Integration of E-Learning into Curriculum Delivery at University Level in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Most South African universities have been acquiring new technologies for teaching and learning. This paper aims at understanding the domestication of e-learning platforms. The authors want to understand the factors that affect the domestication of the platform to become an integral part of teaching and learning. A qualitative research approach was employed. One-on-one interviews with eighteen snowball sampled participants was the data collection method used results of the study show that few academics have appropriated the technology into their pedagogy; however, many are still in need of professional development to successfully integrate the technology in their pedagogy. Most academics are lacking the understanding of the complex relationships between content, pedagogy and the technology to be integrated into the curriculum delivery. Therefore, there is a need for the institutions to assist the academics to improve their technological pedagogical content knowledge if the institutions are to successfully domesticate e-learning platforms.

Keywords: Curriculum Delivery, Domestication, E-Learning, Higher Learning Institutions, South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

While there is a belief that new technologies have the potential to support curriculum (Vrasi-das & McIsaac, 2000), research in South Africa has shown that the use of the technologies for teaching and learning has the potential of alleviating the deepening crisis in the education system inherited from the apartheid era (Hardman, 2003). Responding to the potential South African universities have been investing in the acquisition of the new technologies for teaching and learning. Institutions like university of Cape Town and Witwatersrand University have learning management systems (LMS) with which e-learning is able to unfold. The new technologies are reshaping the curriculum delivery and management processes in the universities (Mlitwa, 2006). It is believed that the integration of e-learning in the curriculum delivery has “eased the burden of having to contend with an influx of students seeking tertiary education to enhance their skills for the ever-demanding job market” (Mapuva, 2009, p. 1). Nevertheless, while some universities are deploying e-learning to enhance their teaching and learning processes, others are believed to be joining the bandwagon for the sake of not

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being left behind (Govindasamy, 2002). The bottom line here is that the institutions (e.g., Witwatersrand University) are investing in e-learning technologies. However, the question here is: has the technology been domesticated in the institutions?

It is argued that while e-learning is increasingly considered significant in curriculum delivery and instruction, and is reshaping traditional learning worldwide (Damoense, 2003, p. 25), the benefits of e-learning can only be realised by the institutions and users if the platform has been properly adopted and integrated into the teaching and learning processes. It is argued that integration of technology in teaching and learning processes goes beyond mere adoption. While adoption of e-learning in learning institutions describes the process from the time the technology is acquired to the time when it is utilised in teaching and learning, domestication, on the other hand, is the implicit blending of technological components, parts or elements into a complex but harmonious whole, as well as how the technology is seamlessly embedded into pedagogy (Margaret, 2005; Chigona, Chigona, Kausa, & Kayongo 2010). That is, mere adoption of e-learning technologies may not necessarily translate into integration of the platform into the teaching and learning processes, unless deliberate steps to integrate the technology are put in place.

The aim of this paper is to understand how e-learning is integrated into pedagogical processes of the individual lecturers in some universities in South Africa, since research and anecdotal evidence show that the use of e-learning for course delivery leaves a lot to be desired (Madiba, 2009). Our concerns are particularly regarding the factors that affect the domestication of e-learning to become an integral part of curriculum delivery and instruction in the institutions. Appropriate domestication of e-learning is the concern here since quality teaching with technology requires developing a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between technology, content, and pedagogy, and using this understanding to develop appropriate, context-specific strategies and representations (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1029). Nevertheless, the following questions gave focus to this study:

- How do instructors in their respective universities respond to e-learning for course delivery?
- What factors affect the integration of e-learning in the pedagogical processes in the institutions?

A qualitative research approach was used to collect and analyse interview data from lecturers included in the study via referrals. The lecturers were from the universities in South Africa. We used one-on-one in-depth interviews as a data collection technique. Domestication theory was used to provide the ‘weltanschaung’ (Holweg & van Donk, 2010) which guided our observations and data analysis. The theory was deemed important because it explains the process of technology adoption from acquisition to the point when the product is fully integrated into the life of an individual or an institution. The analysis of the results has shown that e-learning platforms have not yet been appropriated in most of the universities because many lecturers have low computer self-efficacy as well as not being in a position to make informed judgments on the teaching and learning platform to support their pedagogy. Computer self-efficacy is defined as “a judgment of one’s capability to use a computer” (Compeau & Higgins, 1995, p. 192). It is believed that computer self-efficacy has an impact on an individual’s willingness to make use of computers to accomplish tasks (Karsten & Roth, 1998).

This study makes both a practical and a theoretical contribution. Research shows that the integration of e-learning in universities is fraught with many challenges (Madiba, 2009). Practically, the study has provided suggestions on what institutions and staff developers could do in order for course instructors to domesticate e-learning. The staff developers need to respond to the issues of domesticking e-learning by sensitizing the course instructors to skills and knowledge that are central to teaching with technology. Theoretically, it has assessed the
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