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Research and innovation in teaching and learning are prime topics for the *Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning* (ISSN 1550-6908). The Journal was initiated in January 2004 to facilitate communication and collaboration among researchers, innovators, practitioners, and administrators of education and training involving innovative technologies and/or distance learning.

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IJITDL is committed to publish significant writings of high academic stature for worldwide distribution to stakeholders in distance learning and technology.

In its first eight years, the Journal logged over eight million page views and more than one and one half million downloads of Acrobat files of monthly journals and eBooks.

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Editorial

Criterion-Based Learning

Donald G. Perrin

I introduce my students to criterion based learning by asking them “how high can you jump”. Some think in terms of hurdles – maybe two or three feet. Others set a higher target. They run to get momentum and use a scissor action to get their legs over the bar. The problem of getting higher was solved by the western roll, where body and legs are parallel to the bar as you roll over just above it. More recently, the Fosbury Flop requires only a small part of the body to be above the bar at any instant. Technique enables us to master bigger challenges. This film clip explains it better than I can:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mprtNILdmOE>

So how high can athletes jump? Can they exceed their own height? Look at the first minute and 20 seconds of this clip from the 2012 Olympics:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1YmBof5r9g>

Ivan Ukhov jumped 2.38 meters (7 feet 9 ½ inches) about 24% higher than his 6ft 3 ½ height.

Setting standards

I relate top performance on the athletic field to criterion performance in the classroom. The bar sets the criterion level. I set that level very high – not just excellent, but exemplary. We need to reach the global highest standards to be competitive. To achieve this, I need to provide instruction, tools, techniques, models, mentoring and learning opportunities that engage, motivate and leverage students to enable them to achieve criterion level. In my Decision Science classes I use computer applications and mathematical models to provide extra leverage. There will always be students that need additional help – time, tutoring, and customized support. In my course, everything above the bar is an A; anything less is a waste of educational resources, my time and theirs.

The ABCDF system of grading is flawed. It is useful to track progress toward the criterion. When used to select the best-of-the-best, everyone else is a loser.

In criterion-based learning, all students must reach a predetermined standard. They must be engaged, motivated, and accept responsibility for their own learning. They succeed through interaction and collaboration with teachers, fellow students, rich learning resources and a flexible supportive environment. Furthermore, they are encouraged to be curious, to explore and to take risks as part of the learning experience. Failures and late assignments are not punished. Emphasis is on success and support for learning.

Would you be satisfied with a 75% heart surgeon or a 65% airplane mechanic? Failures or inferior qualifications are costly to the student, unproductive for the educational system, and wasteful for the economy.

Dr Sugata Mitra has useful advice from his experiments with under-privileged populations. Often the student can map his own learning and reach goals step-by-step.

http://www.ted.com/talks/sugata_mitra_build_a_school_in_the_cloud.html

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Editor's Note: Research has demonstrated online courses to be comparable to on-campus courses. Public perception follows this trend, stratified by age group as demonstrated in this research. Additional research is needed to compare learning for comparable courses in different institutions, distant and online courses in the same institution, and distant and online courses taught by the same professor. However, online attracts populations that previously did not have access to degree courses. None of the above comparisons are valid unless linked to the characteristic of each student population it serves.

Public Perceptions of Online Education: Progress and Potential

Trevor Belcher, Jan Tucker, Patricia Neely
USA

Abstract

Making a commitment to go to college is as major decision. While choice of school and available opportunities vary, students want to be sure the degree they are earning will be accepted and respected upon graduation. To that end, students are concerned about the quality of their education and the reputation of the institution they plan to attend. This is especially true and a primary concern for students considering earning a degree through online education. In this study, public perception of online education was assessed using a convenience sample. Participants answered multiple questions geared toward perception of online education. Results indicate that public perceptions' around the quality and reputation of online education as compared to campus based education differs depending on the age and experience of the respondents.

