

Re-Orienting The Teaching And Learning Approaches In Open And Distance Learning; Riding On Technological Advancement.

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Abstract—The change in value systems for students and lecturers is reshaping the educational delivery systems of colleges and universities. Open and distance education is rapidly gaining pace compared to the conventional system. From the popular modular delivery system commonly used in Distance Education, options for online teaching and learning processes are now being preferred. Deliberate effort is being made to re-orient Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) students and staff into off- campus tutoring through the use of real-time tutoring utilizing My-Vista Platform and video conferencing. ZOU, being an Open and Distance Learning institution, prefers to reach out to a larger population of students at any given time, hence the use of electronic media. This can only be achieved through the use of technology. In view of the current economic challenges, technology utilization is a cheaper mode of learning and teaching. Although the use of technology may appear cheaper in countries where facilities are well established, there is need for developing countries to put systems in place in-order to realize the long-term benefits of e-learning. However, this shift calls for unreserved support from national and institutional decision making powers and this may actually call for training and retraining of Senior managers, whose support for the endeavour is critical.

A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted on the use of the e-learning facilities at ZOU. This follows a series of staff training on the use of technology. The researcher worked with lecturers and students. The purpose of the study was to establish the appreciation and use of technology for teaching and learning by students and lectures in ZOU. A sample fifteen lecturers including five senior managers, and fifteen students who were conveniently selected was used for the study. Data were collected from respondents using self-administered questionnaires. Analysis was done SPSS.

Response rate was 100 % for both tutors and learners. The study revealed that 10 (66.7%) of the lecturers were familiar with My-Vista platform.

Sixty percent were not proficient in the use of My-Vista although 13 (86.7%) had received training. Lecturers and students cited several challenges they faced with technology. Recommendations made included training on the use of My-Vista and adequate resource distribution especially computers.

Keywords—Open and Distance Learning, technological advancement, e-tutoring

BACKGROUND.

The use of technology brings in important and significant improvements in educational production. <http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/use-technology-teaching-and-learning>. With technology, there is the possibility of expanding the courses offered at any one given time. Learners and tutors are able to access current issues and materials without any difficulties. This motivates the students and the tutors. Learner support is around the clock and the student becomes more engaged in the learning process as they search for solutions to assignments on the internet. <http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/use-technology-teaching-and-learning>.

Literature Review

The general shift in education is in tandem with the current globalization and rapid technological advancement. Open and distance education is rapidly gaining pace compared to the conventional system. From the popular modular delivery system commonly used in Distance Education, options for online teaching and learning processes are now being preferred. The change in value systems for students and lecturers is reshaping the educational delivery systems of colleges and universities. Deliberate effort is being made to re-orient Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) students and staff into off- campus tutoring through the use of real-time tutoring utilizing MyVista Platform and video conferencing.

A new model of teaching is ushered in as teachers and students are in constant communication. While the rate of learning is accelerated, the cost associated with materials production and programme delivery is greatly reduced. Time for both the learner and the tutor is utilized productively. <http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/use-technology-teaching-and-learning>.

The roots of educational technology revolution are planted in the explosion of consumer and business technology usage (Brocade communications System 2011) E-technologies accommodate the slow learners as they can reinforce concepts learnt at their own pace. The rate at which the technology storm is gripping the world in the education world will soon outpace the conventional system of education in terms of meeting the demand. Schools at all levels are racing to capture the interest and imagination of students by bringing the innovations of technology into the curriculum. (Brocade communications System 2011)

Educational transformation is being brought about by the rapid expansion of information communication technologies around the world. The high level of interest will assist to improve the educational status of the world's poor (Winthrop and Smith 2012).

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has been viewed as a vehicle to fill in the gap of missed opportunities. ODL enables learners to pursue their educational ambitions regardless of socio economical, geographical and any other constraints (UNESCO 2012). The ODL system however, demands for a well-structured student support system in order to enhance students' performances (UNESCO 2012).

While textbooks become out-dated, no student in technology-rich environment will mourn the diminishing importance of a textbook (Brocade Communications Systems 2012) ZOU, being an Open and Distance Learning institution, prefers to reach out to a larger population of students at any given time, hence the use of electronic media. This would not be possible using face to face tutorials. Assignment questions and answers are being processed on-line. The use of video tapes and cell-phones play a facilitatory role in the communication process between the tutor and the student. E-learning is the life-line for research. Educational institutions emphasise on research and publication. This can only be achieved through the use of technology. In view of the current economic challenges, technology utilization is a cheaper mode of learning and teaching. Although the use of technology may appear cheaper in countries where facilities are well established, there is need for developing countries to put systems in place in-order to realize the long-term benefits of e-learning. However, this shift calls for unreserved support from national and institutional decision making powers and this may actually call for training and re-training of Senior managers, whose support for the endeavour is critical.

Distance education is a form of distributive learning and tutors pay attention to the needs of individual students. Technology is used to deliver instruction to learners who are at remote locations from a central site (Jethro et al 2012). While the learners are remote, they are produced in large scales. Learners and tutors do not find it easy to visit each other for services and instruction

<http://wikieducator.org/images/4/49/A. Murali M Rao. pdf> Noeth.R.J., & Volkov, B. B. 2004

While ODL has its own challenges, use of technology invokes a lot of exciting and independent learning for students. Access to information is easy.

