



An analysis of student portal's experiences at the Zimbabwe Open University Manicaland Regional Campus

Lynn Mzizi^{1*}, Nicholas Mwareya², Juliet Mukaro³, Davie Mapfunde⁴, Charles Govero Chipika⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

¹mzizil@zou.ac.zw, ²mwareyan@zou.ac.zw, ³mukaroj@zou.ac.zw, ⁴mapfunded@zou.ac.zw,

⁵chipikac@zou.ac.zw

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ABSTRACT

In line with the international fraternity, the Zimbabwe Open University has adopted open and distance e-learning (ODEL) technology that uniquely empowers its teaching and learning approach. After creating the first version of My Vista that was fully functional in 2017, the Information Technology department in its efforts to continuously improve and empower students, created a new version of the My Vista student portal in 2022, which was made available to students and lecturers in January 2023. The old My Vista had its own challenges, hence the new version was created. This study is informed by the following objectives, to establish the accessibility of the new student portal to the students in conducting e-learning at the Zimbabwe Open University Manicaland Campus. To identify the e-learning challenges faced by students whilst using the My Vista student portal. To ascertain the e-learning reasons for students' dropouts at the Zimbabwe Open University. This study is based on the critical realism paradigm that considers reality based on social, political and economic contexts, a recent qualitative study complemented by digital ethnography as a research strategy to collect data from online platforms, attempts to analyze the e-learning portal experiences of students at ZOU Manicaland regional campus. The results showed that students face challenges in accessing the new student portal due to technical issues, lack of timely induction by the university, and issues related to the digital divide. It is recommended that the institution is asked to continuously update its system and increase the Wifi band coverage.



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INTRODUCTION

E-learning has become the 'new normal' and became acceptable as a form of delivery worldwide in the education fraternity resulting in all academic institutions spanning from colleges to universities offering certificates, diplomas and online degrees pursuing it. Nasir & Guvendik (2021) concur that, adoption of e-learning has nullified the borders in the education sector. As a technology assisted form of learning, e-learning is now popular all over the world as it is a very convenient way of teaching and learning (Trelease, 2016). Due to the rapid use of internet technology, e-learning system and service quality are now more important than information quality (Alatawi et al., 2021).

According to Singh et al., (2021), in India, the desire for ongoing, flexible education and training, combined with the growing bandwidth of more powerful information and communication technologies, is driving major corporate advancements in the e-learning business. Osei et al., (2022) highlight that, in America, e-learning motivation does play a crucial role in the adoption and also the use of technology as this can work as a motivation for the students. To be noted is that e-learning motivation does differ from conventional learning and such effort expectancy must be embedded into e-learning motivation technology. However, there is no empirical evidence of the influence of students' e-learning motivation on e-learning systems use and adoption. Conversely, "e-learning" motivation and "social influence" have both a favorable impact on students' behavioral intentions (Chu & Chen, 2016). However, "facilitating condition" had no effect on e-learning portal use in institutions of higher learning in South America as they used behavior influenced e-learning motivation positively. The moderation role of "region" was also discovered. Ruuskanen et al (2019) also argue that most students in institutions

of higher learning in Peru preferred conventional type of learning over open and distance e-learning. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) was viewed mostly positively by those who are working and are above the age of twenty-four years and they revealed a functionalist approach to learning meaning that they associated ODL with a very effective way of education.

In the Zimbabwean context, the majority of lecturers (97.5%) have no expertise in distance education (Munamati et al., 2024). Effective use of remote learning technology through training of teaching professionals in the use of distance education as a form of delivery is therefore apparent. A few African scholars are now acquainted with online instruction. This scenario makes developing online education on the continent difficult. However, the benefits of online learning have since been enjoyed in various areas in Zimbabwe despite the fact that the technique has not produced the same results (Nyamudzodza et al., 2021). This is evident because during the covid 19 pandemic lockdown, schools were closed for almost a year resulting in them recording lower pass rates because of lack of resources to foster online learning.

