

Understanding E-Learning Challenges Experienced During Covid-19: A Case Study of Bishop Hannington Institute (BHI), Mombasa

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E-learning involves programs that use the internet to allow instructional material beyond classroom walls for interaction between educators and the learners. It is powerful tool in education if the right pedagogy is used. The purpose of the study was to interrogate types of e-learning modes, impact, success and challenges of e-learning at Bishop Hannington Institute of Theology and Development, Mombasa. The study adopted desk top research by observation of students and educators use of e-learning at BHI (Mombasa) and analyzed documents, books, journals on the patterns of e-learning in relation to BHI. The study reviewed the synchronous and asynchronous types of e-learning modes. Additionally, the study evaluated advantages and disadvantages of e-learning at BHI. The study aim was to give information to other universities, middle level colleges and secondary schools on the place of e-learning in modern education patterns and how best it can be improved. The study created awareness to the educators, students and the general public the need for e-learning.

Keywords: technology, communication, e-learning, learners, educators

Introduction: Understanding E-Learning

E-learning or online learning is education process in which instruction and course content is executed or supported by the internet (Kamba, 2009). The term online education is used interchangeably with virtual learning, cyber learning and e-learning. E-learning is a broader concept (than online learning) encompassing a wide range of applications and processes which use all available electronic media to deliver vocational education and training more flexibly (Gudo, Olel, & Oanda, 2011). Online learning consists of many programs that use the internet beyond classroom walls to allow access to instructional materials.

E-learning can be further categorized into synchronous and asynchronous e-learning. Synchronous learning is when the learners and the instructor interact with each other in real time, from different locations through set time (phone/internet classroom sessions). In synchronous e-learning, the learning resources are delivered via mobile, video conference or chat and webinars. In this type of learning the participants can share their ideas during the session and interact with each other and they get detailed queries and solutions. Synchronous e-learning is gaining popularity because of improved technology and internet bandwidth capabilities from different locations through set time (phone/internet classroom sessions). Asynchronous

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e-learning is when the learner and the teacher cannot be online at same time (Appana, 2008). Asynchronous e-learning may use technologies such as email, blogs, discussion forums, ebooks, CDs, DVDs, etc. Learners may learn at any time, download documents, and chat with teachers and also with co-learners. In asynchronous learning sources are self-paced online course, discussion forums, groups and message boards. Asynchronous e-learning is very convenient because learners can take online courses to learn at their preferable time while not effecting their daily commitments.

BHI Mombasa E-Learning

The internet has increasingly become a source for resources needed for research and other academic requirements for teachers and students (Nichols, 2020). To attract more students in the universities especially those who want distance learning due to various reasons, e-learning is preferred (Hollow & ICWE, 2009). Due to cessation of physical learning by the Kenyan government prompted by COVID-19 in March 2020, BHI embraced asynchronous e-learning. Despite having no previous experience in e-learning, BHI faculty had to embrace the change to facilitate learning and teaching. In study conducted by Kasse and Balunywa (2013), it assessed the implementation of e-learning in Ugandan institutions of higher learning namely Makerere University of Kampala (MAK); Makerere University Business School (MUBS); Kampala International University (KIU); and Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU). The choice of these institutions was based on the fact that they are the highest-ranking institutions in Uganda in terms of the quality of education, student population, and ICT adoption. Findings of their study showed that e-learning was used mostly as a means of delivering learning material (80%), minimally used to conduct discussions (12%), and to conduct assessment (2%). Kasse and Balunywa (2013) study was part of BHI faculty to embrace e-learning. This study revealed success and challenges stories of some education institutions in East Africa, who had already embrace online learning, albeit on small scale.

For effective learning, new educational technologies need to be supported by innovative pedagogical approaches which in turn enable collaboration, communication and mobility (Webster & Murphy, 2008). Therefore, since the suspension of physical learning in Kenyan educational institutions, most institutions have adopted various e-learning teaching and learning approaches. Significantly, since 2006, when the Kenya government developed Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy there has been a great change on impact of IT on the academia world. Some established Kenyan universities started delivering their academic courses relay via various ICT apps to achieve the objectives of transmitting knowledge. Kasse and Balunywa (2013) pointed out that most universities use e-learning to deliver learning material, conduct discussions and assessment. The use of e-learning has witnessed a massive registration of students in programs that use the internet to conduct classes, submission of examination results and course registration. Technological innovations have elicited mixed reactions among educators as more new Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools are expected to hit the market every year (Baker & O'Neil, 2003; Fletcher, 2003). New technological tools such as iPads, applets, virtual manipulative, and tablets among many others have been introduced in the market necessitating educational institutions come up with new curricula.

