

**EFFECT OF DIGITAL GOVERNANCE
ON THE QUALITY OF HIGHER
EDUCATION: THE CASE OF
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY**

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Author's Declaration

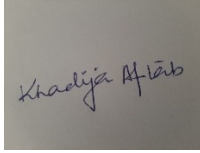
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Abstract

Assessing quality in university education is a serious challenge as it is a complex phenomenon. There is a dearth of studies that assess the effects of digital governance on the quality of university education. This study tries to contribute to this gap by exploring the effect of digital governance on quality of higher education through the case of Central European University. Twelve in-depth expert interviews were conducted from selected faculty members in addition to the study of written sources of data. This study employs triangulation to crosscheck consistency in data and conclusions of earlier studies. The study revealed that although faculty are using different kinds of digital tools and platforms while delivering their courses, they are not deeply familiar with the instruments of digital governance. They are incorporating many online and offline activities in their instruction. In their opinion, a combination of both conventional and digital learning tools is necessary for improving quality in education. The research recommends that universities should devise new policies to address digital governance and encourage its faculty to incorporate more digital tools in their pedagogical practices.

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Dedicated to COVID- 19,
you made my study more relevant than anything else!

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List of Abbreviations

CEU – Central European University

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INTRODUCTION

This study is about knowing the effects. Hence, it is an assessment study. It endeavors to study the studies on the effects of digital governance in universities. It also endeavors to suggest ways to improve the use of digital interventions in the quality of education in the governance of higher education. Digital governance is an emerging aspect in the field of university education. The primary purpose of digital governance is to create an environment of effective delivery of education and improved accountability of the participants in university education. Broadly, accountability refers to the efficient use of the resources to improve the capacity of the institution (Welchmann 2015). However, digital governance has direct and indirect implications for the quality of education and learning.

Quality is a subjective phenomenon in university education; it most likely depends on how and by whom students are taught by the instructors of an institution (Longanecker and Blanco 2003). It is divided into five different categories as (i) transcendent quality that is based on the reputation and expertise of the faculty, (ii) manufacturing based quality tailored to the fulfil certain kind of expectations (iii) product based quality generated based on student learning through curriculum and faculty (iv) value-based quality dependent on acceptable performance and (v) user-based learning that focuses on students choices and preferences (Fish 2003; Koslowski 2006). Students choices can be measured through content, faculty and grades received in the subject (Walker 2008). Higher education leaders and policymakers expect that digital governance will enable different stakeholders to control the operational efficiency in several processes like funding, feedback, assessment and performance. This step will result in increased and visible operational efficiency that will satisfy the needs of the students by providing them with more facilities and making their experience enjoyable. The role and benefits of digital governance in maintaining the standards of

higher education are vibrant. Well-structured digital governance can minimize the effect of preexisting issues in the institution.

Higher education institutions across the globe are working hard to maintain the quality of education to sustain in the economic sector as they are governed similarly as any other profitable organizations. The primary purpose is to target and attract students based on different magnitudes of quality of education (Ashraf, Ibrahim & Joarder 2009; Akareem & Hossain 2012).

The literature on digital governance has mostly been prescriptive, but there is little empirical evidence on how digital governance in higher education works in practice. The theoretical implications of this research are positioned in the recommendations of scholars who claim that the effect of digital governance on the quality of education is deep-rooted. Hence, it is debated and suggested that the future scholarship in the domain will focus on an empirical understanding of issues.

There is a visible increase in the use of technological content, i.e. digital tools and platforms in the field of education. These tools and platforms have not only effectively turned the shape of learning among students but also the teaching practices of the faculty within an institution. As a result, the difference between the traditional form of learning is narrowing down the gap with digital learning, and both are contributing to improving the quality of education at a higher level.

This research will explore the effect of digital governance on the quality of higher education in the Central European University and will further investigate the challenges they may encounter while implementing this system. This evidence-based policy formation may reveal fruitful avenues for the university to improve the quality of education utilizing digital governance. The contribution of this study is to use interpretative approach and explore the influence of digital governance in shaping the experiences of the quality of education in the context of Central European University.

Rationale of the Research

Although the structural costs of implementation of digital methods are very high than the traditional methods of teaching due to the advancement in the technologies, universities are very much interested in inventing their central digital systems to provide quality of education without any delay to the students. This present research is focused on considering the effectiveness of digital governance with that of quality of higher education while imparting digital tools and platforms in the system regarding Central European University. For this purpose, digital governance has been studied and analyzed through the lens of the faculty involved in using digital tools and platforms to impart knowledge among students.

GUIDING PERSPECTIVES

This chapter summarizes and critiques the studies conducted on the effects of digital governance on the quality in higher education. The quality of education has always been an important issue for education policy research. However, since the digital governance is a recent intervention in higher education, its multifarious effects on the quality of higher education have not been studied widely. Therefore, the studies reviewed here have been selected from a range of disciplines. These studies illuminate various aspects of quality in higher education ranging from motivation of the participants to the arrangements of the universities.