Keywords: distance education, public perception, online education, distance learning, online degrees, student learning, quality of education, reputation of online learning, growth of online education, e-learning

Public Perception of Online Education

Online education has grown exponentially over the past 10 years (Waller, 2008; Allen & Seaman, 2011; Lytle, 2012). In 2009 some 5.6 million students reported being enrolled in at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2011), a number which continues to climb. E-learning is forecasted to be a \$49.6 billion dollar industry by 2014 (Nagel, 2010). A number of studies have been conducted on the growth of online programs and the quality of instruction in online and distance education programs. Researchers have collected data from administrators, faculty, students, and hiring managers on their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of online education (Adams & DeFleur, 2005; Adams & DeFleur 2006; Adams, DeFleur, & Heald, 2007; Carnevale, 2007). Faculty have expressed some apprehension concerning the growth of distance learning and the necessity to acquire new skills to teach online (Kolowich, 2012), but they also see the value that distance education programs can bring in staying competitive and maintaining student enrollment (Mills, Yanes, & Casebeer, 2009). More than half of university administrators see online education as equivalent to traditional teaching when it comes to achieving learning outcomes (Dykman & Davis, 2008). Students seem to be drawn to online education because of the flexibility and accessibility, but report they would like some face time in the classroom (Wyner, 2012). Even with such value, one of the major obstacles that online education has faced in the past is the perception that online programs are of lower quality than traditional, on-campus programs (Drago, Peltier, May & Hodginson, 2005) and the belief that students trade quality for convenience (Dash, 2000; Dolezalek, 2003).

The concern over quality is demonstrated in recent literature. A review of the literature shows administrators and faculty who have voiced concerns of the quality of online education (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012). Perceptions have ranged from online education being slightly beneficial to the more negative view of online education being the equivalent of a *false*

gold rush (Malone, 2011). The 2011 Pew Foundation study reports that “just three-in-ten American adults (29%) say a course taken online provides an equal educational value to one taken in a classroom” (p. 3). A somewhat shocking number when we consider that three-quarters of the nation’s institutions are offering some type of online courses (Pew Research Center, 2011). Given the rapid and expected continued growth of online education, we contend that there is a shift taking place with the general public’s perception becoming more accepting of online education. This is an important consideration as we know one’s subjective perception will indeed play a part in influencing behavior (Adler, 1956), which included education related behavior such as school selection, enrollment, and retention. However, little has been written about the general public’s perception of online education. This study addresses a gap in the literature and contributes to the body of knowledge by assessing public perception of online education.

In this study, we evaluated three research questions:

1. What is the public’s perception of the quality and reputation of online education programs compared to traditional, face-to-face programs?
2. What is the public’s perception of the qualifications of online faculty members compared to their perceptions of the qualifications of face to face/campus based faculty members?
3. How does age, sex and educational background affect perceptions of the quality of online educational programs compared to traditional, face-to-face programs?

Method

Participants

A non-random convenience sample was recruited via the internet by advertising on two popular sites (Craigslist & Facebook) for participants willing to complete a short 10-question survey about online education. The researchers selected this sampling approach to explore the general public’s perceptions of online education as it allowed access to a readily available population. This approach is appropriate for less demanding research problems (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

A total of 175 participants (50 men and 125 women) provided data for this study. Although participants did not indicate their exact age, participants’ ages ranged from 18 – 74 years, with the largest group of participants (23.4%) being between the ages of 35-44. A vast majority (83.4%) of the sample was Caucasian, with the remaining participants self-identifying as African American (6.9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2.3%), Hispanic (4.6%), Native American (0.6%), and the remaining identifying as other (2.3%). Participants’ educational background provided a variety across the education continuum: 1.7% reported having completed less than a high school education, 8.6% reported being a high school graduate or having earned its equivalent, 22.3% some college, 9.1% earned an associate degree, 18.3% earned a bachelor degree, 5.7% some graduate school, and 34.3% reported having completed graduate school (M.A., M.S., Ph.D., etc). Finally, 58.9% of the sample reported taking an online college class. Tables 1-4 below illustrates the demographics of our sample as compared to the U.S. census data (U.S. Census, 2012)

Table 1
Age of respondents

Study	Ages 18-24	Ages 25-34	Ages 35-44	Ages 45-54	Ages 55-64	65+
	21.1%	18.2	23.4	21.1	10.8	5.1%
U.S.	Ages 18-24	Ages 25-44		Ages 45-64		65+
	9.6%	30.2%		22%		12.4%

Table 2
Gender of respondents

Study		U.S	
Male	29%	Male	49.1%
Female	71%	Female	50.9%

Table 3
Ethnicity of respondents

	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Caucasian	Hispanic	Native American	Other
Study	6.9%	2.3%	83.4%	4.6%	.6%	2.3%
U.S.	13.1%	5%	78.1%	16.7%	1.4%	N/A

Table 4
Educational background of respondents

	Less than HS diploma	HS graduate	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree or higher
Study	1.7%	8.6%	9.1%	18.3%	34.3%
U.S.	12.9%	31.2%	9.1%	19.4%	11.8%

