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Framework for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Online Education

Celestino Pempe , Daniela Barros , Vitor Jorge Ramos Rocio , Vitor Manuel De Jesus Filipe

Open University ISCED, Mozambique

Abstract

The expansion of online education has increased access to higher education; however, People with Disabilities (PwD) continue to face pedagogical, technological, and institutional barriers that limit participation and academic success. This study analyzes challenges to PwD inclusion in online education and proposes an integrated approach to support more accessible, inclusive, and equitable digital learning environments. A mixed-methods, interpretive-critical approach combined bibliographic and documentary research, questionnaires, and focus groups. The field study involved 131 participants, including PwD, teachers, academic and institutional managers, and specialists. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data through thematic analysis, followed by triangulation with bibliographic and documentary evidence. Results revealed limited accessibility of Learning Management Systems and digital resources, connectivity difficulties, insufficient integration of assistive technologies, inadequate adaptation of pedagogical practices, training needs, and weaknesses in institutional policies and support structures. These findings informed the development of a Conceptual Framework for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Online Education, structured around three pillars—Pedagogy, Technology, and Governance—and five interdependent dimensions: policy and institutional; pedagogical; technological and accessibility; training and capacity building; and monitoring and evaluation. The framework requirements were assessed by a multidisciplinary focus group, contributing to their refinement. The study also proposes a continuous implementation process involving diagnosis, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement. The framework provides a guiding structure for transitioning from isolated initiatives toward a systematic and integrated approach to PwD inclusion in online education.

Keywords: Accessibility; Conceptual Framework; Inclusion; Online Education; People with Disabilities