The interventions in higher education are usually made to improve quality of education being delivered. It is because continuously improving quality in higher education has always concerned higher education policymakers and researchers. It has become ever more important because universities are working as firms which focus on delivering certain elements of quality to their consumers. They are also giving more attention to the enhancement of quality of education for socio-cultural and economic reasons (Brookes and Becket 2007). In fact, quality provides an opportunity for success (Green 1995). Contemporary universities look at the education quality as a critical resource for being successful in the market of higher education. It differentiates success from failure by providing an opportunity to the institutions to achieve desired outcomes, outstanding academic staff, improved learning and assessment practices, support of other stakeholders, application of technology, excessive resources, strong leadership, developing challenging curricula and extended student care (Sallis 2002). There are more than 30 reasons that describe the implementation of quality in higher education (Kanjilal, Malek and Tambi 1999). These include continuous improvement, enhancing universities and their processes, providing a high

level of services to the customers, increased productivity and efficiency (Green 1995). It also considers increasing staff morale and student satisfaction (Owlia and Aspinwall 1997).

Universities are increasing the use of digital tools in teaching and learning practices and consider it as a critical element in the competitive economic market. The digitalization enhances the methodology of teaching and hence effects the quality of education in the long run (Yusuf 2005). It is essential to identify standard practices to utilize technology when addressing a diverse group of students. This step will result in better learning and development of skills among students (Rajesh 2003).

It is worth noting that digital literacy is a part of the skill set of an individual in the 21st century. Therefore, higher education institutions are likely to offer courses that use digital tools as a supportive mechanism in higher education (Vásquez-Colina et al. 2017). Factors like institutions (policies), humans (instructors and students) and course design (content) are highly responsible for the successful integration of technology into the learning and teaching practices (Viberg and Grönlund 2015). Online instructive material can also provide chances to the learners and lead them to the desired outcomes (Baldwin and Trespalacios 2017).

Digital tools add an element of flexibility and interdisciplinary methods in learning and learning practices. They also help the students to prepare themselves before attending a lecture and allow them to engage in more interactive activities. The courses are conducted with consistency in content (Bell et al. 2017; Vásquez-Colina et al. 2017; Wong and Sixl-Daniell 2017). Hence, digital tools and platforms support flexibility, an equal chance of education and support the learning process. The critical element is the right combination of the mix of conventional and digital tools in learning (Sonesson et al. 2017).

One of the critical elements in the course design is students' choice, their level of satisfaction (Lee 2014) and their perceived learning (Gray and Diloroto 2016) which has a more significant influence. The digital governance in higher education is being applied to set these elements rightly in education. These elements bring in good results in the learning. It is essential to blend in conventional and digital methods while designing the course (Cheng and Chau 2014; Fedynich, Bradley and Bradley 2015). However, many activities can be considered while designing a course.

Another element of digital governance in higher education relates to the use of various form of blended learning. The blended learning techniques combine the use of both digital tools and conventional tools under one space. The blended learning can become a part of everyday teaching and learning practices. This practice can be done by deliberately designing a course and including blended learning into it. Besides, chat sessions on different platform encourage students to connect with their instructors. It can also allow the instructors to be present in the students, fieldwork. This technique encourages inquiry-based learning (Hunt 2015).

In addition, faculty in universities are increasingly rethinking about their pedagogical practices and can think of using digital tools in many more ways than an effective presentation tool. It can also be a problem for the instructors because it requires some digital training (Tour 2016).

There are certain challenges of higher education related to components of the education system (Saillard 2011; Shah, Lewis and Fitzgerald 2011; Dick and Tari 2013). Thus, it is not easy to fully meet and implement the standards of quality in higher education.

Structural challenges like broadly defined quality assurance policies, lack of training of the faculty leading to a resistant behavior to use digital platforms and tools, time constraints for the faculty to

develop and upgrade their skills and lack of financial support affects the use of digital tools and quality of education in higher education institutions (Mahlangu 2017).

Different countries face different kind of issues while implementing the use of digital tools to improve the quality of higher education. For instance, Greece faces difficulty with the negative impression of the use of technology and its adverse effect on learning and teaching practices. Also, Germany faces challenges to the use of digital tools are increase in isolation and lack of bonding support and communication among the instructors and the students. In contrast, Hungary faces problems of higher costs of developing the system, lack of course content requiring digital tools and problems of learning among students (Arasaratnam-Smith and Northcote 2017).

Other problems that hinder the adoption of digital governance from enhancing the quality of higher education are the absence of technical support. It is supported by the study conducted in Tanzania, which revealed that insufficient capacity of the internet and fewer computers discouraged the faculty from practicing and incorporating different digital tools in their courses. Moreover, many of the faculty and instructors do not have a personal computer. Another less highlighted problem is the attitude of the instructor towards technology. It may result in the barrier in adopting and practicing digital techniques during the class (USUN 2004).

As this review has shown, many universities across the world have integrated elements of digital governance. These innovations have contributed to improve quality of higher education significantly. For example, overall student learning has improved, more students use internet to locate information, the online feedback mechanisms are found to be helpful for students. The systems and quality of education has been improved in many universities across the world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, case study, expert interviews, selection of experts for the research, sample design followed by triangulation of sources, development of research instruments and pilot testing.

The research is focused to exploring the effect of digital governance on the quality of higher education in the context of Central European University and tries to understand the process of the implementation, and challenges related to its implementation. In-depth, expert interviews were conducted to have a clear insight into the situation for this purpose.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To reveal the extent digital tools, serve to provide for quality education.
- To determine the level academicians, use digital technology effectively to serve the purpose of quality of education.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study are as follows:

- How does the faculty use digital platforms to contribute to enhancing the quality of higher education?
- What are the tools of digital governance practiced for providing transparent education and evaluation to the students?
- What are the impacts of implementation of digital governance for enhancing the quality of education at higher level of education?

