Chapter 47

Barriers to Blended Teaching and Learning in Sub–Saharan Africa:
Challenges for the Next Decade and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains the need to better design blended teaching and learning curricula, the need to address infrastructural problems, and the need to organise programmes so that faculty and students can better plan for unanticipated and unintended situations that confront them in the teaching and learning processes. Improving the quality of education through the diversification of content and methods and promoting experimentation, innovation, the diffusion and sharing of information, and best practices are among UNESCO's recent strategic objectives in education. Discussions in this chapter centre on (1) the contexts of blended teaching and learning, (2) the barriers to blended learning usage, integration, and diffusion, and (3) the need to consider policy outcomes when evaluating blended teaching and learning resources. This study uses a qualitative research method, as both document materials and observation were an essential part of this chapter. This study concludes that the great enthusiasm around blended teaching and learning in sub-Saharan Africa has been dampened by inadequacies in essential services and infrastructures, such as electricity and telecommunication services, and institutional, socio-cultural, and economic barriers. Nonetheless, the development of blended teaching and learning resources continues.

INTRODUCTION

Amid the advent of the blended learning revolution (Graham, 2005), the world is witnessing an expansion of blended teaching and learning. This revolution enabled academic institutions to provide flexible and more open teaching and learning environments for faculty and students. The convergence and availability of new blended learning technologies such as computers, satellites, WebCT, PowerPoint, and other learning and fibre optic technologies is making it easier for institutions to implement and achieve their educational objectives (Nel, 2005; Akhahowa & Osubor, 2006). Blended teaching and learning methods have become the foremost tools in some learning institutions and have had a remarkable impact on how educational development is viewed around the world. Blended Learning involves a combination of face-to-face and technology-based learning, distinct from other learning strategies that is highly conducive to faculty teaching and increased students learning (Ololube, 2011). This revolution, however, is not a universal one and needs to be reinforced to reach a larger percentage of the student population worldwide (Nel, 2005; Mac-Ikemenjima, 2005; Olalekan, 2012; Mpofu, Chimhenga, & Mafa, 2013).

The effective use of blended learning as a method in the teaching and learning processes addresses many of the problems associated with technology-based learning, seeking synergistic results that benefit faculty and students as they move beyond their studies and execute their responsibilities as professionals. In order to demonstrate the previous assertion, this paper will embark on a discussion of blended learning and the factors that hinder its effective use in educational institutions as means of achieving educational objectives in sub-Saharan Africa. Blended teaching and learning are central to enabling us to better manage contemporary complex information flows and integrating these flows into effective teaching and learning aimed at the maximisation of human

capital. To this end, we must develop integrated methods and training modules that enable blended teaching and learning application.

Stakeholders, parents, governments, faculty and students rely on universities to educate those enrolled through certification and accreditation in approved programmes. Still, despite efforts by sub-Saharan African governments to establish these programmes to help in the preparation of an effective workforce (Nel, 2005; Yusuf, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Ololube, 2011; Ololube, Amaele, Kpolovie, & Egbezor, 2013), a number of fundamental problems have incapacitated their full development. These same problems have hindered the successful implementation of blended teaching and learning in institutions of higher education. More than half of the students and lecturers in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, lack e-knowledge and most students have limited (or no) experience in the use of WebCT's interactive features (such as discussion forums and assignment submission) (Nel, 2005). Likewise, Yusuf's (2005a) study, which investigated teachers' self-efficacy in implementing computer education in Nigerian schools, found that most teachers in Nigeria lack competence in using computers and computer software for educational purposes. Another recent study (Mpofu, Chimhenga, & Mafa, 2013) found that most of the professionals employed in Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) Regional Centres are not effectively trained in the design and use of e-learning materials. As a result, where computers have been secured e-learning as a form of blended learning is not used to interact with the student on a regular basis.

The popularity of blended teaching and learning methods has brought swift changes in educational technology and has caused a global educational and economic transformation, particularly in developed countries. To be effective in the innovations relevant to blended teaching and learning, faculty need training not only in computer literacy but also in the application of various kinds of educational software; they

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