Procedure

We recruited participants through the use of the two popular internet sites, Facebook and Craigslist. With the craigslist ad we targeted major cities across the United States (San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Los Angeles, CA; San Diego, CA; New Orleans, LA; Miami, FL; Tampa, FL; Orlando, FL; Philadelphia, PA; Des Moines, Iowa; Dallas, TX; Boston, MA; New York, NY; Chicago, IL; Hartford, CT; Atlanta, GA; Las Vegas, NV; and Salt Lake City, UT.) posting the invitation letter (See Appendix B) in the volunteer section of Craigslist for each of the cities listed above. We posted the same invitation letter on Facebook directing people to the page to take the survey. The invitation letter explained the purpose of the study and invited interested readers to click a link and learn more about the study. Once clicked, the link opened in a new window providing our consent form (See Appendix C). If the reader consented, they were immediately taken to the next page to complete the short survey (See Appendix A); if they declined, they were taken to a page thanking them for their consideration. Upon completion of the survey, we thanked participants for their time and interest in our study, and gave directions for closing their browser and clearing their history (See Appendix D).

Materials

Participants completed an online questionnaire designed for this study (See Appendix A). Questions 1-5 were identification and classification questions (sex, age, ethnicity, education, online educational experience). Questions 6-10 asked them to report their responses in the following areas which corresponded to our research questions:

Research question #1: Perceptions on the quality of online education. We asked participants to report their perceptions on the following statement: The quality of online college education is equal to that of a face to face college education. Participants made ratings on the following scale: definitely agree, agree, disagree, or definitely disagree.

Research question #1: Reputation of online colleges. We asked participants to report their perceptions on the following statement: The reputation of online colleges is equal to the reputation of campus based schools. Participants made ratings on the following scale: definitely agree, agree, disagree, or definitely disagree.

Research question #2: Qualifications of online faculty. We asked participants to report their perceptions on the following statement: Online faculty members are as qualified as faculty at brick and mortar campus based schools. Participants made ratings on the following scale: definitely agree, agree, disagree, or definitely disagree.

Research question #3: Student learning in the online classroom. We asked participants to report their perceptions on the following statement: Students learn as much in an online classroom as they do in a traditional classroom. Participants made ratings on the following scale: definitely agree, agree, disagree, or definitely disagree.

Research question #3: Student preparation. We asked participants to report their perceptions on the following statement: Students who earn online degrees are as prepared for employment as those students who earn degrees in the traditional classroom. Participants made ratings on the following scale: definitely agree, agree, disagree, or definitely disagree.

Results and Discussion

We analyzed participant responses using a chi-square test. We conducted separate analysis for each of the following criteria; sex, age, ethnicity, education, and online experience. There were no significant associations between sex, ethnicity, or level of education around perceptions of online education. Results did reveal an association between age and student learning in the online classroom $\chi^2(15, N = 175) = 32.65, p = .005$ and between age and perceptions of student preparation $\chi^2(15, N = 175) = 26.10, p = .037$. Analysis also showed an association between online course experience and student learning in the online classroom $\chi^2(3, N = 175) = 10.02, p = .018$ and online course experience perceptions of student preparation.

Our data provided evidence that age and educational experience are associated with perceptions of online education. Researchers should investigate this association further, as well as expand the study to determine if a true random sample would show the same association. Future studies might expand the sample size and look closer at each of the criteria used in this study.

There are a few limitations to this study including the small sample size as compared to the U.S. population and that a convenience sample was used. While the study was designed to look at the general public perceptions, and these participants are part of that population, we acknowledge that the topic may have attracted a number of online students, faculty, or administrators, as well as those with friends or family involved in online education. However, the results did not seem to show a strong bias toward online education. Other limitations include self-reporting measures which assume participants are answering the questions accurately, and the online data collection which leaves one to assume the questions were understood correctly and answered honestly.

Conclusions

The researchers were interested to see if public perceptions of online education were evolving. In their 2005 research, Yick, Patrick and Costin noted that there was a perceptual disparity in academia that on ground education is superior to distance education. That same year, Adams and DeFleur (2005) found that 98% of the 109 employers they surveyed preferred to hire a candidate from a traditional educational institution versus one from a distance education institution. Guendoo (2007) found that administrators at community colleges did not see faculty members with an online degree as less qualified than their traditionally educated colleagues but that a bias

toward traditionally prepared faculty existed in the traditional four year colleges. Very little research has been published in the past five years addressing whether these past perceptions still hold true in 2013.