Theoretical Framework

I have used the actor network theory (ANT) (Callon and Latour 1981; Callon 1984; Latour 1988; Law 1991; Law and Hassard 1999) to guide my study. ANT focuses on following the interactions between people, their ideas and the material objects (Latour 2005). As Latour encourages “to follow the actor,” I have studied relations between the actors involved in digital governance and their outcomes in the form of quality of university education. It provides a lens through which to analyze where a user and a technology sit in relation to each other but also in relation to a larger network of materials and people.

Case Study Method

A case study provides a rich understanding of the phenomenon (Stenhouse 1978) within its particular context and sensitizes the researcher to understand the challenges and the complex processes that are inseparable from the social context in which they occur (Cutler 2004; De Chesnay 2017). Therefore, this research adopted case study method and the data is collected from Central European University through multiple tools to have an in-depth and rich understanding of the phenomenon of digital governance and higher education (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier 2014).

Expert Interviews

An expert is a person who is responsible in one way or the other for developing, implementing or monitoring of an issue. An expert has a privilege of accessing information about people or decision processes. Expert interviews is a widely used method for data collection in educational research (Meuser and Nagel 1991).

Criteria for Selection of (experts)Participants

1. Participant who is holding a full time position at the university.
2. Participant belonging to different groups such as gender, age, years of experiences, position at the department.
3. Participant who is well informed and knowledgeable and can provide relevant information related to the topic of research.

Sample Design for In Depth Interviews

Central European University is comprised of fifteen departments in total. Four departments were randomly selected as the sample from the multi-disciplinary category and two from disciplinary category of departments. Participants were conveniently selected from these departments based on their availability for an interview. There were seven male and five female participants. The sample selection for the interviews are as follows:

Table I

Name of the department	Type of department	Sample taken
School of Public Policy	Multi-disciplinary	3
Department of International Relations	Multi-disciplinary	3
Department of Political Science	Disciplinary	3
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology	Disciplinary	3
Total number of Sample		12

Triangulation of Sources

Triangulation of sources is collecting information from different methods of data collection. It is a powerful tool use in research to validate the information collected (Patton 1991). It helps in confirming the reliability and generalizing the results (Vidovich 2003; Mayring 2007; Bryman 2012). In addition to this, it gives a clear understanding of the research problem and reveals unique results (Thurmond 2001). For this purpose, the researcher used CEU published document on Quality Assurance i.e. Institutional Assessment and Quality Assurance (IAQA) Policy ("Institutional Assessment And Quality Assurance (IAQA) Policy" 2018). It describes and explains the quality standards of education adopted by Central European University.

Research Instruments

A semi structured interview protocol was developed for the expert interviews. It is considered as the most suitable method of data collection in an exploratory study. It gives a lot of room and time to the experts to share their different experiences and perspectives. It allows the researcher to compare and handle new questions and also, give an opportunity to evaluate the validity of the answers provided (Louise Barriball and While 1994; Nohl 2017). The developed interview protocol consisted of an introductory section, questions of investigation and open ended question based on the literature about the quality of education and digital governance (Creswell 2014).

Pilot Testing

A pilot testing is conducted to find the problems and deficiencies in the research instrument before conducting the full research (Lancaster, Dodd and Williamson 2004; Kraemer et al. 2006). Hence,

it was conducted twice with the professors with an aim of checking the appropriateness of the interview questions, fitting the interview in a realistic time frame and the uniformity of the understanding of the question among different participants. The interview guide was then tailored and readjusted after the analysis of these interview.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter explains the narrative of twelve experts built on their experiences in Central European University while using different methods of digital governance (tools and platforms) in their daily pedagogical practices. Some professors are found to be more interested in learning and using digital methods, they prefer using more digital methods in their modules and curricula practices than other professors regardless of their age and experience.

The research confirms the confidentiality of the experts; therefore, their experiences and insights are summarized and clustered into themes and categories and elaborated by using direct expert quotations with the phrase of “*the interviewee*” to not to reveal their identity and coded further with letter “*R*” and a number.

Qualitative data is coded and analysed using MAXQDA. The research has adapted Creswell six steps. According to Creswell, the data must be prepared and organized for the analysis, skimmed to generate a broad sense of overall meaning. It is then coded the data by organizing the transcripts, clustering similar themes and descriptions. Lastly, themes are interlinked, and conclusions are interpreted and presented (Creswell 2014).

The results of this research have emerged after processing it through abductive coding and generating themes. The findings of this study will provide the basis for the universities with useful guidelines to incorporate different techniques of digital governance in the learning and teaching practices.

Findings of the Study

This section focuses on explaining understanding of digital governance, quality of higher education, practices of designing curriculum, experiences about co-teaching, and incorporating different digital platforms and tools in seminars, lectures, and assessment practices of the faculty of CEU. What opportunities and challenges do they face while using these digital tools and how they affect the quality of education? How students' choices and preferences play a role in their curriculum design and what kind of support is provided to them while designing the curriculum and using different digital platforms? How are their experiences with using university's personalized platforms, i.e. Moodle and SITS? The narratives gathered describe and explain the experiences of the faculty members in these aspects.

