FACTORS THAT PREVENT TVET TEACHERS FROM IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE AND BLENDED APPROACHES IN THEIR TEACHING

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this paper is to present a qualitative study on the factors that prevent the use of flexible and blended approaches in the teaching and learning practice carried out in six TVET institutions in Kenya (Coast Institute of Technology, Kenya Teachers Training College, Masai Technical Training Institute, Mombasa Technical Training Institute, Rift Valley technical Training Institute and Thika Technical). Purposive sampling technique was used to select eighteen respondents and an interview schedule was used to collect data from the respondents

The findings revealed that poor internet connectivity, lack of computer literacy amongst students and staff, lack of enough tutors, lack of ICT policy framework and inadequate facilities were the main factors that prevent the use of Flexible and Blended approaches in TVET institutions. It is subsequently recommended that a policy framework be developed to guide teachers on the implementation of flexible and blended approaches in the teaching and learning practice in TVET institutions. Also, the government should equip TIVET institutions with the necessary facilities and equipment in order to realize full implementation of flexible and blended approaches in the teaching and learning practice in TVET institutions in Kenya.

Key Words: Blended, Flexible, Kenya, Technical

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE

The advent of the digital age has dramatically transformed every aspect of human life – the way we work, the way we play, the way we live and the way we learn. The use of Information and Communication Technology in and for education is rapidly expanding in many countries and is now seen worldwide as both a necessity and an opportunity for improving and enhancing the education offered to citizens across the globe (UNESCO, 2006).

Flexible learning is multi-layered and multi-faceted. In its broadest sense it is a continuum of approaches in terms of time, place, pace, content and mode of learning applied in varying degrees. Its overarching purpose is to increase opportunities and options available to learners and give them greater control over their learning through a variety of learning modes and interactions. It is not an alternative mode of education but an overarching driving force that provides learners greater choice. Flexible learning is learner-centred, encouraging greater independence and autonomy on the part of the learner. Its ethos is to enable and empower learners and give them greater control of their learning and become more self-directed.

It increases choices available to both learners and teachers resulting in a 'blurring of traditional internal/external boundaries' (George & Luke, 1995). Flexible learning is a pedagogical approach that is sound, purposefully selected delivery approach resulting from fundamental moves and changes in the socio-economic contexts of the times we live in and has been adopted by higher education institutions for a number of different reasons. In the Government of Kenya Sessional Paper No.1 of 2012, we see that training in Kenya has experienced moderate growth over the last 40 years. However, TVET is yet to produce adequate and skilled middle level human resource required to meet the demands for national development and efforts to establish policies to meet and execute its mandate of 'Education for All' by 2015. The Vision 2030 has however placed special demands on TVET as the leading engine that the economy must essentially rely upon to produce adequate levels of middle level professionals needed to drive the economy towards the attainment of the vision. Two of the national objectives for TVET are to provide increased training opportunities for the increasing school leavers and other trainees to increase employability and to provide continuous upgrading of skills and knowledge at the pace and ability of the trainees, flexible and blended teaching and learning implementation in the TVET institutions will help meet this goals.

Formal TVET programs in Kenya are school-based and are offered at school and technical training colleges. For TVET in Kenya, the technical education subsector alone prides of two polytechnic university colleges, two national polytechnics, one technical teachers training college, twenty-six technical training institutes and fourteen institutes of technology currently under the Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology. In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development manages three industrial training centres, one vocational training centre, and one Kenya Textile Training Institute. There are six ninety seven Youth Polytechnics currently registered and managed under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. There are also eighty seven other training institutions spread in fifteen other Ministries and about a thousand vocational training institutions under private, commercial, civil society and faith based organizations including some company-based training schools.

