Chapter 2

Student Support for Information and Communication Technology Modules in Open Distance Environments: Towards Self-Directed Learning

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the chapter relates to providing perspectives on students’ uptake of virtual learning environment (VLE) technologies in an information and communication technology (ICT) module taught in an open and distance e-learning (ODeL) environment. With the aim of helping students to access the assessment and support provided via the VLE, possibly improving the pass rate of the module, it provides readers with an overview and summary of the content of this chapter. Examples of how concepts are formulated within the theoretical and conceptual framework are provided. The chapter also includes a literature review on research into students’ uptake of VLE technologies, to increase pass rates, in some cases in ODeL environments. The methodology adopted a non-experimental quantitative research design. The data collection instrument was a survey. Before concluding, solutions and
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results are presented, together with recommendations regarding improving implementing VLE technologies for an ICT module in an ODeL environment.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, enterprises are becoming digitized, enabled through unified communication and collaboration (Bolton, Goosen, & Kritzinger, 2016). In learning to live in the knowledge society, groups need to be able to model cooperative work in Information Technology (Goosen & Mentz, 2008). As enterprises, universities are challenged to deliver quality learning programs and forced to respond to change in a meaningful way. Changes include, for example, increased student enrolment, the effective delivery of teaching and learning, the quality of assessment practices, and budgetary constraints. These challenges are a mammoth task to manage and finance, while also maintaining quality education for all. Additionally, through these challenging times, universities experienced an increase in voices towards more student support toward self-directed learning, by using technologies in teaching and learning modes of delivery for open and distance environments.

The chapter aims to address the need for scholarly exploration of student support toward self-directed learning in open and distance environments. The chapter will be a combination of theory and practice, reflecting, in general, on conceptual terms around the dimensions of student support at a higher education institution, as well as concepts, methodologies, tools, and applications with regard to change management in distance education and online and distance learning (Partow-Navid & Slusky, 2008). The chapter is grounded in theoretical, empirical and case studies, demonstrating the challenges and opportunities (potentials) that an online environment has enabled within the educational domain. The chapter outlines what is termed ‘student support in online learning spaces’. Furthermore, new kinds of strategies to support students with enabling digital technologies will also be explored to advance this phenomenon. The scholarly text brings together two scholars with a broad range of experience in student support, contributing towards the center of their research: students in open and distance e-learning environments.
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