

Innovation and Development in Blended Learning Mode in Higher Learning Institutions: Interactive Experiences from OUT's Postgraduate Students and Instructors

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***Abstract:** Although blended learning mode of delivery has been found to be an effective and inexpensive way to enhance learning, there is still need to examine how students and tutors perceive it in the presence of the traditional modes. The purpose of the present study was to examine views and perception of both instructors and students on attributes related to processes of BLM implementation and interactions. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to 38 postgraduate students and 14 instructors from The Open University of Tanzania. Data were analyzed using descriptive. Crosstabs were used to describe the association between BLM processes and interactions of BLM by both instructors and students. The results revealed that students' and instructors' views on BLM processes, such as ease of use of the web environment, evaluation, face to face environment etc., are varied significantly with perceived BLM interactions. Unlike the relatively younger students, the older generations were found to value more of the BLM interactions than of the BLM implementation processes. This paper will help to inform learning institutions intending to go BLM of the best and effective processes for the blended learning environment.*

Keywords; Blended Learning Mode (BLM), blended learning interactions, BLM implementation processes, Open University of Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Innovation and development of the blended learning mode has marked the realization of enhancing education opportunity to many people from different backgrounds. The blended characteristic features allow for meeting requirements of heterogeneous groups of learners at affordable cost and time. As noted by Zapata and Sagall (2007), "A combination of face-to face class time and self-study with online workbook is an effective and inexpensive way to enhance learning". Reasons for using blended instruction include: improved pedagogy, easy access to knowledge, more interaction among learners, personal presence, cost effectiveness, and ease of revision of learning content (Singh and Reed, 2001).

To meet high education demands in Tanzania, OUT established the blended learning mode which cuts across various social science disciplines. This process was mostly

facilitated by OUT Management efforts to invest in Moodle which is an online learning platform. Apart from the blended learning, OUT runs various postgraduate courses based on traditional learning mode (evening programmes and executive programmes). OUT's current focus is to ensure that all postgraduate programmes utilize this new innovative approach to meet the needs and demands of stakeholders inside and outside the country.

Much has been written concerning the contribution of the blended mode to higher education. However, little is known about perception of course instructors and students on blended learning mode as regards interactive experiences; and whether generational differences exist especially in Tanzania. According to the researchers' observation, perception of course instructors and students on the efficiency and effectiveness of blended mode interactive experiences; and the generational perceived differences, are the important factors which affect preference to enroll to the programme. This means that perception of the course instructors and students on the blended learning mode interactive experiences will help to realize best practices for the blended learning.

Muthiah (2013), indicates that one of the benefits of a blended learning platform is preventing the 'lone-learner syndrome'. This can best be facilitated by engaging learners - with different backgrounds and generational differences, in interaction during the learning process. Interaction will help individuals to share their experiences, challenge and establish ways for a friendly leaning environment. According to the existing literature, the involvement of students in the blended learning environment is key to their success in the learning process. Anderson (2006) talks about the possibilities of collaborative, interactive, media-rich and personalized learning bring to blended learning. Attention is needed in the learning process to meet students' and instructor's engagement, challenges and connectivity, refining teaching approaches, focusing on high learning experiences and address issues which can interfere learning environment.

In both online and face-to-face instruction, the learners and instructors interact, share ideas and generally try to support one another throughout the learning cycle (Boyle, 2005). Other levels of interactions which are very crucial are: student to student interaction, student to community, student to materials, and student to technology – all of which are the interest of this study. As noted by Ocker and Yaverbaum (2002), the learners are better able to assimilate new information and solve problems when working in collaboration with others.

The main purpose of this paper is to explore innovation and development of the blended learning mode in higher learning institutions based on the interactive experiences and perceptions of OUT's postgraduate instructors and students. Specific objectives of the paper was:

- (i) To investigate overall perception of course instructors and students on blended learning implementation processes and interactive experiences.
- (ii) To examine whether generational differences exist in perception of course instructors and students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two theories provided the theoretical framework of this study. The learner-centered theory adopted from ‘Person-Centered Learning’ developed by the American psychologist Carl Rogers (1951) as a method in counseling psychology; and adult learner theory by Malcolm Knowles (1984). The learner-centered theory acknowledges the fact that learning should encompass the whole person by ensuring that learner is the central focus in learning process. The implication is that, planning of the course, curriculum development, mode of delivery, etc. has to consider learners views. Person-centered education, also known as the learner-centered model of instruction, “focuses on developing real-life skills, such as collaboration, higher-order thinking, and problem-solving skills, and better meets the complex needs of the information age (Yun-Jo, and Reigeluth. 2011-2012).”

Person-centered education is characterized by personalized and customized learning, social and emotional support, self-regulation, collaborative and authentic learning experiences, and assessment for learning (*ibid*). As noted by Motschnig-Pitrik and Santos (2006), to ignore the whole person in the process of education is to lose a golden opportunity to fulfill the true meaning of education, which is to enrich people’s lives.

Malcolm developed a field of adult learning termed *andragogy* after studying adult learners for 35 years (Kisamore *et al.*, 2008). Texts and teachers play new and secondary. roles in adult education. Knowles’s andragogical model is based on several assumptions: (a) the need to know, (b) the learner’s self-concept, (c) role of the learner’s experiences, (d) readiness to learn, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) motivation. Adult learners are surrounded by various challenges which make their engagement in learning unique. They have many responsibilities to accomplish at the same time such as work, recreation, family life and community life. Adult learners find ways to intervene these situations when needed.

Several definitions have been used to describe adult learners. Malcolm Knowles’s definition of the adult learner is that - one has arrived at a self-concept of being responsible for one’s own life, of being self-directed (Kisamore *et al.*, 2008). Some simply look at the age of the learner and define adult learners as anyone over the age of 20, and some feel that the setting defines the adult learner. In other words, if learners are in community college, university, or work setting, they are adult learners. As the population ages and life expectancy lengthens, educators can expect more adult learners (Kisamore *et al.*, 2008).

A generation is shaped by highly significant events during the coming-of-age experiences between youth and adulthood (Strauss, 2005). These events define a generation and determine the traits and attitudes that distinguish one generation from another. Because of their shared experiences, generations often share values and behaviors as well as bring common approaches and ideas to the workplace and classroom (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). Andragogy ties in with generational differences as increasingly generations collide in the

classrooms of academia (Howe and Strauss, 2000). The present study will adopt andragogy ties because distinct and different generations are blending in the programmes under study.

EMPIRICALLITERATURE

Blended learning and Higher Learning

Blended learning has been implemented from the past using various approaches such as physical class formats like lectures, labs, books and handouts. In the contemporary society, globalization has improved blended learning through the development of information and technology. Currently blended learning in some higher learning institutions combine face to face classroom methods with the online learning. For example at OUT experience on some postgraduate programmes like Master of Social Work; the blended learning to a traditional approach might mean that class meets for one week at the end of each course (eight weeks) instead of the usual two sessions per week. This allows students to engage in online discussion forums with course facilitators and fellow students. The main goal of the blended learning approach is to mix the traditional approach and online instruction for the aim of enhancing the learning process.

The concept of blended learning is rooted in the idea that learning is not just a one-time event — learning is a continuous process. Blending provides various benefits over using any single learning delivery medium alone (Harvey, 2003). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) define blended learning as “the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies”. According to this definition and using George Siemens’ concept of innovation, which states that: “Innovation is about being new...doing existing things in a new way, or doing something new in response to changes. Innovation is part evolution and part adaptation (and occasionally, part revolution),” clearly blended learning is an innovation; it involves teaching and learning in a new way, while still adhering to the tenets of higher education⁸.

Blended Learning and the Global Trends

Pannekoek (2008) regards the distance, open, and technology enabled learning movement as one of a few movements that show a convergence of interests and knowledge that might be capable of meeting these challenges. Evidence of increasing internationalization is generally manifested in a significant increase in the cross-border activities of higher education institutions. Cross-border higher education is fueled - in part, by the growing worldwide demand for higher education and is characterized by increased mobility of students, courses and programs and increased mobility of institutions across national borders. As stated by UNESCO, cross-border higher education encompasses a wide range of modalities from face-to-face instruction (such as

⁸ www.cohere.ca. (assessed on 20.07.2013)

students travelling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (through a range of technologies and including e-learning), (ICDE, 2009).

Existing literature shows that there had been a paradigm shift in higher learning education offered by the higher education institutions in the 20th C due to the emergence of the electronic learning (e-learning) globally. Consequently, the adoption of e-learning technologies has impacted the planning, learning design, management and administration of the learning process and delivery of learning content to the students (Namahn, 2010) thereby promoting blended learning. Britain and Liber (2003) point out that over 80% of HEIs in the developed world are actively engaging in the use of e-learning systems for supporting their teaching and learning, with 97% of universities reported to be using one or more forms of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

The situation is different in the developing world due to various social, economic, political and cultural challenges on technological development. As noted by UNESCO (2006), “education in Sub-Saharan Africa are grappling with the continuing economic downturn, high demand for higher education in emerging knowledge-driven economies as well as inadequate availability of experienced and skilled teachers. Universities in Sub-Saharan Africa are also still facing numerous challenges such as high volume of students, limited ICT infrastructure, high illiteracy levels, ineffective computer system maintenance and poor ICT support relative to the implementation of e-learning (Ssekakubo *et al.*, 2011; Andersson, 2008). This calls for the government attention if African countries are to realize sustainable development.

ICTs and the blended learning

Blended learning is realized in teaching and learning environments where there is an effective integration of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning as a result of adopting a strategic and systematic approach to the use of technology combined with the best features of face-to-face interaction (Krause, 2007). According to Bath and John (2010), blended learning is about effectively integrating ICTs into course design to enhance the teaching and learning experiences for students and teachers by enabling them to engage in ways that would not normally be available or effective in their usual environment, whether it is primarily face-to-face or distance mode.