Quality of Education:

Faculty members define quality of education differently as per their understanding and perception. A variety of themes emerged in this category. Participants described the evolution and importance of quality in higher education concerning their experience at CEU. Therefore, the responses have categorized into different themes and sub-themes. Some of them related it to the objectives and learning outcomes of a course or a degree. While others categorized it as an education that has a certain kind of value, in the sense that offers knowledge, ensures that an individual develops personally even when he/she is working in a group form, and this experience later adds to his/her personality.

According to **R6's** point of view, there are some key components playing an essential role in effectively maintaining quality of education.

“It has to be defined by student experience and quality of information transfer. Those are two of the key determinants in my opinion that govern the quality of education. While there is another, and that is the institution itself. Not so much, but it plays a role too.”

R5 understands the quality of education as the way of an interdisciplinary, multi-method type of education that focuses not just on the body of material that should be transmitted in such a way that reflects on the personality of the student.

“In my opinion, it is to give the best available knowledge to students but also sought to educate them to certain academic behaviour, provide them with a certain attitude to think and make them critically think about different social phenomena. It is not just to give them many data that they absorb, and then they forget, but somehow to give them an attitude on how to approach certain social phenomena, certain things and not just take things as they are, as they appear to be but try to be able to ask critical questions about them. I think asking good questions is more important than finding the answers.”

While others focus on learning outcomes and fulfilment of learning objectives and student development, **R1** highlighted that instructors also play an essential role within an institution to maintain the quality of education.

“I understand, first of all, the proper preparation of the education model that as a teacher I want to deliver and by proper I mean there is a logical sequence and evolution to the subject of the course matter that it evolves and gets progressively more complex and more advanced as the

students move forward. Secondly, I think it requires a significant amount of student involvement in the deliberation of the course and the execution of the course. In other words, I very much like the idea of experiential learning. Last but not least, it has to be relevant to today's challenges and issues and always have a connection. My definition of quality education is that the student has even more questions about a certain social phenomenon after completing a particular course."

Elaborating more on understanding of the quality of education and its relationship with the instructors. **R1** said:

"In terms of instructors, their sense of commitment, their passion for learning, and their basic understanding of pedagogy are some of the key elements that play a vital role in the quality of education."

CEU Policies on Quality Education:

Every educational institution has some set of rules and regulations that explicitly describes the policies and frameworks followed to maintain the quality of education. CEU also provides its faculty members, both general and departmental levels policies at the time of hiring at CEU that define and explain the quality standards of the university. While interviewing individually about the familiarity with the policies and frameworks of CEU, mixed views and diverse experiences were collected. Some of them failed to recall any of the documents, while some of them highlighted different aspects. Most of them just simply referred to the mission statement of CEU.

For instance, **R2** emphasized a variety of documents. The interviewee clarifies about them as

“There is some basic stuff that you get when you are hired here at CEU. Each department has a certain set of rules which is primarily defined by CEU. The academic handbook is more about rules and procedures about the expectation of the program.”

R12 tries to remember present documents that are a part of the process of maintaining the quality of education in CEU.

“There are some senate committee documents. CEU has a Quality Assurance Policy that describes a certain set of rules that need to be followed by the faculty members, then different accreditations provide a list of specific requirements and teach about various forms of teaching methodology. As an instructor, you have to follow them in one way or the other.”

R11 thinks that apart from formal documents that do exist in the repository. CEU’s mission statement clearly describes what standards of quality of education mean it.

“I think CEU’s mission statement gives you an important orientation in this regard. It defines a path towards intellectual emancipation, critical sensitivity also social sensitivity as it clearly defines that students who graduate or postgraduate should be a socially responsible, socially conscious individual who is open, who knows how to think critically, who has the tools to enable some kind of a change in their respective areas.”

Curriculum Design and Quality of Education:

Curriculum is a plan of learning focused on learning objectives, students' choices. Participants think that designing a curriculum is a crucial step. Hence, they keenly focus on purpose, content and learning outcome when designing a course because it has a direct effect on the quality of teaching and learning. It is also considered important because Instructors incorporate digital tools in the course in this phase because they are also planning and deciding about the content to be included.

From **R4's** point of view, it is essential to look at the students' backgrounds as it matters to consider their needs and expectations.

“Background of the students and the goal of the master program are two important things for me to consider. I observe the enrolled students before finishing the design of the course and review it after every year. The students I teach mostly have some professional experience and heading to the professional world rather than for academics. So, I probably less focus on theory and more focus on what I believe to be practically useful for them. This is one of the guiding principles of my course design.”

For **R2**, it is a different experience to design the curriculum at CEU. The interviewee also thinks that apart from learning outcomes and objectives, group dynamics is a crucial element in developing a curriculum.

“There are a couple of things that are going on in the curriculum design. There is a standard approach to it. The system is quite different at CEU. You must design things for a smaller group

of people. I design my courses based on learning outcomes, expectations, what a course is trying to achieve. How is it connected with the assignments? I always consult and connect with other colleagues to make sure that I am on the right track.”

R7 describes opinion about curriculum design in a slightly different version.

“I fill the boxes in my syllabus. I describe my class. I make sure that my goals and description are aligned. The teaching goals are aligned with the assignments and then the rest of the material. I make my syllabus internally coherent. For me, it should be coherent overall with the subject you teach.”