While this study was a small convenience sample and definitive conclusions could not be established from the Chi Square test, some interesting observations were noted. Age does appear to influence the perception of whether respondents felt that students in an online class learned as much as those in a traditional classroom. Interestingly enough, 78% of the younger respondents (those 18-24) did not feel that students learned as much in an online class as in a traditional class. This age group is more likely to be attending a traditional school whereas online schools tend to focus on older learners. The average age of a University of Phoenix student is 37 (Admissions, 2013) and is 39 for Capella University (Capella, 2013), while the traditional college student is between 18-24 (McClenney, 2013). As the age of the respondents increased, the perceived differences between online learning and learning in a traditional classroom decreased. Approximately 67.6% of the respondents between the ages of 25 and 34 disagreed with the statement that online learners learn as much as those in a traditional classroom, while only 45% of those between 35-44 and 33% of those between 45-54 disagreed with that same statement. Respondents in the 55-64 and 65-74 age groups seemed less likely to perceive a difference in what students learned in an online versus a traditional classroom with only 27.7% of the first group and 33% of the latter group perceiving that students in a traditional classroom learn more than their online counterparts.

A respondent's experience with online education seemed to slightly bias the responses to be more favorable of student learning in an online environment than those who did not have experience with online education. 59.4% of those who had taken at least one online class perceived their experience to be comparable to their colleagues who took traditional classes. A significant difference was found in perceptions of how well online education prepares individuals for employment. Approximately 59% of those who have taken an online class indicated that online classes prepared students for employment. While only 41% of respondents who have never taken an online course indicated that online courses prepare students for employment. It should be noted this is a marked increase from the 29% reported in the 2011 Pew Foundation Study.

Of the respondents, 75% believed that the qualifications of online faculty are equivalent to campus based faculty compared to 25% who indicated that online faculty were not as qualified as campus based faculty. The requirements for hiring faculty are similar for both online and campus faculty regarding education and work experiences due to accreditation requirements (Jaschik, 2006), but it is interesting to note that the public also perceived minimal differences between the qualifications of the two.

While it appears that as more people experience online education, negative perceptions about the quality of online education may decline, additional research to further examine this topic is warranted. Nearly 3.5 million students (or 20% of all U.S. college students) were taking at least one online class in the Fall of 2006 (Allen & Seaman, 2007) while that number had blossomed to over 6.1 million (or 30% of all U.S. college students) in the Fall 2010 term (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Projections indicate that as many as 25 million post-secondary students in the United States will be taking an online class by 2015, and there may be more full-time students in the online classroom than in the traditional classroom by 2018 (Nagel, 2011). As we continue to see increased enrollment in online education at both the K-12 and higher education levels, and an increased focus on outcomes, accreditation and employment preparation, we may see the perceptions of these online programs change as well.

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About the Authors



Dr. Joseph Belcher holds a PhD and MS in Psychology from Capella University and a BS with a double major in Ministry and Theology from Mid-America Christian University. Over most of the past two decades, his educational and practical experience has allowed him the opportunity to serve in various capacities such as pastoral ministry (ten years), counseling, teaching, and administration. His research interests include leadership and higher education. Dr. Belcher is an Assistant Professor at Ashford University and currently lives in Virginia. In his spare time, he enjoys movies, spending time with his family, and trying to learn guitar

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Dr. Jan Tucker has a PhD in Business Management from Northcentral University, an MBA from Florida Institute of Technology and a BA degree from Auburn University. Dr. Tucker has over 20 years experience in higher education in the areas of instruction and curriculum development. In addition, she spent over 10 years as a Human Resources consultant for several Fortune 500 companies. Her research interests include the integration of technology in education, disruptive innovation in education and change management processes. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Ashford University and resides in Tampa, Florida with her family.

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Dr. Patricia Neely has an Ed.D from the University of Virginia, an MBA from Averett University and a BS degree from Radford University. Dr. Neely has a rich background in higher education administration including curriculum design and development, program management and faculty supervision roles. Her work experience includes a number of leadership roles at Western Governors University, Old Dominion University, Kaplan University and Bluefield College. She is currently the Director of Curriculum at the Higher Learning Institute and resides in Pounding Mill, VA with her family.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY

For classification purposes, please complete the following questions:

Sex:

- Male
- Female

Age:

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and over

What is your ethnicity?

- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Caucasian – Non Hispanic
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Other

Which of the following best describes your educational background?

- Less than High School Graduate
- High School Graduate or equivalent (example: GED)
- Some College
- College Graduate (B.S. or B.A degree)
- Some Graduate School
- Completed Graduate School (M.A., M.S., Ph.D., etc)

Have you taken an online college class?

- Yes
- No

In general, do you feel the quality of online college education is equal to that of a face to face college education?

- Definitely agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Definitely disagree

In general, do you feel that the reputation of online colleges is as good as brick and mortar campus based schools?

- Definitely agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Definitely disagree

In general, do you feel that online faculty members are as well qualified as faculty at brick and mortar campus based schools?

- Definitely agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Definitely disagree

In general, do you feel students learn as much in an online course as they do in a traditional classroom?

- Definitely agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Definitely disagree

10. In general, do you feel that students who earn online degrees are as well prepared for employment as those students who earn degrees in the traditional classroom?

- Definitely agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Definitely disagree

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Reader,

We are interested in exploring public perception regarding online education. To do this, we need your help! If you are over the age of 18 we invite you to participate in a voluntary research study that will help further knowledge and research in this area.

The study will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and you may quit at anytime for any reason.

To participate in the study, please click the following link: [LINK WOULD GO HERE](#).

If you have any questions, or would like to receive the results of the study free of charge, please contact Dr. Belcher via email at jtrevbel@yahoo.com.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Dr. Trevor Belcher, Dr. Jan Tucker, Dr. Patricia Neely

APPENDIX C

WAIVER OF SIGNED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study:

Public Perception of Online Education

Researchers:

Trevor Belcher PhD

276-791-7280

Jan Tucker PhD

813-996-0637

A. Purpose and Background

The purpose of this study is to expand on previous research and the existing body of literature around online education.

B. Eligibility to Participate

The criteria for participation in this study is to be an adult over the age of 18.

C. Procedures

Participants will be asked to respond one time to a survey on online education. In all, participants should be able to complete the survey in approximately 10 minutes.

D. Risks

There is no known risk to participating in this research study.

E. Direct Benefits

There is no direct benefit to participants, but may yield beneficial information relevant to online education.

F. Confidentiality

No identifying information will be obtained from any participants, to maintain complete anonymity. Initial data will be stored on a secure server, then downloaded to a password protected and encrypted removable storage device belonging to the researchers. Data will be deleted from the server once the researcher has downloaded the data. In addition, the removable storage device will be kept in a fire safe lockbox for 7 years, accessible only to the researchers. After 7 years, the data will be destroyed.

In addition, once you have completed the study, please close your internet web browser to protect your privacy.

G. Questions and Contact Information

If you have any questions, or would like to receive the results of the study free of charge, please contact Dr. Belcher via email at jtrevbel@yahoo.com.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY and you may stop at anytime by closing your web browser. There is not a penalty for withdrawing from this study at any time.

Please click:

I understand and wish to participate
I do not wish to participate at this time

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation in this study. I would like to describe in more detail the study you just participated in. The primary goal of this study is to examine public perceptions around online education.

I hope you enjoyed your experience and find great personal satisfaction in knowing you have helped to contribute to this ever growing and much needed body of knowledge. If you have any questions, or would like to receive the results of the study free of charge, please contact me via email at JTrevBel@yahoo.com.

Finally, while there are no known risks to participating in the research study, if you find yourself experiencing any types of distress, please contact your local physician or mental health provider, and if this is an emergency, please go to the nearest emergency room or dial 911 immediately.

Thank you again for your participation.

Dr. Belcher, Dr. Tucker, & Dr. Neely

REMINDER: Once you have completed the study, please close your internet web browser to protect your privacy.

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Editor's Note: This study opens up unresolved problems related workload and related issues such as faculty training and other support services.

Impact of Online Teaching on Nursing Faculty Workload

Joseph T DeRanieri
USA

Introduction

In contemporary educational settings across the nation, faculty face many challenges. These include: increasing enrollment, decreasing availability of faculty, expanding distance education demands for access to geographically isolated students, enhanced convenience of course availability, and the ongoing evolution of influence that technology has on teaching and learning. Further complicating the faculty role, online teaching has frequently, and often suddenly, become a required faculty role without any significant preparation or orientation. Compounding the typical suddenness, this “on-the-job learning” approach frequently leads to increased faculty anxiety and subsequent resistance to utilization and employment of online education.

