

ABSTRACT

The advent of the internet has resulted in the development from mail, radio and telephonic modes of delivery to electronic mode of delivery in distance education. It has been predicted that the impact of the internet on distance and online education will result in benefits such as wider reach of learners who might be disadvantaged by geographical locations and distance, greater flexibility and increased convenience for distance and online learners. However, the envisaged benefits seem to be elusive as a result of a range of impediments, including issues related to the digital divide. In this case study, focused on on-line students at a college of distance and open education in Botswana, students' perceptions of both the benefits of and the impediments to their study are described, together with their perceptions of support strategies. Findings indicate the need for support strategies consistent with the nature of online learning in the 21st century. In particular, the findings of this study suggest that Web 2.0 technologies have the potential to enhance learner support, and that there is a need for careful exploration of the ways in which such technologies can be exploited and applied in support of on-line learners.

KEY WORDS: Distance Education, Online Education, Learner Support, Web 2.0, the Digital Divide; Social Networking

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Edward Selelo

_____ day of February in the year 2011

Dedicated to:

My Grandfather - Kediretswe Abraham 'Kedes' Monyadiwa Segobane Tshwene a Selelo

My Grandmother – Lorina 'Mma 'M'ragi' Mma Ragele Selelo (R.I.P)

And my uncle - Edwin Mogae Selelo a.k.a 'Mkuzi' (R.I.P)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH.....	1
1.1	Introduction.....	1
1.2	General Statement of the Problem.....	1
1.3	Research Problem and the Research Question.....	3
1.4	Critical Questions.....	3
1.5	Significance of the Study.....	3
1.6	Clarification of Terms.....	4
1.7	Conceptual Framework.....	7
1.8	Outline of Chapters.....	9
2	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
2.1	Introduction.....	10
2.2	The Digital Divide.....	12
2.2.1	Physical Access	12
2.2.2	Technology Acceptance – Attitudes and Perceptions	13
2.2.3	Quality of Learning Materials	14
2.2.4	Demographic Characteristics of Learners and the Digital Divide.....	14
2.2.5	The Digital Divide in Botswana.....	17
2.3	Learner Support.....	17
2.3.1	New Learning Environment.....	18
2.3.2	Characteristics of Online Learners.....	19
2.4	Comprehensive Learner Support System.....	20
2.4.1	Introduction	20
2.4.2	Institutional Learner Support Models.	22
2.4.3	Beyond the Institution Support Interventions	23
2.5	Support in the 21 st Century.....	24
2.5.1	Web 2.0 Technologies.....	25
3	RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES.....	30
3.1	Introduction.....	30
3.2	Research Method and Approach	30
3.2.1	Description of the Research Site.....	30
3.2.2	Entry to the Site and Time Frames of the Research.....	31
3.3	Data Collection Techniques and Instruments.....	33
3.3.1	Role of the Researcher.....	33
3.3.2	Interviews	33
3.3.3	Perusal of Documents	33
3.3.4	Live Sessions Observation.....	34
3.4	Participants	34
3.4.1	Sampling and Sample Size.....	34
3.4.2	Recruitment of Student participants - First Phase of the Research.....	35
3.4.3	Recruitment of Student Participants – Second Phase of the Research.....	35
3.4.4	Interviews with Staff.....	36

3.4.5 Terminating the Field Work	37
3.4.6 Reflection on the Students' Interview Process..	37
3.5 Data Analysis.....	37
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	39
3.7 Limitations	40
3.8 Conclusion of Chapter.....	42
 4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS.....	 43
4.1 Introduction.....	43
4.2 Challenges Identified by Staff	43
4.3 Support in Place for Learners	44
4.3.1 Findings from Interviews with Staff.....	44
4.3.2 Findings from the Observations of the Live Sessions	45
4.3.3 Findings from Documents.....	46
4.4 The Perceived Value of the College's Support.....	46
4.5 Challenges Identified by Learners	47
4.5.1 Patterns form Challenges Identified by Learners.....	49
4.6 Learners' Suggested Helpful Interventions.....	49
4.7 Self Help Strategies	51
4.8 Reflection on the Main Findings.....	52
4.9 Conclusion of Chapter.....	55
 5 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS.....	 57
5.1 Introduction.....	57
5.2 Challenges that are Beyond the Institution.....	59
5.2.1 The Digital Divide.....	59
5.2.2 The Digital Divide – the Prohibitive Internet Costs.....	60
5.2.3 Conclusion of the Beyond the Institution Challenges.....	60
5.3 Institutional Challenges.....	61
5.3.1 Feedback.....	62
5.3.2 Tutors and Tutorials.....	62
5.4 Flexibility of Online Learning.....	64
5.5 Personal Challenges.....	65
5.5.1 Isolation.....	65
5.5.2 Mitigating Challenges using Web 2.0 Technologies.....	66
5.5.3 Digital Fluency	68
5.6 Conclusion of Chapter	69
 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	 71
6.1 Introduction	71
6.1.2 Motivation for the Study	71
6.1.3 The Research Question.....	71
6.2 Conclusions	72
6.3 Recommendations	73

REFERENCES	74
APPENDICES.....	81
A: RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER FROM BOCODOL.....	81
B: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER.....	82
C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STAFF.....	83
D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS.....	84
E: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND SUMMARY OF KEY RESPONSES.....	85
F: BPC LOAD SHEDDING SCHEDULE.....	90
G: BTC INTERNET PENETRATION NEWSPAPER ARTICLE.....	91

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>Page</i> x
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xii

LIST OF FIGURES

1 Wang's ICT Integration Model	7
2 Salmon's Five Step E-Moderation Model	62

LIST OF TABLES

1 World Internet Usage Statistics	13
2 Generations and Digital Fluency	15
3 Lesson Attendance Records	41
4 Challenges Identified by Staff	44
5 Perceived Value of the Support Interventions	47
6 Challenges experienced by Learners	48
7 Patterns Representing Categories of Challenges	49
8 Participants' suggested components of a helpful institutional support system	50
9 Patterns of Suggested Helpful Interventions	51
10 Internet Usage Statistics for Africa	60
11 Extending the Flexibility of Online Learning with Web 2.0 Technologies	64
12 World Facebook Usage Statistics	67

ABBREVIATIONS

AU Actual Usage

BI Behavioural Intention

BOCODOL Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning

BPC Botswana Power Corporation

BTC Botswana Telecommunications Corporation

DAFE Diploma in Aids and Family Education

EDN Education Data Network

ICTs Information Communication Technologies

IGNOU Indira Ghandi National Open University

LMS Learning Management System

PEOU Perceived Ease Of Use

PG Postgraduate

PU Perceived Usefulness

RNPE Revised National Policy in Education

RSS Really Simple Syndication

SAIDE South African Institute for Distance Education

TAM Technology Acceptance Model

UG Undergraduate