Designing and Redesigning a Course:

The strength of the course depends heavily on its design. Hence, it is an essential component of the course. All the participants agree that they redesign their course after every academic year by adding new trends and researches to their courses while keeping some percentage of the essential components related to a respective course. Besides, they also have room to adjust when and where needed accordingly. They do so by adding new resources to the specific components. These new resources can be a report, an article, or some news that validates the effectiveness of the topic discussed during the lecture.

R11 refers to experiences of designing a course as difficult because an instructor must consider many things for designing a perfect course.

“I adopt the curriculum as we go along. I always plan something, but I open it up to students to have an input into it like they can suggest readings. The syllabus is quite a tricky part. On the one

hand, students don't like it if the syllabus is flexible, but at the same time they would like to have some input where the course is going, and that is a bit of tension sometimes, but I make it democratic as possible as I can. There is much flexibility in the second half of the course."

R4 shares experience of designing and redesigning a course as

"I would redesign it after every term. One fact that I do redesign it is when I get an overwhelming response. I try to alter the substance of the course, especially when some major events happen in the world. I try to leave one class loose after, like in the middle of the course on the topic and ask students to tell me what they would like to add and cover on this topic. This helps to address interests in a particular area. The major designing of the course is before its start in the term."

R9 thinks that it depends on the type, of course, that one teaches.

"It depends on the courses mostly. Some of the courses I teach changes on the margin every year but structurally after every two or three years. The structure is quite similar. We add or remove different homework assignments, change the examples to be discussed in class. The other subject is refreshed every year. Moreover, it includes recent research of the related subject. it changes topically as well."

Course Design and Students' Preferences and Feedback:

Students' preferences of opting a course makes it popular among fellow students and are a way of encouraging an instructor to make it more exciting and meaningful for prospective students. The

participants are teaching different mandatory and elective courses across different departments in CEU. Almost all of them conduct an informal midterm evaluation of their courses. Some prefer an anonymous review while others conduct it in an interactive way. Instructors tailor their courses by considering suggestions made in students' feedback. They found it helpful to understand the diversity of the cohort that they receive every academic year in a better way. The only demand that they are not willing to consider is to lessen the assigned reading load. To them, a student must prepare himself/herself before attending the lecture, and for that, he/she needs to go through the specific assigned material. A formal evaluation is also conducted at the end of the course by the university providing an overall assessment summary of the course to the respective faculty member.

R6 has both formal and informal feedback from the students. This helps the interviewee to improve the course at different levels.

“Definitely! They affect me. If a course component is not working, I just take it out. We (me and the students) always try new things, and I explicitly solicit feedback to see how things can be improved or should be improved, or they just need to be scrapped and find Something else. So, this is Something I am actively into for producing better results.”

Elaborating further about the feedback, the interviewee highlighted how students complain about the assigned readings.

“I am quite resistant to feedback about the course material Because that is a skill set that helps you to gain more experience as a researcher later in your life. You have to process like 1000 pages in a week to get Something done.”

Contrary to the response of the first participant, **R5** considers students' feedback on extensive reading and has now lessened the burden on them.

“Well, the methods are changing for transmitting knowledge. A few years back, students were more ready to read the longer text, and now in this different world driven by the internet and social media like Facebook, people are not so well prepared to read the longer text so they tend to complain why they should read 80 pages per week for every class. They complain that they cannot read this much stuff. There is always a pressure on me to decrease the expectation and requirement in terms of quantity of reading, and I did cater for it so now my mandatory readings are much less and also; students want me to give me a smaller portion of lessons and pieces to read. Finally, I did this”.

For **R3**, it is essential to have feedback, but it is difficult for an instructor to fulfil every demand of the students.

“I have a three-step process in my courses, i.e. Expectations, mid term evaluation, and a wrap up what has worked out and what not? Every year it is different because of a different group and its dynamics. I used to collect notes from the students at the end of every term so that I can change or improve the course accordingly.”

Learning Experience of Co-teaching:

All twelve participants have encountered similar experiences of curriculum design when they are co-teaching and co-designing a course in different capacities and at different levels of their careers.

All faculty members agree upon the fact of enjoying the curriculum designing phase when they are working with another faculty member either from the same department or from a different one. Generally, they believe that it requires a lot of exercise and preparation for the course by agreeing on some similar grounds. Nevertheless, at the same time, they get an evaluation from their co-instructor on their part of the course and can make changes accordingly before the beginning of the course. They also consider it as a chance to learn from one another by sharing diverse experiences and academic background. Moreover, at times it becomes challenging for them to analyze a situation from a different lens/ perspective if the course is co-taught by instructors from the other departments. But, it is also a valuable experience that makes them understand and learn many new and different things.

For example, **R8** shares experience of co-teaching and designing a course as a way of learning.

“If you are starting to co-teach a course, you start from scratch, as you have to do it with another colleague. There are a lot of interactions and interventions where you plan on different things. The reason why I do co-teaching is that I learn something from the other person, so you learn how others teach, you learn the content they teach which supposedly you cannot do on your own.”

R4 emphasized the learning experience from a recently co-taught course with a colleague. This class was interviewee’s first-time experience of co teaching a course. The interviewee enjoys the time and explains the experience in the following words:

“Although I have minimal experience in co-teaching but as per my experience, we (me and the other colleague) just work together and try to understand the things we want to teach and try to agree on what is a good approach to lead a course, and we did it successfully.”