Initially seen as a medium to supplement the classroom environment, online education has evolved into the primary teaching method for many courses, with increasing numbers of students opting for this method of education. Also, many academic settings are moving toward one or more degree offerings taught totally via the virtual classroom.

Online education provides a flexible and convenient platform for the independent learner who has ongoing life commitments, geographical barriers, and seeks alternative opportunities for interaction. In addition, it can simultaneously create flexibility for faculty, as they too, are not restricted as to when they must be in a classroom. However, while on the surface these appear to be positive outcomes for faculty and students, there are many factors that have made this transition difficult and anxiety provoking for faculty.

To effectively address this transition for faculty and accurately assess their needs for online educational development, it is critically important to determine how faculty perceives their ability to teach online. In direct response to this foundational contemporary educational trend, this study examines the relationship between faculty comfort level with online teaching methods and their perceived impact on workload.

Central issue and context

There are many complicating factors: nursing faculty face an increase in the number of students in the classroom with class sizes reaching the hundreds; there is a shortage of nursing faculty; the average nursing faculty member is close to 60 years of age. The increasing number of open positions for nurses, particularly in mental health and pediatrics, make it difficult to retain faculty in teaching positions due to disparity between salaries in the academic setting versus the clinical setting. There is a growing need for advanced practice nurses to meet the health care needs of the nation's growing population (Leighty, 2006; Palmer, 2000).

In addition there is pressure for practicing nurses to hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree in nursing. This is supported by the fact that 18 states are considering legislation to mandate that nurses with associate degrees, must complete a bachelors program within 10 years of completing their associate degree (Kolowich, 2010). Talk of this change has helped admissions in RN to BSN programs grow, with 30 new programs being added between 2007 and 2009 (Kolowich, 2010). Colleges have learned that online programs can help retention of RN to BSN students; attrition rates as high as 30% have decreased to an average of 1% (Gilmore and Lyons, 2012).

Legal mandates, increase in enrollment, decrease in attrition, and faculty retirement all support the need for development of workload policy to help retain experienced faculty in the workforce as the online demands increase.

The primary goal of this study is to identify factors for faculty regarding comfort level with online teaching methods and their perception of the subsequent impact on workload. Data findings will guide recommendations related to faculty development needs and faculty workload concerns. This is of importance in light of the significant paucity of information in the existing literature regarding this rapidly growing contemporary trend and issue in the academic setting.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the framework of Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) which addresses the issues of planning and policy development for distance education programs. The framework includes seven policy-development areas: academic, fiscal, geographic, governance, labor-management, legal, and student-support services (Gellman-Danley & Fetzner, 1998). The components of the framework to be considered in this study include academic, labor-management and student-support as they relate to workload.

Relevant literature

Current literature has not produced any universal recommendations on development of a workload policy for faculty, but some studies have emerged that look at how the workload paradigm is changing. What has also been recognized is that each university appears to be handling this issue differently.

Kaufman (2007) describes a study conducted by Benner (2004), which surveyed all nursing faculty whose schools were part of the National League for Nursing (NLN), roughly 32,000 faculty members were contacted and there were nearly 8,500 responses: The study obtained diversity information, age distribution, anticipated faculty retirements, highest degree earned, and perception of workload before employment in academia and after, and perception of workload in a clinical setting.

Of significance to this review is the information regarding workload perceptions. This survey revealed that nursing faculty felt their workload increased by 20% upon entering academia, from their previous clinical positions, and it was actually 15% more than the individual faculty members anticipated prior to entering academia (Kaufman, 2007).

In analyzing the impact of the nursing faculty shortage on nursing education, the mix of faculty and the number of faculty members was considered through a Workload Taskforce study conducted through the NLN (Durham, Merritt, & Sorrell, 2007). The purpose of the taskforce was to develop a workload formula that would recognize the various components of the nursing faculty role to ensure equity in workload assignments (Durham et al., 2007).

The workload policy recommendation that came from this taskforce was that a workload formula needed to be specific to nurse educators, and it needed to encompass the many facets of the nursing faculty role (Durham et al., 2007). It is helpful for administrators to have an established basis for equitable faculty workload, however this new workload formula did not include any specifics about online courses and the impact that they have on faculty workload.

Ehrlich (2003) concluded that faculty workload policy has not kept up with the innovation and change that has resulted in delivering courses to students. Workload policy did not take into consideration, development and technological changes, which needed to take place as courses are brought to online platforms. It was concluded that the present credit load system, actually impeded innovation, because it inaccurately reflected actual course workload (Ehrlich, 2003).