The rationale behind BHI e-learning model was to cater for all who were within and out of Mombasa during the cessation of face-to-face class interaction. Later, e-learning mode served learners who could not be available for the full-time or evening courses due to work-related issues and other commitments. Similarly, since most Kenyan educational institutions had embraced e-learning, BHI could not afford to miss out on the

distance students' niche. To be part of the growing Kenyan e-learning educational institutions community, BHI, developed the learner management system that allows learners have a feel of physical campus environment away from the college. The educators and the learners are able to have a platform where communication flows freely. The learners can access their portal any time, any place once the internet is available. The BHI online classes are for those self-motivated learners who are constrained by cessation of physical classes by the government, work, time or location and can study anywhere, anytime. Diploma and certificate in Theology, Early Childhood Education (ECE) courses are offered through the asynchronous and synchronous e-classes depending on the student's choice. The learners get the same level of knowledge as any students who are in face-to-face classes.

The BHI (Learning Management System) uses videos, presentations, simulations and textual instructions to disseminate information asynchronously. E-learning makes use of many technologies some of which have been developed specifically for it, whilst others conveniently complemented the learning process such as the social media. Boit and Kipkoech (2012) stated that the main purpose of technology in schools should be to enhance the learners' performance, but not to make the schools have the state-of-the-art device. Learning should always be an impetus that drives the use of technology in school. Technology used in e-learning at BHI enables instructors and learners partnering to achieve maximum academic results.

In the BHI online learning, the learners get their course outline and other requirements from their instructors on the portal. The learners post their assessments through the same mode. Assignments are carefully incorporated in each course to ensure that the instructors are able to evaluate learners and continuously offer reinforcements to them. Similarly, the learners take same courses and examinations as regular students in other higher institutions of learning. The courses uploaded on the LSM platform have the same context as any physical class cohort in other institutions. There is no difference in the course content except the mode of delivery. At the end of the semester examinations are administered through the student portal from the course outline delivery. The examination questions are mainly application questions and students are expected to answer the questions within duration of 24 hours. To ensure quality assurance measures the learner must submit the examinations paper at the stipulated mark of 24 hours. Prior to the examinations, learners undertake continuous assessment tests and assignments which account for 50% of the total course work marks. Examinations account for 50% marks to make the total 100% marks.

The e-learning students interact amongst themselves through discussion groups, dash board within their networks. The learner management system is packed with interactive and interaction features including chat rooms, discussions and micro-blogging tools that facilitate conversation amongst the users. Furthermore, the digital campus has electronic library which includes huge volumes in all areas of theology and social studies. The library is a key ingredient in any academic institution. The electronic library enables learners by a click of the button to access any required information with ease. With the advent of electronic library at BHI campus, there is reduced activity by students in the physical library. BHI online learning allows students from all over Kenya to apply for courses and programs regardless of their location. Every application is forwarded to the admission staff and further communication is provided through e-mail.

Advantages of E-Learning at BHI

Numerous students find BHI online learning appealing because they can read materials and submit their assignment on their cell phone from any location within the country and there is no scheduled time of class.

Online learning gives schedule flexibility. The BHI students need only a desktop computer, laptop or smart phone and internet accessibility to take the online course. Lessons can be taken when needed and notes read at the student's discretion so long as they meet the deadline of assignment submission, compared to the traditional on-campus classes where there is timetable for each lesson lasting for an hour or more.

Since online learners have to plan their own schedule and are responsible for their learning, it makes students masters of their own. This helps in self-regulation and students can spend more on course or topics they feel they are weak and need to improve (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2012). The self-regulatory virtue is very vital for successful academic journey because the student puts much effort in studies hence enhances involvement (Sife, Lwoga, & Sanga, 2007).

Students may feel comfortable talking and expressing themselves online with their instructors through emails, Skype, Imo, online chats and group discussion than face-to-face classroom interaction. This helps remove any cultural barrier that might have existed if it was on-campus studies, where students from different background meet. Students have the chance to respond to questions with confidence in writing without seeing the other source and respond well compared to the face-to-face classroom set up (Ndume, Tilya, & Twaakyondo, 2008). Additionally, the internet provides a variety of different materials which can be used by all people in online classroom irrespective of their age, economic or social status. Students are free to say what they want to say and have much time to make comment when ready.