While talking about co-teaching, **R9** explains it as the hardest experience because it is more demanding than the other courses solely taught by the faculty members themselves. It needs a lot of planning and discussion sessions with other colleagues. In words, the interviewee describes:

“It is much harder to do. I have co-taught two different classes. One is at the departmental level and the other one as the part of university-wide courses. We were four people from four different backgrounds. It was a super interesting experience. We have our domains, and that is reflected in our perspectives about just a single concept. It is hard to co-teach across disciplines. It becomes more demanding at times. However, though it is less interesting but much easier to co-teach at the departmental level.”

Digital Governance:

When it comes to the familiarity of the term digital governance, very few were able to relate it to academics. Although, all use different types of digital governance in the form of digital tools and platforms, they were confused and associated it with other sectors of society like health, politics etc. Most of them think of it as the system that a government uses to monitor its citizens by implementing different systems and mechanisms. They suggested examples like electoral voting, parking tickets, and maintaining digital records.

For instance, **R12** uses several different digital materials in the class, starting from presentations, videos, documentaries, podcasts to online surveys. Still, **R12** was unsure about how to describe this term. The interviewee then explains

“To me, electronic tools that an instructor use to convey material to the students is digital governance. You use it in some way called cognitive switching. You change the mode of teaching so that you do not make a lecture boring for the students. Instead of talking and talking, you interject short videos; you always accompany your presentations with slides that are clear, use datasheets, clickers, in-class polling. Although I am aware of these tools, I did not get the chance to acquaint myself with these kinds of tools fully.”

R3 has a different understanding of how and where is digital governance used? The interviewee has a background in working on governance and is associated with it from the past few years and describes digital governance in a different way.

“It is everything and nothing. I like the term digital, and people are working more on it these days as core societies are becoming digital, but governance is always an issue. For me, governance is an analytical concept that homogenizes everything. It is not easy to define.”

When asked from **R2** the very same question, the interviewee shares understanding of digital governance in the light of global governance. The interviewee expresses it as some set of rules and regulations further highlighting it as:

“Something that attempts to cover cyberspace. It involves digital spaces followed by international agreements, institutions, and standards.”

Interacting through Activities:

Active learning is a student-centric approach to teaching. It heavily depends on the instructor to make a course interesting for the students and make them understand things most simply.

R11 uses different techniques in classes to make them more interactive and keep students motivated to participate.

“For one of my classes, we have a Facebook group. So, I also use the forum on the Moodle a lot, and I encourage students to share interesting things they come across which are related to the subject matter, and that can be anything, an article, news, or video. Anything that they think connects them to the relevant subject material. I sometimes start my class with a writing exercise and discussion. I always want to cultivate that students learn through and from each other.”

R6 promotes in-class activities to engage students more in the topic of the course.

“I am very much an interactive teacher. I do not like this situation we are now dealing with. I maintain an active learning environment through in-class activities, either large or small groups, by encouraging students to generate a dialogue on a certain topic.”

R7, on the other hand, likes to have assignments and worksheet exercises to maintain an active learning environment in the class.

“Group assignments, individual assignments, interactive worksheets, we were close reading together. Everyone in the class enjoyed it and participated in the interpretation of the text.”

Experiences of using Digital Tools:

Exciting trends were found when participants asked about their preference and use of digital tools in the class. Although digital tools found to be commonly used by all the participants in one way or another, some of the faculty members tended to be conventional in their approach and do not prefer to use digital tools other than the usual ones whereas few of the faculty members found to be exploring, familiarizing and self-training themselves for the newer tools. While some of the subjects are less demanding, and that is why instructors are fine with their knowledge and capacity of using digital tools in their lectures and seminars.

R5 teaches theory-based courses in the department. The interviewee does use some basic and purest form of digital tools and is comfortable in using them. In interviewee’s opinion, the tools being used in the course are enough for it.

“I belong rather to the older generation of the faculty, and I am a bit slower than the younger faculty to learn to use complex digital tools in the classroom and to catch up to the recent technological developments. So, I always need somebody to help me to put my things on the online platforms, and guide me on how to manage them? So, I prefer to use the simplest of all: the PowerPoint presentations, small films from YouTube, or other sources. I did not feel that I wanted to know more. I am happy with the tools I use.”

R6 teaches more of the practical courses but still do not use much of the digital tools in the class.

“I am very much familiar with digital tools. I may have less experience in using them in my class but now, I am piloting with various tools now.”

R8 almost has a similar experience as the other participants. The interviewee does not need to learn more about it.

“Although I am aware of many, I generally use Moodle to upload my material, teams to have meetings and interactions with students. I have used an online whiteboard. I think I am performing fine.”

Blended Assessment Practices:

Assessment is always the most crucial part of the course, especially when the instructors are dealing with a diverse cohort of students. CEU gives instructors enough flexibility to change the assessment rubrics and allow them to adjust it according to their own needs and requirements.

R10 likes to give quite several assignments in class to maintain students’ engagement and assess them transparently. The interviewee further clarifies.

“I think I give too many (short and long; paper/ online) assignments to my students as part of the assessment. This helps students to be engaged in the class, and it also helps me know about their understanding of the topic. I can then focus more on other related topics.”

R2 likes to assess students through written assignments.