The innovation and development of the blended learning has been greatly influenced by the integration of the information computer technologies in various programmes. This means that the course facilitators and students have to be well equipped in terms of ICT skills and knowledge. This is because course facilitators will be responsible for preparing online courses and upload extra reading materials online so that respective students can access and proceed with learning as expected. Course facilitators have to participate on the online discussion forums with their students to make the online learning visible throughout. According to (Clark 2003), “adding creative and innovative uses of technology to improve teaching practices have generated new opportunities for learning”. This is supported by (Bath and John, 2010) who argue that, “Advances in technology provide new opportunities for teachers to design and deliver their courses in

ways that support and enhance the teachers' role, the students' individual cognitive experiences, as well as the social environment; three key elements in successful learning and teaching." Blended learning technologies can:

- Broaden the spaces and opportunities available for learning;
- Support course management activities (e.g., communication, assessment submission, marking and feedback);
- Support the provision of information and resources to students;
- Engage and motivate students through interactivity and collaboration.

Bath and John added that, it is not just about using technology because it is available; blended learning is about finding better ways of supporting students in achieving the learning objectives and providing them with the best possible learning and teaching experiences, as well as supporting teachers in their role (including the management and administration of courses).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study involved a cross-sectional survey research design where data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to purposefully selected 50 postgraduate students and 20 instructors. The survey instrument used a 5-point Likert Scale with choices of strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree; very relevant, relevant, don't know, somehow not relevant, very irrelevant; highest level, high level, don't know, low level, lowest level. The survey offers participants specific choices and directions to choose the one that best fits them which help to measure the degree to which the assessment consistently measure the attribute (Hinkle *et al.*, 2003).

A total of 52 (74.3%) of the mailed questionnaires were returned dully filled of which 38 were postgraduate students and 14 instructors from The Open University of Tanzania. A purposeful sampling technique was the most ideal because of the respondents' appropriateness and willingness to provide more in-depth understanding of the topic being researched. For this study, instructors who teach face-to-face and teach or have taught at least one academic course online in any department at OUT were selected to participate.

Only postgraduate students enrolled in the blended mode were selected for the purpose of this study. Data on perceptions were arranged in frequency tables. Cross tabulation was done to examine association between BLM processes and interactions of BLM by both instructors and students. Crosstab was also used to assess whether generational differences were related to the respondent's perception on BLM core attributes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of the sampled respondents

Demographic information was requested at the beginning of the survey instrument. Information obtained from those who chose to respond revealed that 57.7% were male and 42.3 were female. The demographic profile for students and instructors participating in the study is represented in Table 1. Students enrolled in postgraduate studies offered

through blended mode represent 75.1% and course instructors participating in blended learning mode 26.9% of the study population. Generational difference was based on age below 40 years (57.7%) and age above 40 years (42.3%).

Table 1: Demographic description of respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Respondent's sex	Male	30	57.7	57.7	57.7
	Female	22	42.3	42.3	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	
Respondent's status	student	38	73.1	73.1	73.1
	Course instructor	14	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	
Respondent's age	below 40 years	30	57.7	57.7	57.7
	above 40 years	22	42.3	42.3	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Perception on blended learning implementation processes and interactive experiences

To reveal instructors’ and students’ overall perception on blended learning implementation processes and interactive experiences (the first research); the study established various questions based on expectations of BLM benefits; perception on BML limitations; perception on the implementation processes of the BLM; and anticipated forms of interactions of the BLM. This is clearly indicated in tables presented as appendices 1- 4. The outcome shows that students and instructors favour blended learning and their interactive experience with blended learning is relatively good. From the findings respondents have indicated that they have enough skills necessary for blended learning and they seem comfortable with the structure of the blended learning mode. As far as the respondents’ perception on BLM limitation is concerned the findings show that this does not hinder the leaning process because it seems lecturers and students have necessary skills and they manage to access internet. The blended learning implementation processes according to survey participants is good and meets their expectations. The findings revealed that students’ and instructors perception on anticipated forms of students’ interaction of BLM is of the high level. A student manages to interact with fellow students, course instructors, community, reading material and information technology.

Relationship between Generational differences and respondents perception on selected attributes

The second research objective sought to understand whether generational differences existed in affected perceptions of instructors and students. To answer this question various attributes related to blended learning implementation processes and interactive experiences were established based on 5-point Likert scale analysis as indicated in Table 6 to Table 12. The following attributes were established: perception on BML limitations by age; perception of relevance of various attributes of BLM by respondent’s age; perception of interactions expected of BLM by respondent’s age group; perception on

benefits expected of BLM by respondent’s age.

Perception on BLM limitations and age generational differences

Table 2 shows that generational differences exist based on respondents’ perception reflected on different BLM attributes. Findings further indicated that respondents who were above 40 years lacked some necessary computer skills (i.e. lack of keyboarding/typing skills 66.7% and lack of internet browsing skills 87.5%) relevant for the blended learning mode as compared to those who are under 40years (i.e. lack of keyboarding/typing skills 33.3% and lack of internet browsing skills 12.5%). The respondents over 40 years seem to have little concern on the blended learning workload. Only 33.3% indicate that there was too much reading materials and 41.7% agreed that there was too much writing on blended learning mode). As compared to participants below 40,66.7% indicated that there was too much reading whereas 58.3 showed that there was too much writing in the blended learning mode). About 66.7% of respondents aged under 40 years showed that there was inaccessibility of internet connectivity, whereas only 33.3% of the respondents above 40 years indicated that internet connectivity was a problem.

Table 2: Perception on BLM limitations by age

		Respondent's age		Total
		below 40 years	above 40 years	
I lacked keyboarding/typing skills	Strongly Agree	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	Agree	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	Disagree	47.8%	52.2%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
There was too much reading materials	Strongly agree	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	Agree	78.6%	21.4%	100.0%
	Disagree	46.2%	53.8%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
There was too much writing required	Strongly agree	100.0%		100.0%
	Agree	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
	Disagree	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
I lacked internet browsing skills	Strongly agree	100.0%		100.0%
	Agree	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
	Disagree	65.0%	35.0%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%
Inaccessibility of internet connectivity	Strongly agree	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	Agree	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	Disagree	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

Perception on relevance of various attributes of BLM by respondent’s age

Perception on relevance of various attributes on BLM was examined based on respondent’s age to explore whether or not generational differences exist. The findings in Table 3 show that various attributes of the BLM are perceived to be very relevant/relevant by the two generations. Some differences are noted among the two generations in some attributes. The results indicate that 69.1% of respondents below 40 years perceive use of web and internet sources environment as relevant whereas only 39.1% of respondents above 40 years show same perception. The findings show that

65% of respondents below 40 years perceive online forum discussions as very relevant as compared to 35% of respondents above 40 years. 62.1% of respondents below 40years perceive content of the subject matter in a course as relevant and only 37.9% of the respondents above 40% showed same perception. Face-to-Face sessions are perceived as being very relevant by 60.7% of respondents below 40% as compared to 39.3% of respondents over 40 years. There is no significant difference on the relevance of blended learning method and relevance of access to the library print reading materials as results show that 51.7% of respondents below 40 years perceived these as relevant as compared to 48.3% of respondents above 40 years.

Table 3: Perception on relevance of various attributes of BLM by respondent’s age

		Respondent’s age		Respondent’s age
		below 40 years	Above 40 years	
Relevance of ease of use of web and internet sources environment	Very relevant	53.8%	46.2%	100.0%
	Relevant	60.9%	39.1%	100.0%
	Somehow not relevant	100.0%		100.0%
Relevance of online forum discussions	very relevant	65.0%	35.0%	100.0%
	Relevant	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Somehow not relevant	100.0%		100.0%
Relevance of content of the subject matter in a course	Very relevant	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
	relevant	62.1%	37.9%	100.0%
	Don’t know	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Relevance of Face-to-Face sessions	very relevant	60.7%	39.3%	100.0%
	Relevant	52.4%	47.6%	100.0%
	Somehow irrelevant	100.0%		100.0%
Relevance of blended learning method	very relevant	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
	Relevant	51.7%	48.3%	100.0%
	Somehow not relevant	100.0%		100.0%
Relevance of access to the library print reading materials	Very relevant	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	Relevant	40.9%	59.1%	100.0%
	Don’t know	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
	Somehow not relevant	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%

Perception on level of interactions expected of BLM by respondent’s age group

Examining perception on level of interactions expected of BLM by respondents based on age groups was important as far as generational difference is concerned. Table 4 shows that some important differences exist across generations. 66.7% of participants below 40 years show that there was highest level student-to-student interaction as compared to only 33.3% of respondents above 40 years. 90.9% of respondents below 40 years indicate highest interaction of student-to-instructors whereas only 9.1% of respondents above 40 years show similar perception. 88.9% of respondents below 40 years show that student-to-community interaction was experienced at the highest level and only 11.1% of respondents above 40 years show similar perception. Student-to-reading material interaction was perceived by 64.3% of participants below 40 years to be of the highest level as compared to 35.7% of participants above 40 years. The

findings have revealed that 80% of participants below 40 years perceive student-to-information technology interaction as of the highest level as compared to 20% of participants above 40 years.

Table 4: Perception on level of interactions expected of BLM by respondent’s age group

		Respondent's age		Total
		below 40 years	above 40 years	
Student-to-student interaction	Highest level	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	High level	54.8%	45.2%	100.0%
	low level	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Student-to-instructor interaction	Highest level	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%
	High level	44.8%	55.2%	100.0%
	Don't know	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Low level	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Student-to-community interaction	Highest level	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%
	High level	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%
	Low level	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	Lowest level	100.0%		100.0%
Student-to-reading material interaction	Highest level	64.3%	35.7%	100.0%
	High level	57.6%	42.4%	100.0%
	Don't know	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Low level	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Student-to-information technology interaction	Highest level	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	High level	54.3%	45.7%	100.0%
	Low level	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%

To enhance the purpose of this study perception on benefits expected of BLM by respondent’s age was examined. Table 5 shows that 63.3% of participants below 40 years agree that there was a friendliness of Moodle platform, instructors and students as compared to 36.7% of participants above 40 years. 71.4% of respondents below 40 years indicated that they strongly agree that they do not like sitting in a class for long due to their positions in society as compared to 28.6% of respondents above 40 years. 71.4% of respondents below 40 years strongly agree that they had an opportunity to air out their points with ease during forum discussions whereas only 28.6% of respondents above 40 years showed similar perception. 83.3% of respondents below 40 years strongly agree that time fits well with their employment obligations unlike other learning mode as compared to 16.7% of respondents above 40 years. 85% of respondents below 40 years strongly agree that time fits well with their family and social commitments whereas 15% of respondents above 40 years had similar perception. The findings show that 71.4% strongly agree that they I can learn from anywhere and anytime of the day as compared to 28.6% of respondents above 40 years.