This is important because it again supports the need to develop a dynamic workload policy that is reflective of the technological changes which are occurring.

Morris, Xu & Finnegan (2005) specifically addressed the faculty role in asynchronous undergraduate teaching. Their study examines the perceptions of faculty teaching online and in addition, they looked at the archival analysis of their courses.

The perceived roles of online instructors as describe by Morris et al (2005) are as follows: course customization, course facilitation, and grading and assessment. Course customization encompasses the managerial/pedagogical role. The managerial components described included calendars, syllabus, setting up discussions but keeping them closed until the instructor was ready to open them, set up testing, and course postings. From a pedagogical standpoint they also had to consider content to include or drop based on the online course design and learning activities for the course (Morris et al., 2005).

From a course facilitation standpoint, the concepts of course monitoring, pedagogical, social, and managerial roles were explored. Instructors need to create opportunities for learning. Differences existed between novice instructors and experienced online educators. Novice instructors saw their role as answering student's questions, structured interactions for students, evaluating their work, and provided them feedback. Unlike the experienced educator, they made students more responsible for independent problem solving and learning (Morris et al., 2005).

An additional third component is faculty as evaluator or grader; this is seen as a pedagogical role. Online courses were found to be intensive with readings, discussion, writing assignments and proctored exams. Interviews were conducted for those instructors who taught online. It was identified that instructors attached more importance to the managerial and pedagogical tasks prior to course delivery, and most of the time instructors tended to prioritize managerial over pedagogical roles during course delivery (Morris et al., 2005).

Faculty also expressed concerns about faculty workload related to online course offerings. Lorenzetti (2004) found that faculty members concerns about workload could be a deterrent to taking the step into online teaching. Perceptions abound that online teaching takes significantly more time than the traditional classroom, but there has been little research to substantiate this premise. Lorenzetti's study had faculty categorize the amount of time spent on various tasks relating to both traditional classroom courses as well as their online course. Workload reported was actually less in the online courses than those of the traditional classroom courses (Lorenzetti, 2004). What was discovered though is that the allocation of time was different. For online teaching there seemed to be larger chunks of time needed at a given time for research and writing and was not spread out through the semester as with classroom courses.

Dibiase & Rademacher, (2005) looked specifically at the workload associated with online coursework, over a six month period, with an average class size of 49 students. The results of the study demonstrated that there was a direct effect on workload as class size grew. When class size increase by a factor of 2.7, workload increased by a factor of 2.5.

The authors also found that concerns for faculty workload were one of the top five reasons why faculty were resistant to teaching in the online environment. Dibiase & Rademacher (2005) also made a case for monitoring changes in faculty workload as a result of faculty teaching online. Faculty could expect two to three times the amount of work in an online course versus a traditional classroom course.

Jones and Kelley (2003) highlighted that online courses take more faculty time than teaching the same course in the classroom, which translates to a faculty workload issue. It was not only the teaching that affected workload, but so did the number of student emails from online students compared to their counterparts in the classroom, and instructors needing to provide student

services beyond office hours for their online students. The recommendation that faculty receive release time and additional support services if they are teaching online did come forth as a result of the study (Jones & Kelley, 2003).

An article entitled, "Can Faculty Members Do It All at a Distance?" (2005) identified issues concerning faculty workload and online education from a different perspective; they approached it from the perspective of service and raised the issue of whether faculty needed to be on campus to provide service to their online students. This was not a study but a statement of the importance of looking at things from that issue as well.

The issue of differences in workload policy based on discipline is also a consideration that needs to be explored. The article "Managing Faculty Workload to Reflect Differences Among Disciplines" (2005) recommends that a workload framework needs to exist, which includes workload norms for each discipline.

Education administrators are constantly faced with issues concerning the increasing demands on faculty and how online coursework has changed faculty workload. Given the complexities of this issue, this research will directly examine these issues by assessment of faculty comfort levels with teaching online courses and perceived impact on faculty workload.

Research questions

1. How comfortable is faculty with online teaching?
2. And how does faculty's comfort level with online teaching affect faculty workload?

Methodology

Study design

While online education in nursing is not new, examining the relationship between faculty comfort level with online teaching and its effects on workload is. Utilizing a descriptive exploratory study, a seven point Likert scale on the DeRanieri Assessment Tool (DAT) was used to assess faculty comfort level with teaching online and perceived impact on faculty workload. Specifically, respondents were asked to complete the DAT exploring their thoughts and feelings about these same concepts after they began teaching online. Data analysis explored educational developmental needs of faculty for online teaching to guide recommendations for policy changes.