“I prefer paper assignments over presentations. Some students can write smaller papers answering the research questions in the text they read in the class. There are some standards of grading and Grading rubrics. Moreover, there are some basic expectations from the students, followed by a feedback process. Students appreciate that the grading rubric is clear to them. I usually connect my comments to the expectations and let students improve your work.”

R1 likes to try new techniques for assessing students. The interviewee mentioned:

“I once used podcasts as a form of the exams. instead of writing a paper, students were invited to do a podcast, and those students who chose that option benefited tremendously from that and told me that they were infinitely better rather than writing an abstract, dry paper.”

Less Preference to Online Teaching:

When asked about their experiences about teaching through online platforms, all the participants agree to the point that it is useful for online teaching for some shorter and definite period. All of them preferred interactive face to face sessions.

R4 thinks of teaching as excellent for a shorter time through an online platform.

“I think it is fine as long as we need it in an emergency cover or situation. Otherwise, no!”

R6 thinks of it as a monotonous activity to teach through online platforms.

“I don’t like online platforms for teaching. I have been involved in developing pre-sessional lectures for the incoming students. At one point, I was unable to understand what I was doing exactly? I despise teaching online.”

R8 seems to be satisfactory with using online platforms for teaching but a shorter-term only.

“I am getting there. It is exciting for people like me. You have to educate people to use these kinds of sophisticated things. However, it is not a replacement for interactive classroom learning.”

Boring Moodle and Exhausting SITS:

Various responses were recorded about CEU’s digital platforms. Participants found them to be less interactive, boring, and dull. As Moodle is an old platform, participants do not find it challenging to use even with the dull appearance while none of them seemed to be satisfied with SITS. Moreover, they have not received any training for using these two platforms. However, the IT department and the administrative staff of their respective department are accommodating in addressing their issues.

R7 shares point of view on SITS and Moodle as

“I have regular problems with SITS. It involves too much clicking the boxes for entering a simple grade. Moodle is fine, but it is not beautiful.”

R10 has a similar opinion as that of the other participants.

“These systems are not new to me. They are fine to work with. However, SITS, some time is a real problem.”

R3 does not seem to be happy with SITS as well.

“I like Moodle though it is crude. SITS is awful because it looks worse and involves much clicking. Entering grades is a lot like a mess.”

Rightly Digitizing the Conventional Approach:

All of them hold an opinion that digital methods of governance facilitates and complements the conventional methods in terms of teaching, assessment, and maintaining the quality of education. It is naive to consider that digital methods can fully replace conventional methods in the future. However, the percentage of using both methods vary depending upon the demand of the course and preference of the instructors. Instructors relying more on the conventional methodologies nowadays might change their preferences to the digital tools while redesigning their courses for the next term or an academic year. According to them, every method has its advantages and disadvantages. None of them is entirely replaceable, but preferences can change with time, demand and availability.

According to **R1**, Instructors use both mediums equally and accordingly.

“You just need to have the right mix of both. Digital governance allows you to have cognitive switches. Me lecturing for 100 minutes and yelling at students to teach them and make them understand a particular phenomenon is Definitely not the most exciting thing and they will all either fall asleep or get completely bored, and if I can switch back and forth with all kinds of little surprises like with video things, slides, and podcasts, students will remain interested in the session. So, I think it is all about the right mix.”

R12 has a similar opinion about these two:

“It is not that one should replace the other. So, it is nor that we don’t do anything digitally neither do we do everything digitally.”

R9. has a slightly different opinion about digital governance.

“I think in a small institution the utility of digital governance is very maximized, whereas in a larger institution it might have a big impact, but in the small institution it is not immediately clear that we are going to prefer the digital domain more than the conventional or face to face one to improve the quality of education.”

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the research are, in fact, the effect of digital governance by connecting it with various dimensions of the quality of higher education. These results help to answer the questions posed earlier in the research. The faculty at the CEU are using digital tools and platforms for enhancing quality of education. Their engagement can be explained by using the framework of Actor Network Theory. The lens of the ANT is appropriate as it vividly shows how a user and a technology sit in relation not only to each other but also in relation to a larger network of materials and people. Hence, the main objective of this research is to explore the phenomenon through the lens of the faculty working in the different departments of the CEU. The results of the study contribute to both the sector of digital governance in higher education and quality of education.

Digital tools and platforms are influencing the education sector to a greater extent (Oliver and Conole 2003) and this development has pushed academia tailor and integrate digital tools in the curriculum to facilitate teaching and learning. They are helpful in developing modern ways of teaching and learning (Salmon 2004; Almpanis 2015).

The study is conducted at CEU, based both in Budapest and Vienna; its results are helpful for other universities based in these geographical locations in bridging up the gap between using digital governance and maintaining of the quality of education. Digital tools have a positive effect on the learning of the students (Baris and Tosun 2013). They help the academic institutions by lowering the cost of provision and results in increasing their revenues. (Ho and Dzung 2010; Masa'deh et al 2016; Masa'deh, Obeidat and Tarhini 2016) Furthermore, it will help the departmental heads in training their respective faculty members in improving the standards of quality of education in their pedagogical practices.

Education plays an essential role in the development of society. Hence, it is crucial to keep up the quality in this sector. This research will help CEU to work and improve its standards of quality of the future by not only revising its present policy but also devising new policies that can directly and explicitly address these aspects. The approach of blended learning is more successful than solely using online or face to face approach (Kattoua, Al-Lozi and Alrowwad 2016).