Table 5: Perception on benefits expected of BLM by respondent’s age

		Respondent's age		Total
		below 40 years	above 40 years	
Friendliness of moodle platform, instructors and students	Strongly agree	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Agree	63.3%	36.7%	100.0%
	Disagree	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree	100.0%		100.0%
I don't like sitting in a class for long due to my position in society	Strongly agree	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
	Agree	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
	Disagree	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
I had opportunity to air out my points with ease during forum discussions	Strongly agree	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
	Agree	41.9%	58.1%	100.0%
	Disagree	100.0%		100.0%
Time fits well with my employment obligations unlike other learning modes	Strongly agree	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
	Agree	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Disagree	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree		100.0%	100.0%
Time fits well with my family and social commitments	Strongly agree	85.0%	15.0%	100.0%
	Agree	48.0%	52.0%	100.0%
	Disagree		100.0%	100.0%
I can learn from anywhere and anytime of the day	Strongly agree	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
	Agree	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%
	Disagree		100.0%	100.0%
	Strongly disagree		100.0%	100.0%

CONCLUSION

The current study has come up with some interesting findings to inform developers of academic programmes that involve blended mode of learning. The findings imply that in order to make the students to highly engage in their own learning and take the time to be better students, it is necessary to shift into a different paradigm of learning. It is important to create an educational setting that allows students to explore and engage in multiple levels of learning. The perceptions by students at OUT has indicated that though BLM could be the best to fit their time both at work and at home, still face sessions are important. This implies that conventional physical integrations between instructors and students need to complement the online modes of learning. To create this type of student engagement in the online world, students should have five very highly interactive experiences; student-to-student, student-to-teacher, student-to-community, student-to- material, and student-to-technology. If an online program/class is able to build this type of learning environment, the students will have one of the most exciting and memorable encounters of their educational experience.

Combining the real-world resources, activities, and online experiences are some of the most valuable lessons students can do. All students, whether high achieving or low level, old or young can master key interactive fundamentals if given the chance. This study has indicated that the generational differences were not that diverse between old and young students. Access to the print materials library is also crucial in complementing BLM because the print material library environment (Vs digital library) is an important part of interactive, distance education to ask students to do real-world

activities to more fully master the content. When students must mentally, emotionally, and physically touch the reading material, they learn the authentic skills they will be able to use as they advance into their academic and real-world future. If students must use all of the academic disciplines to do their work and produce a product that has to be viewed, reviewed, and restructured, they are forced to learn a wide variety of skills they will use later in their lives. This calls for instructors in BLM to create more interactive hands on assignments to improve on students' interaction with the community, which was perceived low by majority.

Various studies related to the blended learning have been conducted for the purposes of enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. For faculty members, blended learning has to be seen as providing more opportunities for teacher –student interaction, increased student engagement in learning, added flexibility in the teaching and learning environment, and opportunities for continuous improvement. The area of student perceptions of online and blended learning environments as also noted by Shaw (2010) and Wu *et al.* (2008) is often overlooked. It is important not to forget that students are the ones embracing or “fleeing” from these methods of delivery (El Mansour and Mupinga, 2007). What students perceive about the learning environment remains important for implementing new methods of delivery in the academic and training and development areas.

Institutions which adopt BLM should note that students spend considerable time and money, as well as exerting substantial effort in obtaining a quality education and should perceive educational experiences as being of high value (Knox, Lindsay, & Kolb, 1993). Many factors which influence students' perception on various areas such as instructor, technology, interactivity, interest, course management and instruction have to be monitored in the learning process. Student learning style, course structure, expectations, communication, and collaboration are the variables in the BLM hence instructors must address in an effort to increase students' satisfaction levels. Comprehending these essential variables can provide great management insights into developing effective strategies that will allow universities going BLM to create new opportunities and value for their students and instructors.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Respondent’s general experience of their use of BLM (N = 52, figures in %)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can easily understand new information by reading it on my own	28.8	53.8	15.4	0.0	1.9
I consider myself to be highly organized	17.7	73.1	17.3	0.0	0.0
I learn better if I listen to a lecture online than if I read a textbook on my own	30.8	36.5	13.5	7.7	7.7
Sometimes I need help to understand reading digital materials.	42.0	38.5	3.8	10.0	4.0
I have strong time-management skills.	9.6	55.8	30.8	1.9	1.9
I need to be reminded about upcoming assignments and due dates	28.0	36.0	4.0	26.0	6.0
I usually complete the textbook reading assignments	10.9	43.5	4.0	26.0	6.0
The blended course component was designed to help me be an active learner.	54.0	36.0	8.0	0.0	2.0
I understood what was expected of me	28.0	62.0	10.0	0.0	0.0
I experienced intellectual growth in the course of learning	46.0	52.0	2.0	0.0	0.0
I consider myself in a group of the best 5 highest performers in our cohort	38.1	26.2	33.3	2.4	0.0

Appendix 2: Respondent’s perception on BML limitations (N = 52, figures in %)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I lacked the keyboarding/typing skills	5.8	9.6	0.0	44.2	40.4
There was too much reading materials	17.3	26.3	11.5	25.0	19.2
There was too much writing required	3.9	23.5	13.7	41.2	17.6
I got behind and could not catch up	0.0	7.7	11.5	57.7	23.1
The course was too unstructured for me	2.0	5.9	5.9	51.0	35.3
I experienced difficulty with Blackboard	5.8	5.8	7.7	50.0	30.8
I lacked internet browsing skills	1.9	15.4	1.9	38.5	42.3
Inaccessibility of internet connectivity	17.3	28.8	1.9	40.4	11.5

Appendix 3: Respondent's perception on the implementation processes of the BLM (N = 52, figures in %)

	Very relevant	Relevant	Don't know	Somehow not relevant	Very irrelevant
Ease of use of Web and internet sources Environment	50.0	44.2	3.8	1.9	0.0
Online forum discussions	30.5	46.2	9.6	5.8	0.0
Content of the subject matter in a course	35.3	56.9	5.9	2.0	0.0
Face-to-face sessions	53.8	40.4	1.9	5.9	0.0
Course Evaluation by student	34.6	51.9	13.5	0.0	0.0
Blended Learning Method	34.6	55.8	5.8	7.8	0.0
Course assessment (tests and exams)	35.3	51.0	5.9	7.8	0.0
Readability of electronic/digital materials	25.0	67.3	1.9	5.8	0.0
Access to the library print reading materials	15.4	42.3	17.3	17.3	7.7

Appendix 4: Respondent's perception on the anticipated forms of student interactions of BLM (N = 52, figures in %)

	Highest level	High level	Don't know	Low level	Lowest level
Student-to-student interaction	28.8	59.6	0.0	11.5	0.0
Student-to-Instructor interaction	21.2	55.8	3.8	19.2	0.0
Student-to-Community interaction	17.3	36.5	28.8	15.4	1.9
Student-to-Reading Material interaction	26.9	63.5	3.8	5.8	0.0
Student-to-Information Technology interaction	19.2	67.3	3.8	9.6	0.0

Prospects and Challenges in the Deliverance of Executive Masters Degree Programmes

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Abstract: *In the recent decade Executive Masters degree programmes have become very popular deliverance in the Tanzanian higher learning institutions. Such shift of paradigm may have occurred due to public budgetary cuts, employment and socio economic conditions that do not favour full time courses attendance and recent higher learning marketing processes. Using The Open University of Tanzania as a case study, this article will focus on two programmes, namely; Executive Masters in Business Administration (EMBA) and Masters in Community Economic Development (MCED) to analyze its deliverance prospects and challenges. Data collection tools included questionnaire, interviews and documentary analysis. We are arguing that the Executive Master's Degree programmes can be made more effective by being more practical, learner-centered and adoption of blended learning approach. These changes in the provision of Executive Masters degree programmes may expand the impact of the higher learning institutions in the communities and labor markets*

Keywords: Executive Programme, Prospects, Challenges, Blended learning

INTRODUCTION

There is a great paradigm shift in the Tanzanian higher learning institutions in the recent years. Such paradigm shift may have occurred due to public budgetary cuts, employment and socio economic conditions that do not favour full time courses attendance and recent higher learning marketing processes. For instance, the financing of public higher education in Tanzania has adopted the cost sharing policy. Ideally, there is sharing of responsibility between different stakeholders and beneficiaries of higher education products (Ishengoma, 2008).

On the other hand, executive education is changing. As we move into the 21st century, numerous forces are causing a transformation in not only its delivery but also its purpose. The employment and socio economic conditions have acted as pushing factors that has lead into choice of Open and Distance Learning, evening classes and executive education as alternative to full time provision of studies. There are also some cases were students were not able to join residential and full time programmes due to family commitments, employment and working conditions.

A previous study by Conger and Xin (2000) pointed out that executive education is more directly geared to learning needs, learning content, pedagogy, instructors,

participant mixes, and organizational integrating mechanisms. The authors also feel that the mentioned outcomes can be considered in terms of the transformation of executive education in the 21st century. This article therefore intends to explore further on the provision of executive education in the Tanzanian higher learning institutions.