Attempts to integrate technology in teaching in TVET institutions affiliated to Commonwealth of Learning has provoke a variety of responses from teachers that range from enthusiasm and skepticism to fear and uncertainty. Information and Communication Technology is, in fact, now regarded as "one of the building blocks of modern society" (UNESCO, 2002) and is now considered as one of the indices that should be used to assess a society's development. Many countries globally now regard the acquisition of Information and Communication Technology skills as part of their "core education, alongside reading, writing and numeracy" (UNESCO, 2002). Old curricula and pedagogical approaches should be reformed, and if necessary replaced, to take advantage of the affordances of the new media. Research has shown that computers are used less often in the classroom than in other organizations. In order for education innovations to succeed, systemic approaches and the collaboration of all stakeholders, including teachers, are required (Cuban, 2001; Vrasidas & Glass, 2004, 2005).

The Government of Kenya recognizes that an Information and Communication Technology literate workforce is the foundation on which Kenya can acquire the status of a knowledge economy by 2030. Against this background, the Government shall make education the natural platform for equipping the nation with Information and Communication Technology skills in order to create dynamic and sustainable economic growth. The Ministry has continued to supply Information and Communication Technology equipment, content and training of teachers on Information and Communication Technology. (Policy Framework for Education and Training, Sessional Paper No. 1, 2012)

A major issue emanating from research on teacher preparation has to do with the provision of ongoing teacher support to continue integrating technology into their teaching. Several scholars have argued that existing professional development programs are inadequate (Ball & Cohen, 2000; Borko, 2004). Ongoing professional development is essential for school improvement, and it can empower teachers to address the challenges they face in their everyday teaching. Professional development is a growing need as schools attempt to reform themselves and as new policies are established for teacher certification and school accountability.

Teachers do not just need support in the form of workshops, but instead they need to have access to support throughout their careers as they try to integrate technology into the curricula and seek to improve their teaching. One-time workshops on teacher preparation during the course of one semester are not sufficient. One of the key characteristics of successful professional development programs is collaboration among all stakeholders (Gross et al., 2001; Manke, Ward, Lundeberg, & Tikoo, 2005; Vrasidas & Glass, 2005). Building partnerships for developing, implementing and evaluating programs for teacher preparation in teaching with Information and Communication Technology has worked well in several instances. Radinsky, Smolin, and Lawless (2005) reported a case study in which the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign created a professional development program in which teacher education faculty, technology experts, and teachers collaborated to design modules integrating technology in the curriculum. Collaborative curriculum design anchors the process of learning to use technology in an exploration of what it is to teach and learn the subject.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

In line with the qualitative methodology, the research employed a descriptive design. The study was conducted through interview schedules.

The purposive sample consisted of those who were in institutions that collaborate with Common Wealth of Learning. This included sixteen teachers both male and female. Most of them have implemented some form of flexible and blended approaches in their teaching.

This includes two from Coast Institute of Technology, two from Kenya Teachers Training College, four from Masai Technical Training Institute, four from Mombasa Technical Training Institute, two from Rift Valley technical Training Institute and two from Thika Technical. Data were collected using an interview schedule, by making phone calls, online and meeting the teachers at their work places. The data were then coded and analyzed qualitatively manually.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What are the factors that prevent the use of Flexible and Blended approaches in TVET institutions?

FINDINGS

Five key factors that prevent TVET Teachers from Implementing Flexible and Blended Approaches in their Teaching have been established and these include: Poor internet connectivity, lack of computer literacy amongst students and staff, lack of enough tutors, lack of ICT policy framework and inadequate facilities such as wired lecture rooms and well-equipped computer laboratories:

Inadequate Facilities

Further, inadequate facility was also a factor that prevents the implementation of flexible and blended approaches in teaching in TVET institutions, as reported by the respondents thus:

> *"…our classrooms lack basic facilities, the classrooms need to be mounted with projectors and the government ought to buy or subsidize the cost of laptops and computers to enable teachers to buy them."*

Another respondent reported thus:

> *"...The computers in the college are very old, they break down all the time, and they are also very few .. the labs should be well-equipped.*

The following was reported by yet another respondent:

> "*.. Teachers may access the few computers available at work, but they need continuity at home, they plan their lessons from home so they need to have a computer/ laptop to use at home.*

Hence inadequate facilities are partly to blame for the lack/ slow implementation of the Flexible and Blended Approaches in Teaching in TVET institutions in Kenya. Accordingly computer laboratories should be expanded and be well-equipped.