According to Chinamasa & Neube (2023), learning institutions in Zimbabwe make use of WhatsApp, which is the most popular e-learning platform and this was the initiative of lecturers and students in response to the need for distance learning. Factors boosting WhatsApp's dominance include smartphones availability and its ease of use by both lecturers and students. WhatsApp's adaptability for many purposes such as texts messages, videos and images are critical to its popularity. Factors that discourage the adoption of other e-learning platforms include: a lack of awareness of the application based on hearsay, financial challenges for data bundles, poor internet connectivity in Zimbabwe, a lack of technical support culture and at national level – power cuts as a result of load shedding (Tarhini et al., 2017). From the arguments of these two scholars, there is also a need for public awareness initiatives to promote the existence of more e-learning platforms. Institutions must provide assistance to their lecturers and students. There is also an indication that most institutions in Zimbabwe do not use the student portals for e-learning because of the lack of resources.

When the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) opened its doors in 1999 as an Open and Distance (ODeL) institution, it was delivering face to face lectures and students were submitting assignments manually in its regional campuses in Zimbabwe. However, a new vision was later brought to the fore by the then Vice Chancellor Professor Primrose Kurasha and her vibrant IT team that introduced online learning and a platform to do so. This was the birth of the 'My Vista' student portal which is a technology enabled platform that was to be utilized to fulfil teaching and learning online. However, when the My Vista platform became fully operational in 2017, both students and staff members had numerous challenges (Chirume & Thondhlana, 2019). The development of this online portal came with its own challenges such as failure to recognise some students' personal identity numbers, missing results, failure to register by students as their courses were missing on the portal (Bishop et al., 2017). Care et al., (2018) also argue that students experienced difficulties using the My Vista platform to register, communicate with other students and lecturers due to inadequate resources, poor network and academic staff who did not respond to their messages. This system was then replaced by the new My Vista student portal which came into effect in 2022 but was availed for use by the students and lecturers from the January 2023 semester. The system was meant to be an upgrade of the previously used student portal for e-learning purposes which includes submission of assignments, online registration, online fees payments and accessing study materials. The present qualitative study sought to ascertain these findings from the perspective of Zimbabwe Open University Manicaland Campus.

This study is informed by the following objectives, to establish the accessibility of the new student portal to the students in conducting e-learning at the Zimbabwe Open University Manicaland Campus. To identify the e-learning challenges faced by students whilst using the My Vista student portal. To ascertain the e-learning reasons for students' dropouts at the Zimbabwe Open University.

The present qualitative study is informed by both the technological determinism theory as well as the public's sphere theory. The term 'technological determinism' was coined by Thorstein Veblen and propounded by Canadian scholar, Marshal McLuhan. The theory stipulates that technology, more than any other factor, influences social behaviour to change. In other words, technology shapes how individuals in a society think, feel, act and how a society behaves as it moves from one technological

age to the other (Zuboff, 2023). This theory revolves around the proposition that technology in any given society defines its nature. This means that the theory aims to provide a causative link between technology and a society's nature. It tries to explain as to whom or what could have a controlling power in human affairs. The theory questions the degree to which human thought or action is influenced by technological factors.

The theory of technological determination is relevant to the current study in that technological determinism manifests itself at various levels of the e-learning process. It initially starts with the introduction of newer technologies like My Vista platform which introduces various changes and at times these changes can also lead to a loss of existing knowledge as well. For example, the introduction of e-learning methods has seen the gradual loss of knowledge of traditional means of learning which are face to face human social interaction, writing assignments physically in the students' own handwriting and reading physical copies of books from the physical library. This implies that technology is also influencing the level of knowledge in the Zimbabwean society, to bench mark against the level of the developed countries. Furthermore, the society will be transformed by e-learning technology since distance will no longer be a barrier to education and learning.

The internet as a new public sphere can help to foster discussions that encourage the exchange of new ideas and opinions (Shao & Wang, 2017). The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube have enabled users or students to freely communicate with one another and as a result to come together around a particular topic. To publish something online is to communicate but it also refers to being connected to other people online. Since anybody may access published content on social media, there are no longer any geographical or infrastructure barriers. This means that the freedom of expression and consequently to the right of assembly. Never before has it been so simple for people to unite and get together to voice their disagreement or disapproval on a particular issue that affects a particular community. The WhatsApp platform which is used by the students to interact is a public's sphere.