Background of the Problem

While the number of Executive Masters programmes being delivered by higher institutions in Tanzania is increasing rapidly, our knowledge of what makes these courses effective learning experiences for students is still limited. This study, therefore, was conducted to examine the prospect and challenges experienced by executive masters students at The Open University of Tanzania. The provision of Executive Master Programmes is The Open University of Tanzania education approach designed specifically for working business professionals to complete their course with minimal work interruption. The study further analyses the effects of technological, pedagogical, and student characteristics on student learning in Masters in Economic Development (MCED) and Executive Masters in Business Administration (EMBA) programmes at the Open University of Tanzania.

Masters in Community Development (MCED)

Masters in Community Economic Development (MCED) is among many programmes offered through executive module at The Open University of Tanzania. The programme started in 2008. Community Economic Development concept is a participatory process by which communities initiate and generate their own solutions to economic problems leading to positive concrete changes in communities through the creation of employment, stabilization of local economies, reducing poverty, contributing to the health of the natural environment, building local resources and capacities and increasing community control (OUT, 2008). The MCED promotes a holistic approach to practical issues and recognizes the complex, long term nature of individual and collective empowerment processes. MCED is an eighteen months course divided into three modules. Three courses are accomplished in each module lasting for two weeks.

There is a two months break between modules. In total students undertake 9 courses in total (6 core courses and 3 electives). Students are assessed in each course by a combination of course work, term paper and a project/dissertation. The course work component is made up of student's group presentation (50%), while the term paper carries 50%. Students are required to choose a community based organization to work with in order to practically create an impact in the respective community as part of dissertation requirements. The programme is offered in five regional centers, namely, Arusha, Dodoma, Dar es Salaam, Mbeya and Mwanza. Since 2013, the programme has been extended to one centre outside the country, namely, Kibungo, Rwanda (OUT, 2013).

Executive Masters in Business Administration (EMBA)

The Executive masters in Business administration (EMBA) programmes is designed to develop managerial competence in a wide variety of business situations appropriate to diverse national and international backgrounds. The main educational aim of the

programme is to prepare and equip graduates with general training in cross-organizational functions of business and specialized training in career-oriented management professions such as Marketing, Leadership and Governance, Transport and Logistics, Human Resources Management and Finance (OUT, 2006). The programme is offered in three modules with a two months break between modules. Three courses are taught in each module and each course is covered in five days. Course work and dissertations are expected to be accomplished in eighteen months. EMBA is offered in five centers, namely: Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mbeya, Mwanza and Zanzibar in the country and Kibungo centre in Rwanda. The first two modules are conducted in the students' respective regional centers, while the third module (specialization) is done in Kinondoni Regional Centre, Dar es Salaam. The programme consists of 6 core courses and three electives. Students are assessed in each course by a combination of course work, final examination and dissertation. The course work component comprises of timed test (30%) and final examination carries (70%) (OUT, 2013).

THEORETICAL BASIS FOR EXECUTIVE MASTERS PROGRAMMES

The executive Masters Degree programmes are unique due to their business-academic partnership (Carrel and Schoenbachler, 2001). The partnership between Executive Masters Degree programmes and supporting organizations and communities is critical as most graduates are expected to show impacts in the duties with immediate effect. However, the existing literature points out that in some cases the organizations pay the tuition fees and other costs, while other executive students pay these costs through private sponsorship.

Executive Education Concepts

Executive education is commonly referred to academic programmes at graduate-level business schools worldwide for executives, business leaders and functional managers. Executive education is reported as being distinctive from most content focused education (Lockhart, 2013). Usually, these programmes are generally non-credit and non-degree-granting, but sometimes lead to provision of certificates. Recently, the universities and other higher learning institutions have adopted this mode of education whereby senior Managers and Executives are revisiting the campuses for executive education. Some of the goals of these executive learning programmes are to provide government and corporate executives with realistic training. The public and private organizations worldwide believe that they can help broaden the mental horizons of their employees by sponsoring such executive educational programmes.

The Executive Education Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for describing the key features of provision of Executive Masters programmes was drawn from the theoretical perspectives of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983); the reflective executive (Roglio, 2006; Roglio, Light, & Coelho, 2006); and reflective executive development (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003). The development of the reflective executive concept was linked with the study and description of the reflective thinking process, investigated by Argyris and Schön (1974). Schön (1983) developed the idea of reflective practice and presented the

reflective practitioner concept. *Reflective practice* is essential to the development of professional artistry—the ability to make sense of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations of professional practice—and is based on the concepts of knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action.

Knowing-in-action is a spontaneous and usual action that draws on daily practices. It can be identified when practitioners learn how to do something and are able to execute smooth sequences of activity, recognition, decision, and adjustment without having to expend conscious energy thinking about it. However, professional practice often surprises practitioners with unusual experiences that occur when something fails to meet their expectations. In an attempt to preserve the constancy of their usual patterns of knowing-in-action, practitioners may (1) respond to a surprise by brushing it aside, selectively ignoring the signals received; or (2) respond to it through reflection (see Figure 1). According to Schön (1983), this reflection occurs in one of two ways:

- Practitioners may *reflect-in-action* in the midst of an action, without suspending it. They reshape what is being done while doing it. In this case, “we respond to the unusual or anomalous by restructuring some of our strategies of action, theories of phenomena, or ways of framing the problem; and we invent on-the-spot experiments to put our new understandings to the test” (Schön, 1983: 26).
- Practitioners may *reflect-on-action*, thinking back on what they have done in order to discover how their knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome or they may pause in the midst of an action to reflect. Raelin (2002) defines this process as “thinking about thinking” (2002: 66).

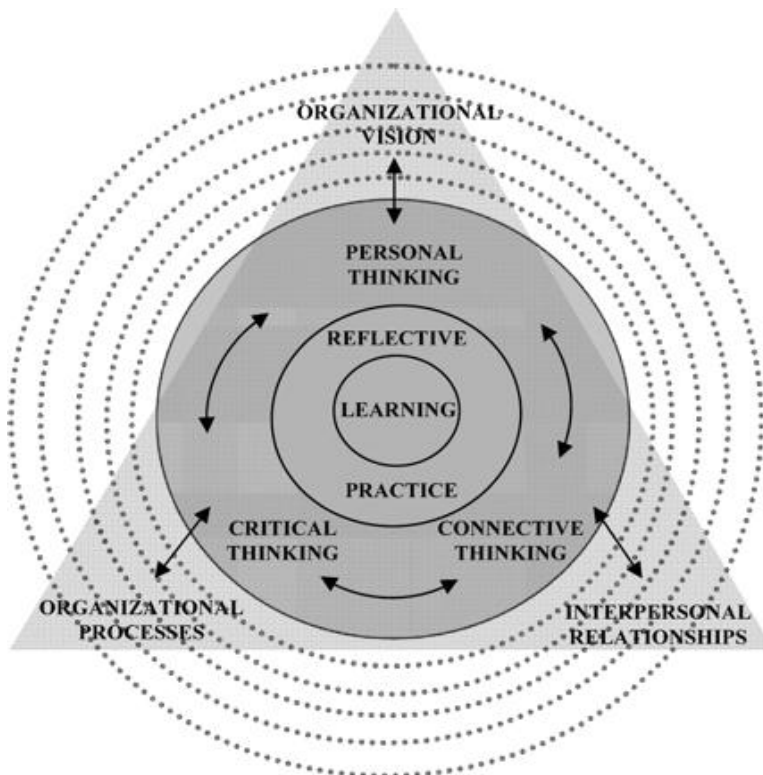


Figure 1: Knowing-in-action approach

Source: Schön (1983)

Executive education programmes have three quite different goals: providing students with focused business understanding and knowledge, helping students solve pressing business problems, and improving students' on-the-job performance and prospects. With few exceptions, executive programmes specialize by discipline, topic, industry, skill, or the role, level, and career stage of participants (Gavin, 2007).

The normal university training programmes aims are to develop students' knowledge and the skills needed to solve problems and conduct rigorous analysis. However, the Executive training typically comes to programmes with particular business problems in mind. They are less motivated by broad intellectual concerns than by pressing practical dilemmas (Gavin, 2007).

The study by Gavin (2007) also pointed out that while other Masters students were in a formative and developmental stage of life, the executives masters programmes were in a more pragmatic and instrumental stage of life. Executive teaching therefore demands far more attention to explicit information and knowledge transfer and far less emphasis on basic skill development than teaching.

A similar study by Newman and Stoner (1989) indicated that normal MBA students are typically in their mid-to-late 20s, with 3 to 5 years of business experience. Most of that work experience has been in relatively low-level positions, such as analyst, associate or individual contributor roles. However, the same study confirmed that most Executive MBA students were typically in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, with extensive business experience.

Many hold mid- and senior-level executive positions; often, they have worked for several different companies and held a variety of jobs. They were usually savvy and well informed about the realities of organizations and management practice; for this reason, “they resent being told the ‘facts of life’” (Newman & Stoner, 1989: 133). What they frequently lack is a larger context: a means of viewing their own experiences from afar and assessing or organizing them around a larger framework or theory.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE MASTERS PROGRAMME TEACHING

The study by Gavin (2007) indicated that Executive trainers need to be far more attentive to the parallels between cases and the work experiences and industry backgrounds of their students. In executive classes instructors need to develop teaching plans that explicitly ask for and draw out their students' experiences. The trainers are expected to help executives use what is already inside them.

To do so effectively, however, requires that students first be given the opportunity to give voice to their experiences; they must then be encouraged to abstract from them and draw broader, more general lessons. The preparation of executive students, on the other hand, is often uneven. At times, this reflects language problems, since executive education students are less likely than ordinary students to have been screened for language proficiency due to many years of staying away from books.

