

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I declare that the thesis entitled, “Towards developing a web-based blended learning environment at the University of Botswana” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature of student:

Date:

Name of student: Pelleth Y. Thomas

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the loving memory of our (mine and my wife's) four parents who would have been delighted to witness the completion of this work if they were alive.

I also dedicate it to my four children, four children-in-laws and five grandchildren with a view to inculcating in them a genuine interest for life-long learning without any age bar.

The man who graduates today and stops learning tomorrow is uneducated the day after.

~ Newton D. Baker

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether 20 or 80, anyone who keeps learning stays young.

~ Henry Ford

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SUMMARY

Extant literature indicates that web-based blended learning will become the most accepted mode of delivery in the near future as an alternative to traditional face-to-face instruction particularly in the higher education landscape due to its potential to provide increased access to education for more people, increased student engagement with the tutor, rich learning resources, peers, and external experts, and flexibility beyond the limits of classrooms without compromising quality. The study focused on developing a web-based blended learning model that could help reap the benefits of blended learning at the University of Botswana (UB).

With this in mind, the research question, “*How can a web-based blended learning environment be designed, developed and implemented at the University of Botswana?*” was formulated.

In order to address the research question, a six-dimensional model called LAPTEL was developed. The six dimensions are: Digital Leadership, Equitable Access, Active Participation, Authentic Tasks, Intellectual Engagement and Learning (LAPTEL); the first five dimensions are requisites to enable students to progress towards successful learning which is the sixth dimension.

The LAPTEL model depicts guidelines on how to ensure equitable *access* for students to learning contexts, motivate and enable them to *participate* in meaningful educational processes, design and develop effective online as well as classroom learning materials (*tasks*), and *engage* students in active 'communities of practice' in order to help them construct their own knowledge (*learning*) collaboratively under proper *leadership*. The Researcher considers it essential to have a complex interplay between the three components – active participation, authentic tasks and intellectual engagement to facilitate active, non-linear learning, and it will be catered for in the design, development and delivery of courses based on the LAPTEL model. The fact that these three dimensions have got features of both face-to-face and online learning, integrated seamlessly, makes the LAPTEL a Web-based blended learning model. The overall aim was to develop a model of curriculum (re)design based on student-centred pedagogical approaches that combine synergistically the effectiveness of traditional classroom with technologically enhanced socialization and active learning opportunities of the online environment in order to support student learning more effectively than what is possible in a typical lecture room.

In a case study to evaluate the effectiveness of the LAPTEL model in the context of UB, the Researcher found that it could provide students with opportunity for increased interactive engagement (more than that is normally possible in ‘face-to-face-only’ or ‘online-only’ environments), flexibility and cognitive scaffolding that enhanced their learning experience. The Researcher concludes that the LAPTEL model fits well in the UB context, and it may be adopted by other institutions working under similar contexts.

KEY TERMS

Blended learning

Case study

Collaborative learning

Community of practice

Community of learners

Hybrid instruction

Instructional design

Technology infusion

Technology integration

Learning design

Learning environment

University of Botswana

Acronyms

CAD: Centre for Academic Development

CLE: Constructivist learning environment

CoP: Community of practice

DVC AA: Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic affairs

EFA: Education for All

ETU: Educational Technology Unit

HE: Higher education

ICT: Information and communications technology

KPA: Key performance areas

LASO model: Leadership, Academic and Student Ownership and Readiness

LMS: Learning management system

PLE: Personal learning environment

WWW: World Wide Web

OELE: Open-ended learning environment

UB: University of Botswana

VLE: Virtual Learning Environment

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