Problem Statement

Lack of training in the use of technology has resulted in under-utilisation of the e-learning platform at the Zimbabwe Open University.

Objectives of the study

To ascertain the use of technology by both tutors and learners at the Zimbabwe Open University

To identify challenges faced by the learner and tutors in the use of technology

To identify gaps in technology utilisation at ZOU

Research Design and Methodology

A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted on the use of the e-learning facilities at ZOU. This follows a series of staff training on the use of technology. The researcher worked with lecturers and students. The purpose of the study was to establish the appreciation and use of technology for teaching and learning by students and lectures in ZOU. A sample fifteen lecturers including five senior managers, and fifteen students who were conveniently selected was used for the study. Data were collected from respondents using self-administered questionnaires. The researcher analysed data using SPSS.

Results

For ease of reference, results are presented in cross-tabulations and frequency tables. The study results will be used to strengthen ZOU's endeavours as it navigates towards attaining 'world class status' in Open and Distance Education. The researcher hopes to escalate the study to a larger scale in order to enhance generalizability of the study. It is hoped that the results will contribute to policy formulation at both institutional and national levels.

Section A of the questionnaire focused on respondents' demographic data

Fifteen lecturers and fifteen students were interviewed. Return rate was 100%. This was attributed to the fact that the researcher waited for the questionnaires as they were being completed. Age range for lecturers was 40 to 59 years. Age range for students was 30 to 42 years. Eighty percent of lecturers were male while thirteen percent of students were female. Longest serving member had ten years working experience at ZOU. Students were at various stages of training.

Table 1: Staff with ODL formal training

Category	Number (N =15)	Percentage (%)
ODL trained	2	13.3
Not trained	13	86.7
Total	15	100

Only two of the respondents had received formal ODL training

Section B elicited information on the use of technology by both lecturers and students

Table 2: Use of technology by staff

Variable	Frequency (N=15)	Percentage
Familiar with My-Vista Platform	10	66.7
Not proficient in use	9	60
Using on-line to service & communicate with students	3	20
Received training on the use of My-Vista	13	86.7
Use of other forms of ICT eg internet	12	80
commented that training was very good	12	80
'Supervise dissertations on-line'	1	6.7
Agree on effort made by the institution to support use of technology eg computer laboratories in regions.	10	66.7
Suggestions to improve included training of students and lecturers	15	100

Lecturers indicated several issues that could be put in place to enhance the use of technology. These included training of both lecturers and students on the use of My-Vista and increase number of computers in regions. However it appears there is minimal activity in terms of assignment submission and marking on-line.

Table 3: Recommendations by students to enhance use of technology

Variable	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
Training	15	100
Add more computers to regions	15	100
Make computer lab accessible 24 hours	10	66.7
Lecturers should give prompt feedback online	3	20
Internet as other technologies in use was cited	15	100
Lack of personal computers delay the learning process	4	20
Use of cell-phones was recommended by students as a means of communication	10	66.7

Students' recommendations could be a turning point if technology utilisation is to be improved in ODL institutions.

Table 4: Challenges that hinder technology utilisation

The following were listed as challenges by both students and lecturers

Variable	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage
Lack of computers	23	76.7
Lack of computer training	30	100
Knowledge deficit on how to use My-Vista	30	100
Work-overload	10	33.3
Lack of exposure to ODL	7	23.3
Lack of support	1	3.2
Need for basic computer training	16	53.3

The major challenge cited by 100 percent of the respondents was lack of My-Vista training as well as lack of computer training.

Discussion

The results have revealed the challenges being faced by ODL institutions in the use of technology. Both lecturers and students cited the need for support in terms of training and accessibility to computers. One hundred percent of students lacked knowledge of

My-Vista platform. Tutors need to continuously practice on the use of technology and cascade the knowledge to students

Technology use enables the ODL tutor reach out to more students who are remotely placed.

Training of tutors in ODL issues, availing of resources and

servicing the student are all critical issues in ODL. Keegan (1996) cited that, institutions joining ODL systems need to be

able to define the field of this new system and distinguish between the various components

which include identification of the critical elements of teaching and learning, and building a

theoretical framework which will embrace the area of Distance Education. This makes technology utilisation a catalyst to the enhancement of quality products in ODL.

Recommendation

- All lecturers need to receive ODL training.
- Both lecturers and students need to have basic computer training in order to create the right platform for e-learning.
- ODL institutions need to invest in technology utilisation in order to be efficient and effective in programme delivery.
- This study could be repeated at a larger scale to enhance generalizability of the results.

Conclusion

While technology has the potential to reach-out to the poor and enable the filling-in of missed opportunities, students need to be continuously protected from useless information they may find as they surf. Technology plays a pivotal role in the field of Distance education. Positive strides have been made in the lives of people. Many people have managed to fulfil their educational ambitions through ODL.

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