Poor Internet Connectivity

Poor internet connectivity was decried by the respondents as a factor that has prevented the implementation of Flexible and Blended Approaches in their Teaching. The respondents reported not being able to fully utilize these approaches as they could not do research on the internet.

> *"..it is hard to embrace these approaches without internet connectivity; internet connectivity usually enables teachers to research on teaching content to be delivered in class. Once a teacher has enough teaching content, he/she will plan his work properly and adopt flexible and blended approaches in his teaching and presentation".*

Another respondent reported thus:

> *"..Poor internet connectivity and installation is a big challenge. These approaches can be embraced if teachers are also able to access internet and research teaching content. This would enhance their implementation of….. Internet is a must".*

Thus according to the respondents, internet connectivity is a prerequisite to wholistic implementation of Flexible and Blended Approaches in their Teaching.

Lack of Computer Literacy amongst Students and Staff

The respondents further mentioned lack of computer literacy amongst students and staff as a reason for the lack of implementation of flexible and blended approaches in teaching in TVET institutions, as reported by the respondents thus:

> *"…Some teachers do not even know how to make or use power point while others do not know how to fix and work with the projector,….. Teachers need to be taught how to use these facilities, it should not be taken for granted that they know how to manipulate them…training should be organized.."*

Another respondent reported thus:

> *….Some of our students come from secondary school in the rural areas … they might have never seen a computer,…. some villages in Kenya don't even have electricity. So they will not learn very fast when a teacher uses electronics in class.. They get confused.*

lack of computer literacy amongst teachers is maybe due to the fact that computers is a new phenomenon, some teachers might have gone to school before the advent of the computers, hence trained is necessary in order for them to implement flexible and blended approaches in teaching.

Lack of Enough Tutors

The respondents reported lack of enough tutors as the other reason behind lack of implementation of flexible and blended approaches in teaching in TVET institutions, as stated thus:

"..tutors are very few in the institutions…..government should employ more tutors so that the workload is lowered for……. instance this term I had 42 hours so it was difficult to prepare all those units and mark them…..

Another respondent stated thus

" …. I had 32 hours normal and 10 production units…most of the time there is so much to be done leaving little room for research and to learn and practice new things"

Apparently lack of enough tutors leads to a heavy work load for the few available tutors. This makes it hard for the tutors to get time to practice new approaches and technologies. Hence more teachers need to be employed to TIVET institutions to help lighten their teaching workload. This will enable them find time to learn and research on new approaches like flexible and blended approaches in teaching

Lack ICT Policy Framework

Lack of ICT policy framework in the education sector was also blamed for the slow / lack of implementation of the flexible and blended approaches in teaching in TVET institutions in Kenya. Subsequently, some tutors do not embrace change as there is no policy requiring them to do so as reported thus:

" *.. lack of policies that require teachers to embrace technology in their teaching is lacking. A policy should be enacted that will require that all teachers embrace technology in their teaching. ….. all TVET teachers could have embraced flexible and blended approaches if a policy was in place"*

Further a respondent reported reluctance to change as follows:

" *… I would rather use the old methods of teaching. There is no difference, more so, computers are costly."*

Consequently, unless the government or ministry of education puts a policy in place, implementation of the flexible and blended approaches in teaching in TVET institutions in Kenya will remain a mirage. Apparently enactment of policies remains the only way of making sure that tutors implement flexible and blended approaches in teaching in TVET institutions in Kenya

CONCLUSION

The study established that poor internet connectivity, lack of computer literacy amongst students and staff, lack of enough tutors, lack of ICT policy framework and inadequate facilities were the main factors preventing the use of Flexible and Blended approaches in TVET institutions.

These findings complement findings from other studies outside Africa that have helped to underscore the value of involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation of Flexible and Blended approaches in TVET institutions.

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