RESEARCH METHODS

Entrenched in a critical realism paradigm, which perceives reality as underpinned by the social, political and economic context (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017). That is to say, its understanding changes from one context to another. This approach is useful to this study as it seeks to analyse students' perceptions on the use of the new My Vista students' portal at ZOU Manicaland Campus. Digital ethnography acted as a tool for data collection from the WhatsApp group called ZOUMNIC AUG 2022 INTAKE. Research ethics are vital to adhere to when executing a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). In the context of this research, consent was sought from the regional campus administrator in addition to minimizing harm to the group participants by coding them using letters of the Alphabet (A-T). This naming system promoted anonymity and confidentiality which according to Lincoln and Guba in Shulz (2025), promotes transparency as well as enabling the participants to open-up more as they share the sought-after information. A qualitative approach adopted is ideal as it helped in unravelling and bring social meanings shared by participants. Also, the use of Digital ethnography for data collection automatically made the study more qualitative in nature (van Hees et al., 2017).

Digital ethnography enabled the researcher to follow up the proceedings and deliberations made by the students and the screenshots the students were sending on the group taken from their student portals. Purposive sampling was used to identify the relevant messages and screenshots of pictures for the study as dictated by Devers and Frankel. The purposive sampling technique, also known as 'judgement sampling' was adopted to select information-rich cases so as to address the research questions. The study population comprised of a group of 193 students who were added on the group upon enrolment for the 2022 August intake from different programs and a few academic and administration staff members from which a purposive sample of 20 was selected. Data was analyzed using critical discourse analysis. Jorgensen and Phillips in Uddin (2024) define discourse as 'the general idea that language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life, familiar examples being 'medical discourse' and 'political discourse' and discourse analysis entails 'the analysis of these patterns. This is relevant to the study as

discourse analysis enabled the researcher to interpret the educational discourse posted by the students in the form of texts, pictures and voice notes on the WhatsApp group.

By critiquing the messages, screenshots of the messages that were appearing on their students' portal, researchers were enabled to bring meaning and interpretation of the challenges that the students were facing which were affecting their e-learning activities at the university. Critical discourse analysis thus helped to unpack even the hidden meaning for a better understanding to both the students and the university staff so that they could all be assisted in finding solution to the problems and solving them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the first semester of 2023 that is in January 2023 students and staff members were told to use the New My Vista student portal for all the teaching and learning activities. During that period there were no much activities since the students were waiting for the results of the previous semester as well as the official opening of the new semester thus the January to June 2023 semester. This came as a surprise to the students and the staff members who were not told in time and oriented on how they would log into the new portal, upload study materials as well as conduct online teaching and learning activities. Students vented their anger through the messages that they were sending on the WhatsApp group.

Participant A posted, 'Afternoon gud people nhayi new My Vista ndinodii after ndaisa pin.' (Afternoon, good people, what do I do the the new My vista after typing my student number?) Response from another student participant B, 'New my Vista uses student email address to log in, Old My Vista uses student PIN You have to create your student email first.' From the message posted by Participant A was asking the group participants what was supposed to be done after logging into the student portal then participant B replied differentiating the old My Vista student logging in credentials which made use of the student number whilst the new My Vista students portal requires students to log in using their university e-mail addresses. The above student MK was asking for help from other group members on what was supposed to be done after logging into the new My Vista portal in order to access his or her student portal. This however is an indication that the student had no knowledge on the actual steps to take to successfully log into the portal.

Some of the students managed to log into their new student portals but were not aware on how to proceed in order to access other contents of the portal despite the instructions which were reflected upon logging in. This is indicated by the message posted by participant C 'I am struggling to log into new My Vista, old yacho irikuita hayo but zvimwe hazvisi kuita. Ko iwo ma courses arikubuda achokare tiri ma 1.1.' (I am struggling the load into the new My Vista, the old one is still functional but other functions are no longer available and it's showing our first year first semester courses which we did long back.)