PRINCIPLES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN EXECUTIVE CLASSES

The process of experiential learning proposed by Kolb (1984) is represented in a cycle composed by four “adaptive learning modes” namely: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation Learning is defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984: 38). The concept of experiential learning implies that all learning is relearning: Nobody enters a learning situation without some experience or ideas about the topic at hand. As such, it is essential for educators to relate these ideas to the learning process. “If the education process begins by bringing out the learner's beliefs and theories, examining and testing them, and then integrating the new, more refined ideas into the person's belief systems, the learning process will be facilitated (Kolb, 1984: 28).”

CONSIDERATION FOR STUDENTS TO JOIN EXECUTIVE PROGRAMME

The considerations students use in deciding if (and when) an executive programme is right for them can be classified as personal considerations, academic considerations, financial considerations, and other considerations. Personal considerations would include decision considerations such as a student's perceived need to become a more

effective manager or community specialist, the likelihood of remaining with the company, the pay-off or perceived value of the investment, the design of the executive programme to minimize interference with work responsibilities, and the ability to stay on the job while attending classes.

Academic decision considerations might include the reputation or prestige of the college or university, the accreditation of the college or university, the programme's interaction or partnerships with the community and the rigorousness of the curriculum. Financial consideration would include the actual cost/tuition of the Executive programme and the availability of payment or credit terms for financing participation in the programme. Other considerations would include its convenience in terms of scheduling, the short duration of the programme and the time commitment outside of the classroom.

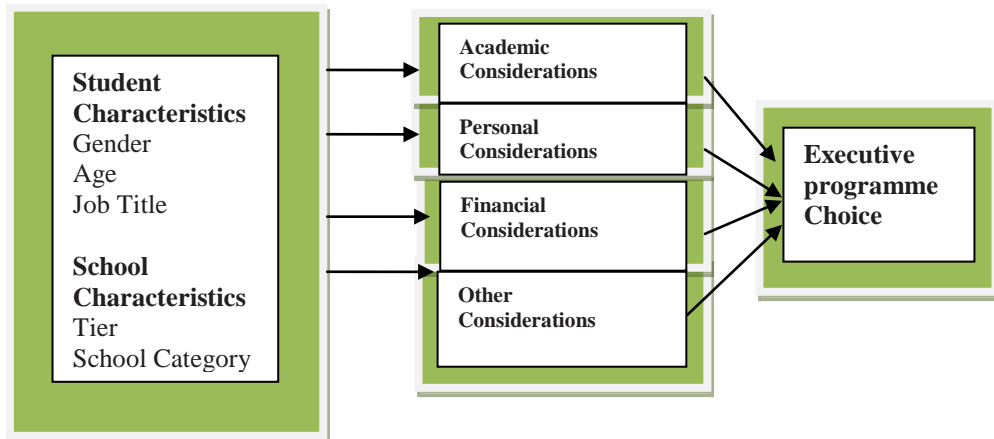


Figure 2 Decision Consideration Model for Executive programme Students
Adopted from: (Carrel and Schoenbachler, 2001)

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF EXECUTIVE MASTERS PROGRAMMES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The reviewed literature points out an intense debate about the quality, value and mode of delivery of executive programmes worldwide. For instance, in terms of prospects, Utley (1992) confirmed that Executive Masters graduates were in a good position to combine theories, knowledge of business and case studies in the classrooms. The study also highlighted deficiencies with certain non-executive programme and the timing for careers. The study by Lewis (1992) justifies the popularity of executive masters programmes in other countries (USA) where many senior managers are motivated to take on this extra burden of office work and attendance of executive programmes.

The study by Baruch and Leeming (2001) indicated that executive MBA programmes has add value to its graduates and make them better managers. Reports on this study provided a comprehensive evaluation for the impact of a programme of a leading UK business school on the competencies, skills, self-perception and careers of its graduates. The results demonstrate the value that a programme generates for individuals and their

employers. The output of the study clearly indicated increased managerial skills, self-confidence and several aspects of career development.

Despite all these prospects of executive programmes, the literature has as well pointed out some challenges. For instance, Desanctis and Sheppard, (n.d.) found the social aspects of this learning process, especially with regard to learning in the executive mode. The study mentioned the challenges in linking traditional university education with corporate life. Other challenges include teaching methods used in the provision of the executive programmes. For example, Siebert and Martin (2003) outlined the dominant variance theory approach based on a positivistic hypothetical-deductive and do not adequately take into account sufficiently either the diversity of students' interests or the contexts in which business or community operate.

The literature also indicates few studies to establish opinions and perceptions of graduates in the Executive programmes in Tanzania. Louw, et al. (2001) did a study to elicit the opinions of graduates on the future development of the MBA programme in South Africa. There has been, however, a concern on the increasingly uncoupled from practice and real-world relevance. The relevance gap in the provision of executive education affects the quality of teaching as well as the institutional legitimacy of our higher learning institutions. Tushman, et al. (2007) argued that executive education is an underutilized context that can enhance the quality of faculty as well as impact on managerial practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study surveyed students enrolled in the MCED and EMBA executive programmes offered by The Open University of Tanzania. This survey covered students enrolled in two academic years, namely: 2011/2012 and 2012/2013. The population was of 250 students. (150 for MCED and 100 for MBA), who are spread in various regional centers, namely: Dar-es-Salaam, Arusha, Mwanza, Zanzibar, Mbeya and Dodoma. Since it was difficult to reach all students we selected using simple random and convenient sampling a total of 120 students to form our sample. Interviews were also done to Coordinator's of both programmes and four selected instructors teaching in the executive masters programmes.

This study employed a survey research methodology. Research instruments used included well-structured questionnaire, interviews and documentary analysis. The questionnaire had both close and open-ended questions and was administered to ongoing students in the selected sample from various executive programs centers. Questionnaires were mailed and/or hand delivered to respective students. Pilot testing of the questionnaire was done to a few students in Dar-es-Salaam in order to verify its content. Interviews were done with coordinators and a four randomly selected instructors of the executive programs in order to get more insight in the delivery, challenges and prospects of the programmes. Various published reports of the two executive master's programmes and literature review was used in undertaking documentary analysis. Data collected was analyzed mainly using descriptive statistics and content analysis.

Presentations of results and discussion

(i) Description of respondents

(a) Sex

Of the surveyed respondents, 65% were male and 35 % were females. This indicates more male are enrolled in our executive masters programmes as compared to females.

(b) Age

Table 1 shows that majority of respondents (55%) were in the age category of between 31 and 40. Those of the age between 41 and 50 accounted for 35%. The implication of these results is that executive programmes attract more students with over thirty years as compared to the young ones.

Table 1: Age category

Age category	Response rate
26-30	10%
31-40	55%
41-50 and above	35%

Source: Author's survey (2013)

(c) Marital status

Our survey indicates that 85% of the respondents were married. 15% were single, 8% were widowed and 2% were divorced. This implies that most of the respondents had extra responsibilities of maintaining families while studying at the same time.

(d) Status of employment

The survey also investigated on the respondent's status of employment. The results are indicated in the table below:

Table 2: Status of employment

Status of employment	Response rate
Employed full time	90%
Employed part time	5%
Self employed	4%
Not employed	1%

Source: Author's survey (2013)

90% of respondents had full time employment, while 5% were employed part time. 4% were self employed and 1% was not employed at all.

(e) Work experience

Results from the survey indicate that respondents have significant work experience. 55% have working experience ranging from 5 to 10 years, while 33% have work experience of more than 10 years.

Table 3: Status of work experience

Work experience	Response rate
No experience	1%
Less than 5 years	11%
5- 10 years	55%
More than 10 years	33%

Source: Authors survey (2013)

(f) Motives for joining OUT executive programmes

Results indicate that respondents’ leading motive to join OUT executive programmes was career advancement (41%). The second leading motive was flexibility of OUT executive programmes (28%). Development of better working skills was the third motive (19%) and the quality of OUT’s quality of the curriculum ranked as the fourth motive (11%).

Table 4: Motives for joining executive programme

Motive for joining executive programme	Response rate
Quality of the curriculum	11%
Flexibility of the programme	28%
Career advancement	41%
To develop better skills	19%
Location and class convenience	7%
Cost of the programme	2%

Source: Authors survey (2013)

(g) Programme expectations

The survey also wanted to know how the executive programmes have met student’s expectations. Results indicate that 45% of the respondents advanced their career, 30% were of the opinion that flexibility of the programmes met their needs, 18% indicated that the programmes helped them to develop better working skills and only 7% revealed that the programmes managed to facilitate theory and practice.

Table 5: Programme expectations

Programme expectations met	Response rate
Development of better working skills	18%
Career advancement	45%
Linking theory and practice	7%
Flexibility of the programme	30%

Source: Authors survey (2013)

Challenges encountered by student respondents

Student respondents indicated the following challenges encountered when undertaking studies in the OUT Executive programmes.

- (i) Loaded lectures within a short period of time in the face-to-face sessions. Normally students meet for two weeks for a module which has three subjects. Time allocated for a course is not aligned to the required course coverage.
- (ii) Most of the students are employed with very busy schedules hence it is difficult to cope with after class assignments. Balancing demand from employers and studies becomes a great challenge and therefore contributes to delays in meeting assignments deadlines.
- (iii) Accessing relevant reading materials is a bit difficult due to poor internet connectivity and lack of libraries in centers' which are outside Dar-Es-salaam.
- (iv) The available executive programs do not have adequate ICT interactive forums for students and lecturers. This has in a way hindered the required continuous follow-ups between and after face-to-face sessions.
- (v) Delivery methodology considered not very friendly to adult learners. This is because time allocated for face-to-face during modules was is not adequate to cover all the three courses comprehensively. Hence delivery is mainly dominated by teaching leaving very little room to share information and knowledge between students and lecturers.

Interviews with the coordinator of Executive MCED programme revealed that there is a chronic problem of students submitting their term papers on time due to their busy working schedules. In addition full time attendance during the module session is not regular as per requirement mainly explained by responsibilities and busy working schedule of students. Decreasing completion rate of projects/dissertations was also singled out as another outstanding challenge. Experience has shown that once students finish coursework, writing the project paper/dissertation is not prioritized. The MCED coordinator explained that "Project/dissertation completion rate has decreased from approximately 90% in 2010 to below 50% in 2012."

