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A critical assessment at a local level of UNISA's virtual learning environment in terms of the pedagogical conversational framework.

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ABSTRACT

Education delivered through the Internet known as E-learning is growing tremendously and attracts researchers' attention in terms of its pedagogical merits. It is in that context of investigating the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for efficient learning that the current research was carried out. This study consists of a critical assessment at a Local Level of UNISA's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE[1]) in terms of Diana Laurillard's Pedagogical Conversational Framework. It focuses on assessing how the E-learning platform (called SAKAI) used by UNISA supports the learning process of online students staying in Rwanda. A qualitative approach was followed and documentary analysis along with a questionnaire was used to collect useful data.

Research findings are presented and discussed under two themes: the requirements for effective online learning and the use of the local UNISA's VLE to support effective online learning of students based in Rwanda.
It is revealed that effective online learning is a function of different aspects that can be grouped under three critical factors: Pedagogical, Technological and Managerial. Although, I have argued that the Pedagogical factor should be considered as the most important and guide all E-learning projects, the three factors mentioned are interrelated and interdependent.

Findings about the use of the local UNISA VLE to support the learning process show that it provides sufficient tools to support all activities necessary for learning activities, as summarized in the Conversational Framework. However, the tools provided by the E-learning platform are underused by participants. Some necessary learning activities are not carried out, even though the E-learning platform used provides tools which could support those activities. The under usage of available tools is caused by two factors:

- inadequate consideration given to some necessary learning activities and
- the lack of skills on both usage of and information on the capability of UNISA's VLE.

These handicap the effective online learning. The gaps found in VLE used by UNISA are also mentioned.

The research report ends with recommendations for more effective E-learning in local UNISA VLE. Further studies in related areas are suggested.

[1] A set of tools integrated into web application to facilitate the learning and teaching process completely or partly in online environments.