Response from participant D, 'ini mine is failing to open, irikunditi password incorrect but I'm certain I'm putting the right password. It's giving me an option of changing my password and asks for my mobile number so that they can send a verification code, I'm entering my mobile number but no message is coming through. Handisati ndambonetswa ne My Vista lyk izvozvi iiiiii apa kuti uite log in unotambura' (As for me, I am failing to access my portal its reading password incorrect yet I have the assurance that I used the correct password. It is giving me an option of changing my password and asks for my mobile number so that they can send me a verification code, I am entering my mobile number but no message is coming through. I have never been bothered by the My Vista portal the way I have been now and it's now a struggle to log in.)

Participant E joined the discussion by saying, 'Ini ndawona moto irikutoramba kuti ndiite the process ye New My Vista kkkk. Irikuita se iya pane panonzi click here to log in, haaa ukaita zvekutamba unoswerapo ichikuudza kuti time out.' (I have been bothered as well with the logging in process of the New My Vista especially where it reflects click here to log in, if you are not serious you can spend the whole day there and the system can time you out.)

From the above discussion between participant C, participant D and participant E, the students are engaging in a free discussion and enjoying the use of WhatsApp as a public sphere coming together for a common cause and also shows how technology has revolutionized education in line with the argument of Grimus in Pang & Woo (2020). Since participant C is continuing to encounter the same logging in challenges there is need for digital literacy as echoed by List (2019). On the other had another challenge that the students are facing to access the new My Vista portal being drawn from their conversation where student D says that he is struggling to assess his portal and the courses reflecting on the portal are the courses which he did on his first year meaning he was not able to find the current courses he was doing on his portal for registration. Participant E on the other hand highlighted that the challenge she is facing is to do with the system's failure to recognize her student number for her to access the portal and student PM highlighted that he had challenges to do with the whole My Vista process and the system in timing him out. Summing up the uniform challenge faced by these three students is the constant technical issues on the platform as echoed by Guo (2017). They highlight that technical problems of online education often require technical support to rectify them because they cause frequent disruptions in the learning flow and may lead to student abandoning the courses because of frustrations and this is indicated in these students' discussions. The WhatsApp student platform on the other hand has been helpful for students to vent out the challenges that they are facing freely.

Accessibility of the new students' portal for e-learning

The findings indicate that one of the challenges being faced by some of the students in accessing the new portal is lack of knowledge. Some of the students managed to log into their new student portals but were not aware on how to proceed in order to access other contents of the portal despite the instructions which were reflected upon logging in. Student F posted on the group, 'pane amboitawo access My Vista portal here yangu irikudai, 'error, database connection failed'. (Has anyone accessed the My Vista portal, mine is showing this message 'error, database connection failed).

Another participant G to student F, 'haisi kuita. Tried since 1am'. (Its down, I have tried it since 1am). Participant E responded to participant G and participant G 'iri down, ndo zvairi kuita. (Its down, that is what mine is also showing). The information shown on participant F screenshot of his portal is showing a message from the system reading 'Error, database connection failed. It is possible that the database is overloaded or otherwise not running properly the site administrator should also check that the database details have been correctly specified in configuring'. From the message of participant G, he seems to be facing a database system related challenge and there was no response on how it can be dealt with from the members of staff who are part of the group and this is in agreement with the echoes of Kombe & Mtonga (2021) who highlighted that another e-learning challenge face by students has to do with lack of in person interaction. This then goes against the encouragement of the e-learning concept and also the university mandate of making ZOU an e-learning university of choice globally. El-Sabagh (2021) also argue that universities should strive to design e-learning systems that improve and encourage students' interactive engagement. Riding on this argument, there is a gap between the ZOU staff and students in terms of students' interaction and engagement which need to be filled. On the concept of the Harbamas's publics' sphere theory, solutions can be found through active participation of every public on the public's sphere and solutions can be found (Visser, 2019). This could be as a result of the sentiments raised by Gourlay & Oliver (2016) who highlight that working with computers does not necessarily translate to digital literacy meaning though the students had electronic gadgets at their disposal but could not manage to manoeuvre through it alone in order to enjoy the services offered on the student portal on their own.

