


Chapter 4

Increasing Teaching Capacity for Supporting Students in an ODeL Institution: Employing Letsema

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ABSTRACT

There is need to build teaching capacity in pursuance of strengthening instruction and support for improving learning, particularly for adult learners. To expound the enhancement of increasing teaching capacity for effective student support through letsema in an ODeL Institution, presenting transactional distance theory and narrating experiences, with emphasis on collective effort through letsema practice. The indigenous qualitative mixed method comprising autoethnography and conversational paradigms, underpinned the study, linking quality support and students' academic success in an ODeL context, consistent with the Africanisation of higher education and outlining the significance of core values inspired by the philosophy of ubuntu. Results suggest increased teaching capacity inspire collaborative letsema support approach, assuring mentorship opportunities, quality teaching, and informed learning towards increasing student throughput rate. Thus, affirming that the approach is suitable for supporting students. Hence the recommendation for implementing the approach in an ODeL context.

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INTRODUCTION

The extent to which higher education institutions (HEIs) support students, determines their academic success as well as institutional excellence (Netanda, Mamabolo & Themane, 2017), particularly for students from deprived backgrounds. There is a growing understanding among researchers that a reduction in dropout rates, attrition, bridging the gap of under-preparedness and delayed completion of studies hinge on the procedures used to support students, particularly in open distance-eLearning (ODeL) settings. Overall, research conducted in HEIs confirms that supported students can increase their competence, gain knowledge, heighten their learning proficiency, improve their self-enhancement and, arguably, boost their chances of completing their courses within a specified period of time (Brookfield, 2017; Harris, Campbell Casey, Westbury, & Florida-James, 2016; Van Wyk, 2017). Other authors recommend that add-on of the aforementioned attributes depend on factors such as quality teaching, the provision of adequate resources, and learner-centric support (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2012; Schrum, 2000). Pitsoe and Baloyi (2015) suggest that student support in an ODL context entails providing help to students, to enable them gain competence in their learning and ultimately succeed. In lieu of this chapter, student support entails guidance through a variety of online means and a collaborative *letsema* support approach, assuring mentorship opportunities that enables quality teaching, and facilitates informed learning towards increasing student throughput rate. The success of student support programmes is dependent on meaningful teaching offered in order to derive value from anticipated outcomes, thereby averting possible learning fallouts. This is echoed by Chen, Chen and Wang (2009), who argue that student support in distance learning spaces ought to include as many empowerment initiatives as possible. This can thus offer students an opportunity to direct their own pace of learning and achieve the envisaged outcomes (Setlhodi, 2019a). In this chapter, the argument is made that institutional values ought to underpin the principles informing the quality of teaching provided and the level of support students can access for effective learning that can yield improved results.

The foregoing suggests that teaching has to be improved, if HEIs are intent to deliver a cohort of critical thinkers who can comprehend and adapt to various learning strategies, have a set of values they subscribe to, and are able to reflect before taking the lead in directing their learning. Kumar (2008) notes that teaching and learning can be strengthened by specific values, which aim to increase learning competencies through the support provided. This meets the dual expectation of increasing teaching capacity to eliminate any competency gaps and improving students' academic success. Bezuidenhout (2018) expounds that the lecturers' competencies – particularly in an ODeL context – have a bearing on student support and achievement.

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