Evaluation of the effectiveness of pastoral care and relevant support mechanism in the University of North London

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Abstract

The drop out rate and academic progression of undergraduates in the business school was defined as very high. This definition has called for investigative procedures through basic testing techniques in selected Information Systems in Marketing modules taught in the business school. An evaluation framework will be used with the intent of measuring the students’ performance with reference to the level of support mechanism and resources utilised by the student.

The research results will be used in enhancing and improving the resource provision to ascertain the best way to capture student needs and interests in order to minimise dropout rates and maximise achievement in terms of academic progression rates. This will lead to the development of models for academics and practitioners.

Introduction

Most institutions recognize the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) by having their own facilities tailored towards effective delivery of teaching and learning. University faculties operate on the principles of excellence benchmarked alongside the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) criteria. This implies that the principles of competitive advantage through research and complementary teaching are seen as bases for evaluating teaching and learning. According to Crowley, 1997, “information technology skills are skills needed for performance as best managers”. I hold the view that the Business School fulfils the practitioner and pedagogical roles as evidenced by the twenty-four points it scored in the recent QAA subject review inspection.

This project will address the concept of Synergogy – the new teaching and learning dimension. Synergogy refers to ‘working together for sharing teaching and learning’. Synergogy is an alternative mode of education with benefits and limitations of two traditional approaches - pedagogy and andragogy.

The current research result reflects a wide range of the methods by which learning is best facilitated. This research will concentrate on improving the traditional methods of delivering education: increasing resource usage, shifting to a merit basis of compensation and extending classroom contact hours and tutors’ pastoral care. The weaknesses of traditional university education are inherent in the delivery systems as it lacks the integration of technological interactivity and media.

The on-line documentation and unique knowledge, in practical and informative ways, will aid the development of web, multimedia and hypermedia as tools for addressing information design and network communications issues and producing appropriate solutions. The implementation of internet, intranet and extranet as the driving force towards effective training and learning capabilities will not be over emphasized.

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that there is a significant gap between the ICT information technology based approach and the traditional Learning and teaching practices due to low levels of investment in resources and the short-term views of institutional management (on capital investment and the returns that they see as immediately required), in terms of student retention and achievement which are subsets of progression.

The hypothesis can be summarized as follows:
Because of
- Low level of retention
- Lack of progression and
- Achievement in relative terms

there will be a significant shortfall between actual achievement and potential for achievement of learning outcome.

**Literature review and a brief overview of information and communication technology [ICT] literature review**

Stuart (1998) argued that the new global economics learning led to increased demand for new-wave management skills, especially tutors who are competent in information technology or computer literate. The argument has its consequence but did not address the issue of add-ons with unsocial hours such as resources and support mechanisms such as duty tutor roles, tutors’ office hours and pastoral support.

Therefore a cyber classroom will provide remote access to learning materials and curriculum information, including available resources which satisfy the learner on-line. The institutions may use the advanced ICT systems and information technology, with video conference links to the premises of their learners and tutors by means of full access to the Internet. Further development in this direction will transform the traditional teaching and learning approach into a network oriented and integrated environment.

Furthermore, this will make the business school competitive like any other business-related education service provider. Otten (1994), in describing information technology and associated electronic communication, classified their benefit over the traditional systems as follows:

- Overall cost reduction
- Efficient communication system
- Positive media relations within the teaching and learning environment
- Integrated environment in terms of document management and efficient storage and retrieval system
- On-line delivery services

**Development of information and communication technology**

The development of ICT as an effective tool for teaching and learning in higher education would give students and tutors a positive academic network and a resourceful image (Roth and Van Der Velde 1989). This project aims to look into the effective use of ICT resources through the teaching and learning environment as well as through the curriculum design as an integrated platform for delivering value added education. It will consider factors which will allow the university teaching managers in the UK to remain competitive and financially viable, and to serve the global education marketplace efficiently. This approach will create educational value for the potential students and a beneficial effect for institutions, investors in education and suppliers. The use of transferable skills such as ICT application skills complement the learning focus and expertise required in assessment. (Anthony H. Fairbouse: 1997).

Davies (1997) argues that “Asset Management can be achieved by the use of systems”. The argument can be interrogated for teaching and learning because of educational attributes as a result-oriented model in terms of student retention, progression and achievement using available resources.

Hardcat (1996) has a Window system design in modular form for maximum flexibility.

The US based ‘Infra-Structure’ states that “The use of ICT-model-developed systems will enable the tutors and learners to deliver innovative teaching programmes and curriculum design concepts through planning, specifications, computer modeling and animated fly through and multimedia.”

**With the growth in the usefulness of the Internet and in anticipation of the value of Intranets and multimedia resources, CDs, videos and sound around an organisation network, the problem might well get worse.** (Jepson: 1997:6). Research has shown that ICT is now in position to deliver multimedia to the desktop and across teaching and learning networks. That means that wherever a Tutor is in the institution s/he can access resources, which include sound, pictures, animation and moving videos as well as text and graphics for effective implementation of best practice. Added to
the above techno-merits is the most recent capability of accessing a massive amount of useful information and academic data via the Internet.

Integrated learning and cyber classroom

The term cyber classroom (CCR) relates to providing teaching and learning services through internet, intranet, extranet and using simple world wide web sites. Research has shown that many institutions pay lip service to the importance of having access to information and documentation. In practice the argument remains that most organisations and their personnel need to have access to certain categories of information without restriction. The cyber facilities management will provide virtual sites and telecottages featuring some of the most technological advanced packages and network based application within an efficient resource environment.

Methodology

The research method was based on the following:
Use of Questionnaire and face to face interviews as well as an online support mechanism. The students’ feedback was used to test Information Technology and Communication [ICT] capabilities of undergraduate students.

The population for the study consists of all the students undertaking the following modules at the University of North London during 2000 and 2001:

Information Systems in Marketing 2nd Year and Final students [Undergradautes]
Business Information Technology 1st year [Undergradautes]
Managing Finance and Information [Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Management]

Sample: 200 students that enrolled and attended the programmes at University of North London were used for the study.

Instrument: A combination of questionnaire and feedback techniques was used for the study.

The entire quota of questionnaires distributed was returned as the questionnaires were used as a feedback tool and an improvement mechanism for the advancement of the students.

Results

It is evident that the pastoral support added value to the entire performance of the students, as very weak students were able to achieve a minimum of a B grade (60–69%) in their module and a minimum of a C grade in associated modules. On average, students that used the pastoral support mechanism achieved an A grade [above 70%] in the module and a minimum of a B grades in the associated modules.

In summary, only one student scored below 40% which represents 0.67% of the population. This implies that 149 students successfully completed the module and a correlation of their performance will be covered in further research. This is a representation of 99.33%.

Conclusions/Summary

In conclusion, it was the following findings were made:

Research evidence relating to Information and Communication Technology as a teaching and learning tool showed that tutors and learners of higher institutions are aware of the role played by new technology but no evidence of a link relationship was identified (such as a support mechanism). This will be an issue for further research.

- Quality Assurance and Monitoring of teaching and learning through effective evaluation tools will be achieved through research and development, surveys and user groups. The benefit in terms of financial and competitive advantage can be evaluated through measuring student retention rates, performance, progression and achievement. This measurement must be at trivalent scales – formative, summative and ultimate evaluation stages. In addition, the teaching and learning feedback mechanism needs to be in place at all times either directly or by using vital audit trails and help desk techniques.
References


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