The findings also indicate that some of the students had challenges in accessing their students' portal due to a new way of logging into the new My Vista which was different from the old My Vista student portal. The old portal required the students to log in using their student numbers and the password they had created which was no longer applicable to the new system. The new system required students to use their new university emails which consisted of their student numbers. This was noted when student E message which read 'yangu is saying, this username maybe incorrect make sure you typed it correct, otherwise contact the administrator' (mine is saying, this username maybe incorrect make sure you typed it correctly, otherwise contact the administrator). The response from another participant F, 'change the browser'. The above conversation between participant E and F is a reflection

of a student-centred technological solution and this might be due the lived technological experiences of participant F. There is a possibility that the new My Vista students' portal responds differently from different browsers as per the sentiments echoed by participant E hence an indication that technological determinism manifests itself at various levels of e-learning. This brought frustrations to the students as they were not aware and lacked the knowledge on doing it. The students were therefore sending screenshots on what was appearing on their portals in order to seek help from other members of the WhatsApp group. There is a possibility that the students did not receive orientation on how to use the new student portal hence in agreement with the sentiments of Ruuskanen et al., (2019) that the evolution of the education system requires the technological determinants to be taken into consideration in the curriculum development. With these sentiments, one can argue that there is a need for the consideration of technology in the development of higher education curriculum amongst universities in Zimbabwe as argued by Dube & Scott (2017).

The continuation of students encountering the same logging in challenges indicated the need for digital literacy as echoed by Mohammadyari & Singh (2015). On the other hand, another challenge that the students were facing to access the new My Vista portal being drawn from their conversation which imply that after finally logging in successfully the courses reflecting on the portal are the courses which they had already done meaning that the current courses on the portal for registration were not available.

Another challenge highlighted is to do with the system's failure to recognize the student number resulting to the whole My Vista process and the system timing the student out. Participant G also responded by showing a screenshot of his portal display after trying to log in by saying, 'yangu ikudai 'system timed out, connection failed'ndodii' (mine is showing the message 'system timed out, connection failed, what do I do). Summing up the uniform challenge faced by these three students is the constant technical issues on the platform. Technical problems of online education often require technical support to rectify them because they cause frequent disruptions in the learning flow and may lead to student abandoning the courses because of frustrations and this was indicated in these students' discussions. The WhatsApp student platform on the other hand has been helpful for students to vent out the challenges that they are facing freely.

There were also screenshots messages from the system reading 'Error, database connection failed. It is possible that the database was overloaded or otherwise not running properly the site administrator should also check that the database details have been correctly specified in configuring'. From the message of students' screenshot picture, one can deduce that there is a database system related challenge and there was no response on how it can be dealt with from the members of staff who are part of the group and this is in agreement with the echoes of Kombe & Mtonga who highlighted that another e-learning challenge face by students has to do with lack of in person interaction. This then goes against the encouragement of the e-learning concept and also the university mandate of making ZOU an e-learning university of choice globally. Secreto & Pamulaklakin also argue that universities should strive to design e-learning systems that improve and encourage students' interactive engagement. Riding on this argument, there is a gap between the ZOU staff and students in terms of students' interaction and engagement which need to be filled. On the concept of the Harbamas's publics' sphere theory, solutions can be found through active participation of every public on the public's sphere and solutions can be found.

The results also indicated that the new My Vista student's portal responds differently from different browsers as per the sentiments echoed by students indicating that technological determinism manifests itself at various levels of e-learning. There was also a positive response as the interaction continued with staff members being acquainted to the logging in process as one of the staff members posted a notice in the form of a pdf file on the group with instructions on how to create a student email and log in to the portal in response to the students' messages. This however was a positive response to the students in the group hence encouraging interaction and positive feedback from the students which is in line with the technological determinism theory which encourages educational practices which meet and caters for the needs of individuals and hence equipping students on how to access the individual student portal.

