Chapter 115
Managing Online Teaching Faculty:
A Case Study and Review of Literature on Mentoring of Online Faculty

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a Kenyan university context on issues surrounding management and mentoring of online faculty. Findings from literature, content analysis of documents, and raw data from experiences of mentees and mentor revealed the following: online teaching and learning is both a well-established discipline and appraised globally. However, levels of its implementation contrast sharply in different contexts, and especially between the developed and developing world contexts. Whereas quality assurance bodies in respective university contexts have standards and guidelines that meet global standards, implementation procedures are highly compromised as reflected by some themes that emerged such as (mis)conception of online learning, expectations and realities of virtual learning environments, lack of readiness/unpreparedness among others. Orientation of instructors, learners, continuous professional development of instructors and effective mentoring and monitoring of key stakeholders have been recommended to ensure quality outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Kenya is often regarded with awe and admiration. The Government of Kenya recognizes the critical role higher education plays in equipping the workforce with the necessary skills and knowledge to grow the economy towards Vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007b). Thus, the Government of Kenya, under the Universities Act (2012), commits to the development of university education,

establishment, accreditation and governance of universities (Republic of Kenya, 2012). As a consequence, public universities continue to grow in numbers from 7 (before 2012), to 35 in 2017 (CUE, 2017). According to the Commission for University Education (CUE), accredited universities' list (CUE, 2017), there are currently 35 public universities and their constituent colleges, 23 private universities and their constituent colleges, and 13 higher education institutions (HEIs) with interim letters of authority.

This proliferation of institutions of higher learning within a short period of time has created competition for students fresh from secondary schools who meet the requirements for a university degree. It is against this backdrop that online distance learning programs have been eagerly embraced by private institutions of higher learning that are determined to meet contemporary educational needs as well as complementing and supplementing public HEIs. It has also forced them to rethink their target market and offer online programs that generate professional skills and competencies to meet a growing demand of learners raging from part time (PT) students, distance learners, and generally to the growing demand of non-traditional learners. Arguably, online programs where faculty engages learners in virtual classrooms hold the promise to equal educational opportunities for all (EFA). It is also attractive to learners who are employed yet wish to enhance their professional development, and cannot therefore be present in traditional classrooms.

While literature on virtual teaching and learning for both faculty and staff show considerable gains and success in developed countries such the United States of America and Britain, literature is dearth on the same in developing countries. In light of the 21st Century market requirements and globalization notwithstanding, it becomes incumbent for all nation states to take up the challenge if global competitiveness in skills and knowledge economy will be realized.

In this chapter, issues surrounding the management and mentoring of online faculty in the study context will be fore-grounded under the following sub-headings: An Online Program at a Kenyan Private University: A Case Study; Virtual Teaching and Learning: A Review of Literature ; Online Program at a Medium Size Private University in Kenya: Lived Experiences of a Mentor and Mentees; Study Methodology and Findings; Conclusions and Recommendations.

AN ONLINE PROGRAM AT A KENYAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY

Started in 2014, the online program in the study context aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Provide broad access and participation to students through the ODeL modes.
- Increase educational advancement opportunities for all regardless of their social, economic, cultural or religious inclinations.
- Integrate learning opportunities to all categories of students including those with special needs.
- Provide students with highly qualitative education that is affordable.
- Provide capacity building in Open and Distance e-Learning with huge investment in staff development.
- Encourage research and development activities especially those that contribute to ODeL practices and offer a range of opportunities for students to develop their potential, contribute decisions on curriculum issues and implementation strategies (Open and Distance e-Learning Policy, 2014).

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