Delay of fees payment was cited as another challenge. Many students pay own fees as most of their employers have not been supportive in financing their studies. This has in a way contributed to the decreasing enrollment of students in the MCED programme. "Many students are selected but normally only half of the selected students finally enroll. Financing is mentioned as the main constraint" (MCED coordinator).

The MBA Coordinator also echoed the problem of poor dissertation completion rate. Busy work schedule and lack of continuity after completing the coursework were mentioned as major constraints. He also cited decreasing enrollment of executive

masters students as a result of intense competition from other universities and financing constraint.

MCED lecturer interviewed expressed concern on the quality of term papers submitted as they were done in a rush in spite of having a break of two months to prepare the papers. He further went on to say that “Copy and paste type of papers have been the order of the day and students do not respect given deadlines”.

On the other hand, another Lecturer in the MCED programme testified that the group presentation by students as part of their coursework was very effective in ensuring that all students participate in learning and sharing work experience as related to theory acquired.

MBA lecturer supported using timed tests and examinations as an effective way of solving the delay of assignments and term papers. “He further went on to say that having examinations improves attendance and knowledge acquisition.”

CONCLUSION

OUT Executive Master’s programmes have mainly attracted adults who have significant work experience. Career advancement, flexibility of programmes, need to develop better skills and quality of the curriculum are singled out as driving forces for joining OUT executive programmes. Students’ expectations have been met in regard to career advancement and flexibility of the programme.

However much needs to be done in ensuring that our programmes help in building working skills required by students and link theory and practice in the industry. Since most of our students are adults it is crucial to ensure that more relevant adult teaching methodologies are adopted in order to create a friendlier teaching environment. To ensure effective continuous assessment there is a need to use more interactive forums for learning purposes. Since our students are busy workers this approach can also go a long way in reducing the face-to-face sessions and instead adopt ICT in delivery methodology. It is imperative to develop blended learning mechanisms in order to mitigate challenges and be more competitive.

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Making a Case for E - learning: Experiences in E-learning at Langston University Langston, Oklahoma, USA

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Abstract: *Research shows that, when activities are well planned, Web-based learners' performances can surpass those of students in traditional learning settings. This paper discusses the findings carried out to investigate the effectiveness of e- learning in hybrid and online learning environments at Langston University in Oklahoma, USA. The study under discussion was a case study carried on 26 freshman students at the Langston University in Oklahoma, USA who were struggling with English Language skills competence. The research method was qualitative based mainly on participatory and observation and asking students' their feelings, observing them work as well as recording their scores before and after. The aim of the study was to explore whether technology/e learning can impact students' success in terms of skills competence, retention, and engagement. The research found that e- learning exploits interactive technologies and communication systems to improve the students' learning experiences. It also established that e- learning can provide a horde of educational opportunities ranging from creating exciting and meaningful learning experiences for students to reinforcing understanding, increasing student interaction and engagement, stimulating self directed learning, to providing resources and supportive collaboration from a distance. The study concluded that technology has the potential to transform the way teachers teach and the way students learn. The study recommended, however, that before resorting to e -learning, educators recognize that e -learning is about learning and not about technology and that strategic planning and development of e -learning should be based on the needs and demands of learners as well their level of their educational experiences.*

Key Concepts: E- learning, information and communications technology skills, effective practice with e- learning, pedagogy, learning activity

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of e- learning has to be based on the same criteria as those used to measure effectiveness of learning in general based on competences in: communication skills--reading, writing, speaking, listening skills; and ability to learn independently. E learning also aides social skills, ethics, positive attitude, responsibility; teamwork; collaborative learning and networking. The; ability to adapt to changing circumstances; thinking skills, problem solving, critical, logical, numerical skills; knowledge navigation; entrepreneurship, taking initiative, seeing opportunities; and digital literacy are also further benefits of e-learning (Bates, 2009).

While some instructors have jumped on board the e-learning ship and have embraced use of technology in their teaching, others have not been so persuaded. These have taken the position of Medwecki of Hong Kong Police, who - arguing against e-learning's effectiveness, says:

When it comes to acquisition of management skills or problem solving skills -- the utility of e-learning is less. In practice, I have found that e-learning is more of a buzz word in training circles that promises much but delivers a lot less (mgvh@ltsg).

Proponents of e-learning, however, maintain that e-learning is effective and that its success is based on how it is used. A research conducted by Reshef (2000) found that almost 50 per cent of educational institutions have started to use online learning as a means of teaching because of its significant advantages. In the United States, the US Department of Education in a study on the effectiveness of online learning versus face-to-face instruction found that on average classes with online learning produce stronger student learning outcomes than do classes with solely face-to-face instruction while another online survey by same authors on whether e-learning is effective found that 36 percent of the students said no while 64 percent said yes. As Lessner (2003) points out, "e-learning must start with the tools to learn how to learn and all learners should make its use a standard part of college experience, making assistive software a mainstream application for all learners, whatever their age or level of ability (Central Government, Education IT, Healthcare IT, 2009).

BACKGROUND

Several universities, as part of the audit process for developing e-learning are looking into a number of initiatives, which can be used in conjunction with a computer and interactive whiteboard. Most have concluded that students struggling with concept mastery and skills competence benefit most if the full range of visual, auditory and kinesthetic principles, which are part of student learning styles, are incorporated into lessons (Knight, 2004). Thus global-wise, most universities have created initiatives geared at promoting e-learning as a means of empowering and engaging learners (2004). University systems in general calling for a more innovative approach in education to combat dropout -rates and improve graduation rates have turned to educational technology. The result is that many educational institutions are beginning to require one to have knowledge of educational technology before one is hired. Hence e-learning is becoming increasingly important since it is being viewed as a way to increase flexibility in teaching and learning. As Bates (2009) notes:

On the ground, the impact of e-learning strategies is beginning to be classroom level, while a new generation of research and development units has sprung up to ensure that the potential for enhancing teaching and learning with new technologies is fully explored. Advocates of online teaching are claiming that e-learning can provide both the instructor and the students time to reflect on what is going on, thus allowing the teacher to become a facilitator while students take charge of their own learning. Pushed by the need to meet the needs of a more diverse student population, Langton University

managers, like many university administrators today, called for a course redesign. Thus in 2005, Langston University incorporated e-learning as a course redesign initiative to deliver learning through what was seen as ‘an interactive and engaging way.’ Through this, e-learning, a skills tutor’ software, (which incorporates all provision in education and training from basic level to advanced level skills) was introduced. The intention was to allow students to master required competencies before they graduated to the next level. Learners worked at their own pace and advanced to the next level only after achieving 80 percent proficiency. The focus was on ‘putting teaching, training and learning at the heart of what the students were doing’ through e- learning. A writing laboratory to allow course redesign and the inclusion of technology in traditional setting was introduced allowing, e-learning to become the buzzword. Encouraged, Langston University made concerted effort to support staff development in the use of learning technologies, making inroads into establishing the skills practitioners would need to teach with technology. Funds were earmarked to promote the development of e-learning materials and instructors were actually rewarded for utilizing educational technology such e-learning and smart boards. While Langston University found that a growing number of instructors were developing e-learning materials, a good number of instructors refused to be persuaded. Staff development meetings hence had to be held to raise awareness on the benefits of integrating educational technology into learning programmes as well as into raising the ICT skill levels amongst practitioners. The study of students using e-learning in an English proficiency class was one such effort created to assess the benefits of e –learning for the benefit of practitioner engagement.

Bates (2009) maintains that technology skills cannot be independent of the subject or topic, given that skills such as problem solving require knowledge of concepts. Thus e-learning should be imbedded into all subject areas in order to provide students with competencies such as information and communications technologies required in almost all occupations and professions. It has become obvious that digital technology is increasingly affecting all areas of human activity from creation, storage, access, analysis, and dissemination of knowledge. Hence Bates sees e-learning and educational technology as not just about teaching generic computer literacy skills such as keyboard use or word processing but as one that should go beyond to using computers for digital imaging, graphical information systems, and wikis to teach writing skills as well as knowing what databases hold the relevant information to solving a particular problem.

Findlay, JISC Learning and Teaching committee (2004) goes further to argue that for e-learning to be effective, designing for e-learning has to take place in the context of a preferred pedagogical approach, which in itself will be derived from a perspective on the nature of the learning process. The focus is to move beyond an understanding of e-learning as simply providing content and learning objects to thinking about technology as central to contemporary teaching and learning processes. The process adds Findlay, also requires seeing e-learning as part of the range of resources available to the professional practitioner.

The United States government were encouraged by researches such as those done by 1) Shachar and Neumann (2010) who found that in 70 percent of cases, students taking

courses by distance education outperformed their student counterparts in the traditionally instructed courses and 2) by Neuhauser (2002) who concluded that ninety six percent of the online students found the course to be either as effective or more effective to their learning than their typical face to-face courses. The US thus began to view the integration of e-learning into the curriculum as key to transforming educational institutions, especially Black American Universities. As a result Langston University received funds through Federal Title III funding to help support the educational technology inclusion initiative. Thus at Langston University, a number of staff development, conferences, and discussion on innovative approaches to e-learning, especially in assessment methods, skills competency and concept mastery were explored.

The aim was to improve retention, graduation rates and learner engagement. The study under discussions used technology as part of a face-to-face environment to investigate the impact of educational technology on students struggling with English Language skills competence. The study utilized Desire to Learn (D2L) - a learning management system, smart boards, computers, headphones, and My Skills Tutoran English Language skills software programme installed on each student's computer. The 'My skills tutor software,' is frequently used on ESOL courses to promote use of language and reinforce understanding (Knight, 2004).

The software provides students with individualized work (created based on the student's level of proficiency derived from a pre test). It also had related questions and quizzes with answers. The software would automatically grade students' work after each attempt. The quizzes and tests were always changing, so a student could practice same concept but with different questions. For this study, students came to the lab three times a week for two hours to practice on the 'My Skills Tutor,' software.