E-Learning challenges faced by the students in accessing the new My Vista student portal

Logging in challenges

E-learning is mostly made possible by technology (Bower, 2019). Generally speaking, an e-learning system's success is largely dependent on the quality of internet access. One can have greater access capabilities for lecturers and students to access during their free time by watching and downloading the free study materials from different sources on the portal. Another technological factor which influences e-learning is the digital divide (Zhao et al., 2022). Thus not all student enrolling at the institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe and ZOU in particular have access to a mobile phone or electronic device or gadget to access the internet. This therefore is a major contribution towards a successful implementation of e-learning. Technophobia is another technological factor influencing the effectiveness of e-learning on the new My Vista student portal as highlighted by Pires & Sousa (2022). Some students are computer illiterate and this affects their e-learning process since the student portal is used for online registration, submission of assignments, accessing study material, accessing the Microsoft links for tutorials, accessing assignments feedback and results. In actual essence, everything to do with teaching and learning is done through the use of the students' portal at the ZOU Manicaland Campus. The results indicated that a sizeable number of students were facing logging in challenges as a result of the introduction of the new student portal which they were not yet familiar with. This resulted in them being frustrated and sending screenshots and messages on the WhatsApp group seeking advice and guidance from other group members.

Registration challenges

Students were failing to register since some of their courses were not appearing on the portal to enable them to register online. Participant H wrote, 'makatokwanisa ku register here nekuti new My Vista irikunetsa registration' (Have you managed to register because the new My Vista is challenging when it comes to online registration). Another participant I posted a similar message on the group 'I am trying to register only one wrong course is appearing the other three courses are missing. Saka ndodii ne (so what do I do) with the online registration?' In some instances, as highlighted by participant I, the wrong courses were appearing and they had to approach the university IT department to have the correct modules uploaded on their student portal. The design of the student portal determines its accessibility to the students (Munyanyi, 2021). If the students' portal design is designed in a way that makes it user friendly it will be easily accessible to all the students and there will be less log in challenges and it will function to its maximum potential. The student portal must be upgraded now and again as well as maintained so as to avoid system congestion and crashing as a result of increased traffic or any other technical issues as stated by Bringular in Siegel et al., (2017). The student portal must be designed in such a way that accommodates students with special needs.

Submission of assignments

The results also revealed that students were facing challenges in uploading their assignments on the new student portal. In some cases, the system preferred certain types of files over others and also it was set up to allow a specific file size and the students discovered upon submission that according to the system their file type and sizes were not permitted by the new system. Participant J sent this message on the group, 'help guys am failing to upload assignments.'

Participant K wrote 'guys I am having problems with submitting my assignment on this course asi mwame arikuita (but I have managed to submit a few)'. Participant L wrote, 'Guys I am facing a challenge of uploading assignment BSSD205 project planning and I talked to the course lecturer and said the due date haisati yapfuura (the due date has lapsed) but I can't submit My Vista irikuramba (the My Vista portal is down)'. Participant M 'iwe tanga wabaya icon re download iro and wozoenda pakanzi save changes apo. (first click the download icon and then save changes)'. Participant N, 'Hey guys portal irikuramba iyii todiniko apa due date rema assignments rasvika' (Hey guys am failing to access the portal and the assignment due date is close).

From the above discussions by the four participants, it can be noted that students were faced with challenges when submitting their assignments on the student portal. Drawing from the messages sent, some did not specify the exact challenges they were facing only participant J did send a screenshot of the message of what was appearing on his student portal. The message indicated that there was a

specific type of files that the system had been set up to allow for that module. This however is an indication of how disgruntled and frustrated students were at the institution because of lack of guidance hence they were influencing each other on the steps to take. This resonates with the sentiments of MaMaldonado et al., in Weng et al., (2015) who argue that both e-learning motivation and social influence have a favourable impact on behaviour.

Accessing Microsoft Teams for tutorials on the portal

Another challenge which was noted from the students' deliberations and the screenshot of the pictures they provided from their individual portals was the failure to access the Microsoft Teams in order to participate in the tutorials. Participant O's message, 'I am facing network problems, I am trying to open my My Vista student portal in order to access the tutorial link'. Participant P responded, 'Am here trying to connect too but the network yacho irikuramba (the network is down), Another participant Q, 'the network is bad too this side am failing to connect.' Participant O responds again, "eish the electricity has just gone and it's now a double tragedy'.