Online learning helps in cutting of cost, because students will save money by not attending the classes in person. Costs of food, transportation and books will be reduced. Books are available through the schools' e-library.

Disadvantages of Online Learning at BHI

In online learning, there is more of monologue than face-to-face interaction with the instructor. The value of face-to-face interaction cannot be overlooked. In classroom context, students exhibit body language and facial expressions, which gives the instructor opportunity to gauge whether the students are grasping the content or not. The online learning does not give the instructor the opportunity to identify an academically challenged student for support.

The online learning offers lots of tasks and assignments because there is no daily supervision and monitoring. There is a lot of reading and writing papers depending on level of study. Since online learning comes with strict submission of said activities and assignments, students may procrastinate hence not perform well.

Technology can fail at any time. Online classes can be disrupted by technology failure or power outages. Since online learning relies mostly on internet, any disruption means the students will not access class that day and may lag behind in given assignments. Kasse and Balunywa (2013) in their study revealed major infrastructural and technical incompetence, and attitudinal challenges (by staff and students) limit full-scale adoption of e-learning in these institutions. Some of the infrastructural challenges experienced at BHI, Mombasa campus evolve around power outages and poor internet connectivity.

Student's plagiarism and lack of integrity can arise. There are high chances that an imposter can do the assignment for the student. In normal classroom assignment, the student physically hands in his submission and class presentation.

Knowledge Required by the BHI Faculty

Since there is lack of face-to-face interaction, the students need to know the expectation, the various types of assessment, grading criteria in the course and any other housekeeping etiquette to ease flexibility. Most of the students join online class because of the flexibility (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2012). Therefore, BHI faculty need to project the expected outcome and the requirements of a particular online course.

The BHI online instructors need to have the Technological Knowledge, together with Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK). This gives them the ability to handle all the learners' concern in the digital campus. McNeely (2005) mentioned that technology in the classroom and the way it is used during the lesson can increase the participation and inclusion of all students to the learning process. The instructor has a very important role in success of e-learning by understanding pedagogy strategies and content (Angeli & Valanides, 2009).

The BHI technical staff and the instructor should be accessible to the computer and always maintain presence. The technical staff should be ready to respond to the student's challenges such as how to sign in the portal, check their grades or access e-books and library. The instructor should answer the students' question or give comments on the discussion. Mishra and Koehler (2006) averred that the instructor and the technical staff have the responsibility of creating an enabling environment to invoke a sense of being valuable in the online classroom. Hollow and ICWE (2009) reported that e-learning is still developing and few lecturers are trained in depth on how to use it. There are also financial costs to meet the internet cost. Walimbwa (2008) pointed out those universities in the East African region have not fully utilized e-learning as expected.

The university staff should select media that will be sensitive to all learners. They should have tools that are friendly for those with learning disabilities. Some tools may need special device for auditory purposes and some students are on Braille. The staff should know how to make the class notes easy to download so as to motivate learning. According to Mayer (2001), it is also very important to select media or format that will fit the student.

Findings

The study revealed that e-learning is a preferred mode of study by students who are employed or busy elsewhere and cannot have time for physical class attendance. Most of the students join e-learning class because of the flexibility (Sife et al., 2007). However, since the onset of COVID-19 the e-learning is increasingly becoming popular amongst students.

There is an increase of students intake in the e-learning cohorts in the two semesters in February and September. The registration process which hitherto has been hectic for students has been made easy. This could be a catalyst to increased student admission. Moreover students by click of the button can easily access their examination results from any location through their portal. It lessens physical interaction between instructors and students especially in the era of social distancing.

Recommendations

Kiptalam and Rodrigues (2010) argued that several factors have in the past hindered the realization of online learning methodology in Kenya. As a result, the higher educational institution change from in-person to online classes faced several challenges. Factors such as poor internet connection, lack of laptops, lack of computer skills and resistance to change by learners have hindered the effective utilization of online learning.

The main aim of online learning is to make it flexible for lecturers and learners to get access to learning materials with ease (Kiptalam & Rodrigues, 2010). Most Kenyan educational institutions desire to go online, but the enumerated factors above have hindered effective utilization of the online learning mode.

Conclusions

The nature of education delivery is ever-changing in the world today. Institutions of learning should always be kept abreast with the changes so as to reach out those who due to work-related, family and distance issues cannot attend the traditional face-to-face classroom set up. Institutions should always advise students on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning.

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