The study also found that e-learning is more useful in recruitment as it widens participation, opening doors to adult and community learners providing especially the disenfranchised with the skills and access to technology they require as citizens in an information age. Further the study experiences at showed that e- learning has a major role in supporting learning, raising standards and widening participation and explicitly support's government initiatives, strategies and policies to provide flexibility, choice and the increased value of the importance of the learner's experience.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Effective e-learning institutions worldwide depend on initiatives supported and implemented by practitioners. Yet, today instructors do not fully recognize the effectiveness of educational technology. But as Bates (2009) points out, even when potential advantages have been recognized, how, when and where to implement e-learning in conjunction with established practice has still not been fully explored. For many practitioners, e learning thus still brings with it as many questions as answers. The case study was intended to contribute answers to some questions on whether e-learning is effective as well as suggesting ways in which a better understanding of the advantages of e- learning would be realized by practitioners.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to investigate whether e learning establishes a pedagogically sound way of improving students' learning. The purpose was to explore the effectiveness of e learning in order to entice practitioners to feel confident in applying e learning across the curriculum and in different modes of delivery; traditional face to face, or open distance. The experiences of students at Langston University from this case study thus were to provide an insight into the advantages and effectiveness of e learning in a hybrid and long distance environments.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which e learning improves students' learning outcomes in meeting the intended goals.

The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To investigate the extent to which e- learning increases student opportunity to goal negotiate so that they can take ownership of their learning
2. To establish whether e learning assists students in sharing and discussing ideas as well as in evaluating concepts being learned.
3. To examine the extent to which e-learning helps students utilize formative assessment to aid them in building skills competencies needed in the 21st century as well as to help them monitor their learning.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was aimed at practitioners in post-compulsory education and training – lecturers, tutors and support staff in higher and further education institutions, as well as facilitators, trainers and tutors in adult and community learning. The study will in short be of significance to all those with an interest in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions as well as those with a curiosity about how e-learning can assist them. It was hoped that the research would entice practitioners to feel confident in applying e-learning across the curriculum and in different modes of delivery; traditional face to face, or open distance.

RESEARCH GAP

Against the backdrop of the growing demand to utilize e-learning not many researches have been carried out to investigate the effective practice of e-learning, thus in January 2011, the researcher embarked on a research to investigate the effectiveness of e learning as a pedagogy on 26 learners in an English language proficiency programmed at Langston University.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

E-learning

According to Knight (2004), e learning is equated to enhanced learning and is defined as 'learning facilitated and supported through the use of information and communications technology. E- Learning may involve the use of some, or all, of the following technologies: desktop and laptop computers, software, including assistive software, interactive whiteboards, digital cameras, mobile and wireless tools, including mobile

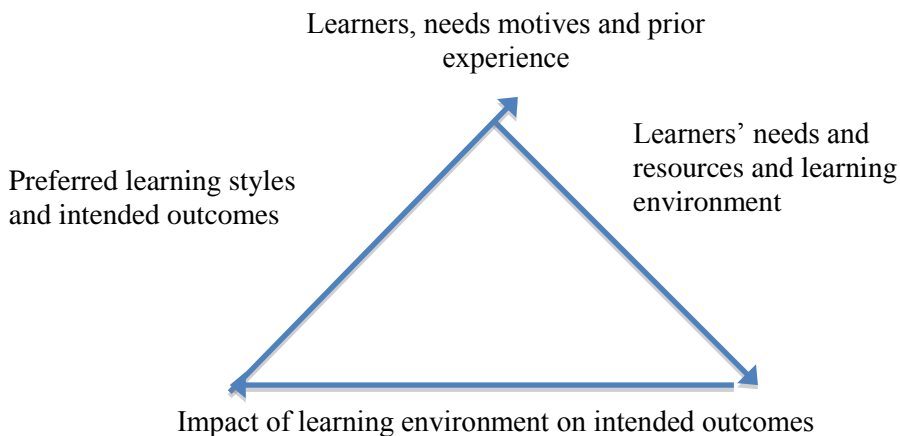
phones, electronic communication tools, including email, discussion boards, chat facilities and video conferencing. E-learning can be supporting learning, blended learning (the combination of traditional and e- learning practices), or learning that is delivered entirely online. In this study, e- learning is no longer simply associated with distance or remote learning but forms part of a conscious choice of the best and most appropriate ways of promoting effective learning.

Pedagogy

- Pedagogy is defined as ‘the activities of educating or instructing or teaching’ and ‘activities that impart knowledge or skill’. Pedagogy implies a very special skill, in which the role of the practitioner can be viewed as essentially creative. The term ‘pedagogy’ (literally ‘a guide who took a boy to school’) means guiding and to exploring the nature of the skills involved (Knight, 2004). Exploring the concept of effective practice in either ‘e-’learning, or other types of learning, begins with an understanding of the term ‘pedagogy’, which was formerly restricted to erudite usage (Findley, 2004)‘.

Beetham (2009) observes that a learning activity can be defined as an interaction between a learner and an environment leading to a planned outcome. It is the planned outcome, which makes learning a purposeful activity. In a learning activity, practice is matched with learners’ needs and with the resources within the learning environment

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Adapted from Beetham, 2009

According to Beetham (2009), the e-learning approach must be matched with preferred learning styles and intended outcomes, which include acquisition of knowledge, academic and social skills; increased motivation; progression, technical framework, support of the development of tools for e learning, subject-based collaboration, and must offer opportunities for experimentation with new technologies. From this model, we note that making e-learning effective begins by looking at the intended goals. Here learners are able to agree on some or all of their learning goals in negotiation with

tutors. What is established practice? Initial assessment of learners' needs and preferred learning styles takes place before courses start. Learners are matched to the most suitable level and type of course. A supportive and respectful relationship between learner and practitioner enables the setting of agreed and achievable learning goals. What advantages can e-learning bring? Access to differentiated online resources can open up a more extensive and appropriate range of options for learners. Self-directed learning through online simulations and tutorials can build learners' confidence to take up formal learning opportunities.

POPULATION

Located in Langston city in Oklahoma the Langston University writing laboratory is a growing Learning Centre designed to provide a learning facility equipped with computers to deliver a wide range of learning opportunities. The Centre holds 26 learners at a time but deals with over 200 student learners every week, offering English skills competency to international and American students. As the Langton Writing Laboratory director, I saw the need to tap into the experiences of the millennium generation who all own either a computer or a phone. Most students would come to the writing lab to use computers but ended up going to either to face book or playing video games and never utilizing technology for learning or to find information regarding their work. The writing laboratory technology, I realized was being wasted while it could be channeled towards learning. I decided to make the laboratory provide a formal place where students came to use technology to learn and not to relax. Included in the population were freshman students as well as upper level undergraduates who needed to booster their literacy levels, access information or improve ICT skills with the help of the latest technology.

The writing laboratory served to provide foundation courses to allow students to embark on full degree programmes. Skills taught were built around a mixture of online materials put together by the instructors and commercially produced materials with a strongly learner-centred approach. In addition, the study included formal taught classes by instructors qualified in English Language teaching.

PARTICIPANTS

The study was carried out on students who took Basic English language classes, foundation course designed to increase their scores so they could be fully enrolled into the Bachelor education programme. The students included young men and women and came from diverse backgrounds and races. Among the students enrolled in the study were athletes who had been mainly recruited many for their sportsmanship but who needed to pass classes to stay in the games. Students were enrolled into regular classes but also came to the writing laboratory as lab hours three times a weeks for a maximum of two hours per session. Drop-in basis slots throughout each week to students outside the Basic English classes were also provided. The laboratory tutors and instructors met learners on their initial visits in order to put them at ease. They discussed student options and helped them on an individual learner path, allowing learners to apply knowledge in the context of real life experiences. The learners were then given classes as well as interactive tutorials in basic skills. Learners outcome were based entirely on

their decision and the effort they put in.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions of the study were mainly derived from the main objective of the study and were as follows:

Major Question

To what extent does e-learning improve learning outcomes in terms of meeting desired goals?

The specific objectives of the study were:

- Does e-learning increase student opportunity to goal negotiating for students to take ownership of their learning?
- To what extent does e learning assist students in sharing and discussing ideas as well as in evaluating concepts being learned?
- Does e learning help students utilize formative and aid students in skill competencies needed in the 21st century and to monitor their learning?
- To what extent does e learning assist learners in explore new concepts, visualize ideas to make learning exciting and active?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study began by setting up a course area on the desire to learn Learning Management System (LMS) and enrolled learners into groups defined by the scores they had earned in the pre testing. The researcher incorporated a mixture of technologies and resources for learning support, including notes and handouts, images (diagrams and photographs and videos) and then embedded my skills tutor software and other on line programmes materials, practice activities, assessments and discussion boards. In addition to providing support materials, the study explored blending e learning with taught sessions, to assist learners in managing their own learning. Each week, the learners worked through prepared material online, which expanded on concepts discussed in the course textbook. Links to outside web resources were also provided. These activities were then made the focus of discussion in the following week's class session.

Self-grading quizzes were set and delivered online. Learners took these quizzes in their own time but with time restrictions to simulate exam conditions. The submissions were automatically marked and if a learner performed poorly, built-in feedback was provided with explanations. Tutors would then provide learners with links to relevant learning materials. Further feedback could take place in face-to-face sessions, thus providing a blended learning solution.

During the research, three effective practices of e-learning principles were observed:

1. Designing effective learning activities involves decisions, which appropriately reflect the needs of learners, the nature of the learning environment and the intended learning outcomes
2. Effective practice matches learners' needs with tools and resources within the learning environment, the approach taken reflects learners' preferences and

abilities, and matches these to the intended outcomes

3. Where the e-learning option is used, it extends learning potential and is not used for its own sake (Beetham, 2009).

Classrooms and computer laboratories at the College were well equipped, mostly with interactive whiteboard facilities and wall displays. A dedicated suite of computer rooms is also available for teaching ICT and Computing. This allows e learning to be used effectively as part of a traditional taught class, in addition to having the resources and discussion facilities available to learners off-site. A real advantage of online resources is that learners can concentrate their efforts during the classroom sessions on learning, rather than on note taking, knowing that course materials will be available to download from the VLE. They can also familiarize themselves with the topics to be used in the next class and prepare questions in advance, whetting their appetite for critical analysis.