This however was also in part as a result of the network failure at the university, technical challenges noted from the above discussions, power cuts resulting to load shedding and poor network connection. According to Ninsiana et al., (2022) students are at the Centre of their e-learning process. Their attitudes however determine the level of grasping the concept of e-learning. They play a major role in determining the effectiveness of e-learning and also the use of My Vista students' portal at the Zimbabwe Open University. One of the factors affecting the students' experiences on the concept of e-learning are the course factors. Since the course study materials are posted on the students by the lecturer who is managing the course, if there are no periodic reviews the material becomes outdated. The course study material must be kept up to date for effectiveness of e-learning (Encarnacion et al., 2021).

Payment challenges

Apart from logging in challenges, students were highlighting payment challenges on the new portal. There were instances where the students' made payments to the bank and the amount disappears before registering online and this was a stumbling block since the portal system was configured in such a way that enables students to register after paying the minimum required amount of money. The students would then have to consult the accounts department for assistance and at that particular time cannot manage to attend tutorials, access study material and submit assignments until the problem was solved. Participant C. "my money just disappeared from the portal but I paid full fees can someone from the accounts office help me?" Participant J also reiterated 'portal iya yavhura asi mari yangu handichavoni hayi bodo, vakaita payment nezuro ma portal enyu arikudii' (I have managed to log into the portal but my fees which I paid yesterday is no longer reflecting, how about yours?). Participant G responded to participant C, 'Ini ndakaitawo payment last week but ndatambura ndiri kuita sendichatorara ndakagara but zvaramba' (I paid last week and have been having the same challenge). Participant H asked, 'Nhai vanhu ve ZOU ndakabhadhara fees kuswera nezuro nhasi futi pave nechikwereti chimwe moda kuti tidzidze here kana kuti fees yacho inokwira everyday ukabhadhara futi wotowona panechimwe chikwereti apa pane ma assignments anota ku submittwer moda kuti tiite sei chaizvo. Kana pane vanoda kufonerwa tipeiwo number dzacho tifone even muka extender date for registration tichingona zvikwereti everyday hazvibatsire' (ZOU people I cleared my outstanding fees balance the day before yesterday but now I have a balance on my portal and I am supposed to submit my assignments what do you want me to do. If there is a someone I am supposed to call for help, may you give me the number, even changing registration dates whilst such things are happening is useless).

Apart from the logging in challenges, students were highlighting payment challenges on the new portal. Participant C. was asking for help from the accounts department since he had made the fees payment and on the portal his balance was no longer appearing and he had paid full fees. Participant J had his balance also disappeared from the portal which now is a universal problem. Upon analysing the discourse of the students above the level of frustration can be noted as they were not getting the service that they were expecting. Participant H highlighted a concerning issue by saying when the My Vista portal is restored back to normalcy the rate of the Rtg\$ dollar will have gone up and they will be required to top up their fees so that they can register.

E-Learning reasons for students' dropout at the Zimbabwe Open University Manicaland Campus

Through the discussion carried out students highlighted challenges as high fees per module as a major reason for dropping out. Also drawing from the conversations, the students have been having on the group, another reason for dropouts is lack of technical support. It was found out that some students drop out at Zimbabwe Open University Manicaland campus as a result of technical challenges on the students' portal which frustrated them into quitting. Missing courses for registration and missing payments were also some of the reasons for students' dropouts.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there was lack of students' induction, computer literacy training, awareness and motivation prior to the introduction of the new student portal (My Vista) at the university. This resulted in students having numerous challenges in accessing the new portal. It was also concluded that the e-learning challenges encountered by the students were mostly technical and could be resolved if due diligence had been done prior to the introduction of the new students' portal. The researchers concur that students who drop out at Zimbabwe Open University Manicaland campus were as a result of technical challenges on the students' portal, high fees per module and missing payments on the new My Vista which frustrated them into quitting. Introduction of the new My Vista, was therefore long over-due in order to minimize the surging drop-out rate.

To this end, the study recommends that, despite challenges the lecturers and the students were facing, the system can be improved through such as increasing the coverage band of its Wifi in addition to creating and intensively using the WhatsApp platform to cater for those with My Vista connectivity hurdles. Above all, it emerged that, Zimbabwe Open University is one of the few institutions in Zimbabwe which is pioneering the students' portal-based e-learning which is so unique a system in its functionality.

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