Chapter 11
The Role of Learning Management Systems to Enhance Learner Support

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this chapter was to assess the role of learning management system to improve the teacher, cognitive and social presence interactions, and engagement in online classes with better support and training. The study employed a qualitative research approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. A sample size of 14 academic staff members involved in teaching and learning was conveniently selected. This study adopted a case study research strategy focusing on academic staff involved in teaching and learning at selected colleges at a distance education higher education institution. The findings suggest that the learning management system (LMS) is not fully utilised to its full capability. The results also emphasised that online teaching methods influence online learning. The recommendation is that all faculty members and all students should complete a training programme on effective teaching and learning in online education, including LMS use.

INTRODUCTION

Open distance learning (ODL) universities are confronted with global issues around competitiveness and relevance. Some of ODL universities have been sustainable in their product offerings. The sustainability stems from the fact that they are low-cost ODL universities. Despite being low-cost universities, they have been experiencing a problem of access to some sections of their learners more especially the disadvantaged communities. The other problem lies with poor learner support provided by the institution. This is exacerbated by higher enrolment numbers which are not supported by the staff complement.

Learners enrolled in an open distance learning (ODL) institution need to be supported through an online training program that orientates them on the use of learning management systems (LMS) and the interactions with the learning environment. This is digital transformation, which requires new technology to work in harmony with the people towards a common goal (Zarifis & Efthymiou, 2022).

The training program will encourage teacher, social, and cognitive presence in online courses.

It is the role of the online facilitator or educator to take into consideration learner support when designing the online course, selection of the content and materials, and the interactive platform for students to engage and interact. Digital literacy is one of the factors relating to learning competences required for learners' satisfaction in an online learning environment (Xiao et al., 2020).

Learners in ODL universities are confronted with learning challenges relating to effective teaching practices and communication patterns with faculty members and fellow learners (Markova et al., 2017). Effective teaching practices in open distance learning do not depend exclusively on the introduction of new technologies, but more on human interactions and dialogue and how students can approach and use all the new technologies and e-learning possibilities (Pavela et al., 2015). Thus,

to experience satisfying learning, learners need to have cognitive engagement competence, which is correlated with learners' cognitive ability to figure out the right mix of learning options (Xiao et al., 2020).

While ODL universities support general training of academic staff members, there is no specific training programme for academic staff to empower students in online learning and this is one of the reasons why most students complain about poor learner support from the university (Frass et al., 2017). There is limited evidence on how the community of inquiry is being applied to enhance online learning and ultimately increase institutional retention and quality particularly as the three presences within the community of inquiry theory (teaching, social and cognitive) are not applied in an integrated and consistent manner. The purpose of this chapter

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