For example, in one assignment, learners were asked to critically evaluate a web-based resource and post their observations to a discussion board. This activity was initially structured as a taught session in the computer suite, but then extended outside the timetabled classes with learners contributing to the discussion over several days. The tutor then worked through their contributions in the next class, providing feedback and stimulating further discussion. The ability to reflect and consolidate in the intervening period, as well as contribute to the discussion online, led to learners participating more in the classroom sessions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Sub Question 1. *Does e-learning increase student opportunity to goal negotiating for students to take ownership of their learning?*

To answer this question, instructors always discussed with the students enrolled in the class and involved in the study what they, the students, visualized as the intended outcome. Learners were made to discuss and agree with the tutors are on some or all some of their learning goals. Before the start, there was an initial assessment on learners' needs and preferred learning styles. Student saw their scores and agreed that the outcome had to be better. A supportive and respectful relationship between learner and practitioner was then established to enable the setting of agreed and achievable learning goals. Students were then asked what learning style they preferred. Most students in this class almost 98% preferred doing, seeing and hearing as their preferred learning styles. Some however preferred taking short quizzed a multiple times while only a few 10% preferred answering long questions. Most students enrolled in this class, it was discovered had very short attention span. Learners were then matched to the most suitable level and type of learning style and tools. Some students who were not very competent in using the computer preferred to continue using the book. Others wanted the teacher to use the smart board to explain concepts first. Some however were very comfortable with technology and found that the "My Skills Tutor software," which involved several online instructors was better for them as it allowed them to work alone without the interference of an instructor.

The study found that the matching of students to preferred learning styles and resources brought many advantages. Access to differentiated online resources opened up a more extensive and appropriate range of options for the learners, which stimulated self-directed learning, which did build learners' confidence to take up formal learning opportunities. As students engaged in this course as a foundation course, a follow up on the students' progress showed that a high number, 70% of the students who had been involved in the e-learning case study had grabbed extending opportunities for learning and were doing just as well and some even better than those who had not started of in basic skills classes.

Sub question 2

To what extent does e learning assist students in sharing and discussing ideas as well as in evaluating concepts being learned?

Using the (D2L) platform, learners were grouped and prompted to ask and answer discussion question through the discussion board. Learners were encouraged to engage in group discussions to seek information and to analyze and assess their own and others' decisions. Classroom-based discussions were then used to reinforce conceptual learning wherever time allowed. Instructors set guidelines for effective discussion and invited learners to defend and promote a position and maintain discussion as part of the course delivery. The study found that the sharing and discussion of ideas had a myriad of advantages. First, learners discussed with their peers exchanging roles in a team and then presented summaries for tutors and their peers. The anonymity of online discussion encouraged participation even from those learners who are normal not as active in face-to-face class discussions. Additionally, students were able to work as teams thus allowing formation of learning communities, which extended beyond class contact time and class discussion to form. In addition online discussions were able to extend discussions and the sharing of ideas even in real time (asynchronous) thus overcoming the barrier of distance and providing social as well as task-focused support. Online discussions can allow isolated learners to engage in collaborative group activities. Through use of learning management systems (LMS) the study found that participation in discussion can be more effectively and scheduled as a component in a course. The study also found that the emphasis on collaborative learning through discussion boards to had given learners a strong push towards their progress. As Jon Clarke, course leader for Child and Youth Studies noted, "online discussion component of the course is not just as a means of engaging learners but also an opportunity to maximize learning (Central Government, Education IT, Healthcare IT, 2009).

Sub question 3

Does e learning help students utilize formative and aid students in skill competencies needed in the 21st century and to monitor their learning?

Through e learning, we were able to organize learning into component units and provide opportunities for summative evaluation. This approach allowed learners to have opportunities to do practice questions, thus test their skills or knowledge. Tutors as well as the learning software give clear feedback to students at each stage to correct as well as direct student performance. The study found that online quizzes give learners opportunities to self-test prior to summative assessments and that online assessment

tests can provide immediate feedback in a non-judgmental way. More than 95% of learners who participated in online self-test practices reported increased confidence in their application of knowledge. The class registered a 20% increase pass rate from the previous classes. The self test helped online study mastery of concepts which in turn helped each student engaged in the class to progress at his or her own pace. The immediate feedback - which occurred in a very private way, made the learning environment come alive but not in a threatening or embarrassing way while at the same time provided direction to guide students' performance. Results from the class showed a move from the bell curve. Most students in the English Proficiency class averaged 70-80% and only 10 to 15 % failure failed to pass and the drop out rate was less than 5%.

In the study, learners became more independent suggesting that self-testing initiatives during learning can lead to a deeper understanding of concepts and skills acquisition and mastery than a content-driven approach. The study concluded that opportunities for feedback should be provided to allow learners to understand where they went wrong. The use of repetition through further activities can, in fact be fun if done through the new technologies. The study also found that e learning allows many more methods than face to face.

SUMMARY

Online resources can support different learning styles as indicated in the study carried out in 2011-2012 on 26 Basic English students. In addition, the study also established that e-learning brings media-rich resources in different formats, which can provide more efficient learning when linked with traditional methods. However, for e-learning to be successful, the study found that the applied pedagogy has to be different since there is need to keep the learner excited and focused to enable him/her to acquire the desired skills. The case study found that the e-learning option provides effective solutions to learning situations-- thus e-learning can aid the ability of learners to achieve the desired outcomes (Teaching college courses online vs. face-to-face).

The study also found that e learning is not about posting presentations on line that are clueless or half-baked. For example, where instructors simply put a list of bulletin points in place of meaningful content and where power points and content were not clear, the students continuously asked for teachers' assistance, which ended up frustrating both the learners and the instructor. This also was the case where students were being asked to work on line but their computer literacy was nil. The students got scared and all attempts to learn stopped. This warranted the need to offer separate classes to those students who could not use computers. The class was designed to provide software skills to enable learners to be able to create, edit, and publish so as to provide lessons feedback to give the look and feel of a live event. The training was used to help student attach and open responses in the drop box, openly respond and post responses on discussion boards as well as take quizzes and post online presentations, which helped them engage in their work more effectively. It was noted that new users of technology should not be made to feel alienated. During this study, researchers found that combination of multimedia instructional design as well as use of other experts could be

employed to work with students. Additionally, e learning freed course navigation giving learner more control. It also freed teachers to facilitate as well as allowed them to do more preparation. Finally, e learning allowed performance-based assessments hence reducing plagiarism and rote learning. Further assessments on e learning assimilated work place experiences. As such, e learning is essential in developing the digital skills that are necessary to navigate particular subject domains (Staff Contributor. (2012). As Bates (2009) points out:

Information technology is no longer just a useful tool that supports university and college administration and teaching and learning but rather an integral and essential component of almost all core higher education activities, which needs to be used, managed, and organized accordingly –

CONCLUSION

The study found that allowing students to participate in evaluating their learning outcomes and resources used and then share their findings with each other and the instructors went a long way to developing students' confidence and skills.

In addition, giving students the freedom to use an online system in a way that complemented their own proffered learning style proved motivational factor in encouraging experimentation with online provisions. Being able to reinforce difficult concepts at their own pace, often from home, and to follow these up with the instructor made e learning exciting for most learners in the English Proficiency class at Langston University class.

Further, the development of e learning at Langston University enabled instructors to devote more time to individual learners during their time at college while other students carried on independently. During the study, learners had the opportunity to offer feedback at the end of each semester as e learning software prompted for these comments, which were later used to improve the e-learning platforms. The future promises much benefit from e learning, including 'meeting demands from the public sector, hence there is need to invest heavily to meet the cost of e-learning projects. As Toy (2009) "We must always remember that e-learning is not just part of the IT infrastructure, it is part of a strategic business consideration for developing human resources." Students work at one level until desired results before proceeding to next level. Thousands of students learn together at the same time; live group sessions in a virtual classroom. E learning assimilates dating sites; it provides more interaction than face to face, especially on collaborated group assignments through Wikis and Google docs (Staff Contributor. (2012).

In addition, e learning is learner-based It aims at mastery, not just covering course content. It allows multiple attempts for quizzes because of the large pool of questions, hence the purpose of learning isn't passing a test – but applying skills on the job with more e-learning students mastering cooperate job skills. The study further found that dedicated students pass and the not so dedicated fail, thus e -learning does not spoon feed. It provides freedom to fail yet retains and graduates more students. Further, the

study found that e-learning uses technology to increase the range of options available to instructors and students in the approaches they can take to learning and thus can be employed not only to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching to raise standards but also to help widen the number of participants in learning environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reliable and efficient networks and systems are key, □ but often forgotten, and components of successful e learning. A poor network and systems infrastructure can greatly inhibit the benefits of e learning. Learners will lose patience and confidence if the infrastructure is of a poor quality (Bates, 2009). Hence the following recommendation:

- There need to work hard to ensure that support for learners is in place as this is an important component in the success of e learning.
- Provide a range of learning packages. Lack of a clear strategy for the development of e-learning is a real barrier to success according to Phil McBride.
- Map out a clear vision of how e-learning should develop from the beginning, It may be important to drive at creating a paperless environment and pute learning online.
- There is need to empower learners to be comfortable with technology before setting them out on their own. Let them set their own learning goals, which is best done in a relaxed, informal setting.
- With most course activities occurring online, some learners could be disadvantaged if they lack the necessary ICT skills. To address this, all learners enrolling on line should undergo diagnostic assessment in ICT and be provided with the training required to enable participation.

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