions. My line of research is oriented to university Higher Education, author of statistics books applied to scientific research at the national level, I carry out research projects with competitive funds and participate as a national speaker, in addition to publishing scientific articles in international journals and indexed in repositories of great impact such as Scopus. She can be contacted at email: tguia@une.edu.pe.

César León-Velarde is a Doctor in Education, Master in Education: Measurement, Evaluation and Accreditation of Educational Quality, Master's Degree in Educational Management, Graduate and Bachelor of Education. He professor of Philosophy and CDSS. With more than 15 years of experience as a teacher in universities individuals and nationals of Peru. Results and awards. Teacher at the Federico Villarreal National University and several universities of Peru: University of San Marcos, Technological University of Peru and Others. Author of several published and indexed scientific articles, author of an academic book, member of the Scientific Committee of the Journal Interdisciplinary Latin Science, Mexico. Researcher Concytec. He can be contacted at email: cleon@unfv.edu.pe.

Risley Rengifo-Tello has a Master's degree in Mathematics from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (2007). He is currently a Science Specialist in Mathematics at the Universidad Privada del North. Oriented to obtain excellent results; resilient, organized and Committed to the entire work team. She can be contacted at email: risley.rengifo@upn.edu.pe.