Piloting the use of a virtual learning environment in rural community schools

Issue at-hand

One of the challenges that African governments have had to grapple with in their quest for attaining Education For All (EFA) goals is the provision of access to quality education for rural communities. The use of virtual learning environments (VLE) has therefore generally been adopted by some governments as a means to promoting and scaling access to quality education. However, it is critical for decision makers to understand the potential of VLE in the educational sector and thus they have the task of supporting and evaluating VLEs for distance education. A study that focused on rural communities in Ghana, for instance, examined the use of VLE to support teaching and learning in rural communities. Teaching with a learning management system, Moodle and a web-conferencing application, WizIQ were introduced in a pilot project. Although there is empirical evidence that this technology-mediated delivery of teaching raised learners’ motivation, increased their e-literacy level and ICT awareness, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed as revealed by Najim Ussiph in his presentation at the 2013 1st International Conference of the African Virtual University.

Recommendations

Political will of policy makers to provide enabling environment and basic infrastructure is critical to the successful use of an electronic system of delivering teaching and learning. A wide range of resources have to be mobilized for ICT access for the rural communities. These include:

- physical resources: access to computers, accessories and the internet
- digital resources: needed application software and relevant online or digital materials
human resources: trainers or instructors on literacy and education to provide basic skills needed for computer use and online communication

- social resources: societal structures such as community or institution that provides support for ICT infrastructure

- There is need to improve the speed of internet connection for students to be able to take maximum advantage of Moodle course materials and other collaborative tools in the VLE to enhance learning experience.

- Both public and private sector support for technology-mediated learning is important for its sustainability and full learners’ benefit.

**Implications**

The study asserts that with VLE:

- learning experience is far greater than in the traditional classroom method;
- there is great potential in providing access to quality education in rural community schools;
- students can be motivated by giving them a chance to play a more active role in the learning process rather than being passive ‘receptacles’ of knowledge;
- students become more innovative, create learning objects on their own and are able to circumvent obstacles or challenges that come their way.

**Conclusion**

E-learning with all its potential must still be complemented by some amount of face to face teacher mediation for students to reap maximum benefit. It cannot totally replace human beings and the plight of rural students and learners can only be alleviated by deserved attention and political will of policy makers and other key educational stakeholders to facilitate the process.

**References**

Paper presented at the 2013 1st International Conference of the AVU, Nairobi, Kenya, under the session on *Distance Learning & ICTs.*  
**Title:** The Potential of VLE in Providing Access to Quality Education in Rural Community Schools – Myth or Reality  
**Presenter:** Najim Ussiph, Department of Computer Science, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Ghana.

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