It will also likely to be helpful to CEU while developing an internal monitor and assessment system. Academically, this research will contribute as an addition to the literature review and will be able to provide future researchers to explore different related themes.

Limitations of the Research

Like other similar researches, there are certain limitations faced by the researcher during the process of conducting this research.

The sample was drawn from four departments only out of the twelve departments of the CEU. This sample size may skew the validity and generalizability of the research.

One of the most critical limitations was that of the time. The present study was conducted in a very shorter length of time. Hence, it was challenging to explore and include other important aspects of the research.

The research was limited to the experiences of the faculty members only. This research did not explore the opinions and experiences of other staff members working and playing an essential role in implementing digital governance in the university.

Lastly, the research confined to the experiences and issues of only one university present in Budapest, Hungary and Vienna, Austria. Other higher educational institutions might have different experiences in this regard.

Recommendations of the Research

The recommendations for future researchers are as follows.

This research will be a source of information and suggestions for the policymakers, administrators and academicians involved in designing, planning and implementing new policies in higher education.

For faculty to be able to use digital tools more confidentially in their courses, they should be trained by the university so that they can develop their pedagogical skills and integrate digital sources in their courses.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

This interview guide is divided into different sections.

Quality of Higher Education and Digital Governance: This section will cover the following themes:

- **Understanding about quality of (higher) education:**
 - What do you understand by the quality of higher education?
 - Do you know about CEU definition of quality of HE? What documents/policies/frameworks are you familiar with that deals with it?
 - How familiar are you with the term digital governance? How often have you heard about it?
 - What is your understanding of this term?
- **Curriculum Design:**
 - How do you design and tailor the curriculum according to university defined standards of quality of education?
 - How do student choices/preferences/feedback inform your curriculum design practices?
 - Does it play an effective role in influencing your choices in designing the curriculum of the course?
 - How many times have you designed and redesigned/ adjust a course accordingly?
 - How do you differentiate your experiences of CD, while co-teaching a course?
- **Teaching and Assessment:**
 - Do you feel that CEU's policies/guidelines for assessment are conducive to quality teaching and learning?
 - Do you have any flexibility in changing those defined criteria?
 - How do you manage to maintain an active learning environment in the class?
 - How do you engage students in different kind of lectures and activities? preferred practices
 - How familiar are you with these digital tools?
 - Do you actively use them?
 - What are the best practices do you use in accessing the students?
 - How difficult is for you to assess students in their assignment through online platforms? In your opinion, what are the opportunities and challenges to maintain the defined standards of CEU about quality of education using these tools?

- As teaching is now shifted to the online platforms. How satisfied are you with this new experience?
 - Which platform are you using to communicate with the students?
- Discussing SITS and Moodle system of the university, how new is this to you?
 - Did you receive any training before using it? Are you satisfied with this new system?
 - What are the opportunities/challenges involved in using SITS and Moodle in teaching and assessment? (in terms of updating the forums, sharing information, grading)?

Conclusion: This section will wrap up the conversation by asking the following:

- Do you see digital governance as a better option than the conventional methods of governance? (curriculum design, teaching and assessment). Is it significant in maintaining the quality of education?
- Would you like to add anything to this fruitful discussion?

Consent Form

Thesis Title: Effect of Digital Governance on the Quality of Higher Education: The Case of Central European University

- ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information document for the above study and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- ☐ I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question during the interview.
- ☐ I agree to the interview being recorded and later transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that the results from this research will be published in Central European University's website and later in Research Journals. I agree
- ☐ to take part in the above study.

Participant's Signature:

Participant's Name:

Date:

Participant Information Sheet

Thesis Title: Effect of Digital Governance on the Quality of Higher Education: The Case of Central European University

Thank you for your interest in participating in the above research which I am conducting as a part of my Master degree at School of Public Policy, Central European University.

Please take time to read the following information carefully as it explains the essential aim of the study and what it would involve for you. Feel free to ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like to get further information. My contact information is at the end of this document.

This study will explore the effect of digital governance and its implications on the quality of education provided in Central European University. Seeing as digital aspects are taking the control in every field, this interview will provide you an opportunity to talk about your perceptions about quality of education, digital governance, while sharing your experiences of difficulties and challenges which may have altered your decision in handling the course(s) you are teaching at CEU.

I cannot guarantee that this interview will provide a direct benefit to you. However, it is my hope that studying your experience can increase my understanding of importance and application of digital governance in education. If you agree to take part in the interview, it will take up to 45 minutes online conversation, and will be conducted at a date and time of your choice.

With your consent, I will record the audio of our interview for transcription processes, and I will delete the voice files of the interviews after transcription. At all times, I will protect your confidentiality, and anonymity, by storing all information on password protected computers, and by using pseudonyms in all written documents.

This interview is completely voluntary, and you are free to refuse to answer a particular question, or to request to stop the interview, and ask your information removed from the study. I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experience as one of the professors at Central European University.

I look forward to meeting you. I will be grateful if you can confirm the date and time for interview by responding to this email. If you need information about the study at any point and or you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at aftab_khadija@spp.ceu.edu. For questions about this research, you may also contact my thesis supervisor Kata Orosz at oroszk@ceu.edu.

Kind Regards,

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