This study employed a convenience sampling methodology and sample size was established at 100 faculty member study participants which represented a 65% response rate for the survey that was randomly sent to faculty who teach online courses in nursing programs across the United States. Identifying demographic data was redacted from the survey to maintain anonymity.

Procedure

The survey assessment tool (Appendix A) was distributed via an online survey management program. Links to the survey were sent to nurse educators who were members of the National League for Nursing (NLN), asking recipients to complete the attached survey in a given period of time.. Data from the survey was analyzed to develop demographic data and generalizations; each survey item was analyzed for frequency distributions.

Survey tool

The DeRanieri Assessment Tool (DAT) is a survey tool with 17 questions formatted in a Likert-type presentation. The responses range from a 1 to 7 number system, with 1 indicating not comfortable and 7 indicating very comfortable. The tool was used to explore faculty level of comfort related to teaching, workload, resources, and testing principles which currently are facing faculty in traditional and online teaching environments.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were applied to describe the faculty member's demographic characteristics. A mean, mode, percentage distribution and standard deviation, were calculated for each item on the DAT. All statistical procedures were conducted using SPSS.

Validity

A systematic research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication were all employed as the basic strategy for ensuring rigor. The data were collected using the same tool, under the same conditions. To additionally strengthen validity, the researcher is involved in the subject matter being studied; therefore, attempts were made to not have the researcher share his thoughts or opinions with the faculty being surveyed.

Reliability

Pretesting of the tool was conducted in two phases. The tool was first administered on a small population of nurse educators from the researcher's University. The tool was refined and then administered on a sample of 15 nurse educators, which included both the Likert Scale questions as well an opportunity to include qualitative data. Analysis of these data were completed, and the tool was further refined prior to it being administered to the current sample. Faculty reported that the initial tool was attempting to address some issues and concerns which were not directly associated with workload. The version of the tool used for this study was reported by faculty to be more reflective of workload and workload policies issues, which is the purpose of this study.

Results

The demographic data collected included age range, range of years' experience teaching full time, level of education, and gender. As seen in Figure 1, the mean age range for faculty was 51-60 years of age, with mean teaching experience between 11-15 years, level of education was 39% at Doctoral Level and 61% at the Masters level, and gender distribution was 12% male and 88% female. Figure 1 also identifies the frequency of responses for each question and their respective standard deviations.

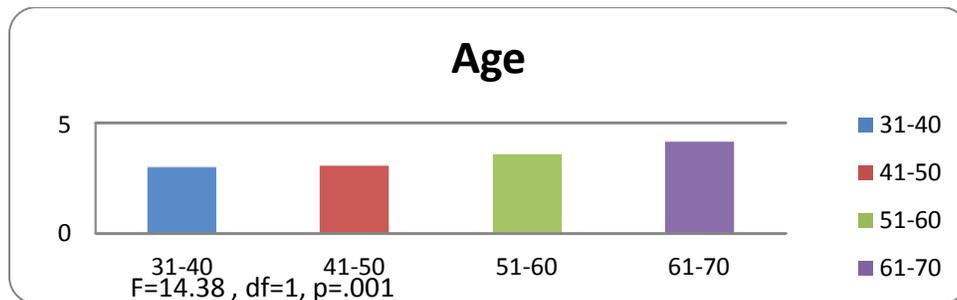


Figure 1. Age

A one-way ANOVA was used to differentiate the subscale scores for age and faculty experience. Based on age the ANOVA indicated significant differences in the mean comfort level of faculty with online teaching. Scheffe analysis indicated that faculty grew more comfortable with teaching online the older they were. This is perhaps related the fact that older faculty also had more years of teaching experience.

The one-way ANOVA for number of years teaching indicated that again there were significant differences between faculty members based on their number of years as a nurse educator (Figure 2). Scheffe analysis indicated that faculty grew more comfortable with online teaching, as their years of experience increased, with the largest increase between 15-20 years and 20-25 years, with a slight decrease in the 25 – 30 year experience group. This supports the fact that

older experienced faculty appear to be more comfortable with teaching online, than less experienced faculty. Perhaps a way to address this issue is to develop workload policy which pairs experienced faculty with less experienced faculty when there is a need to teach an online course.

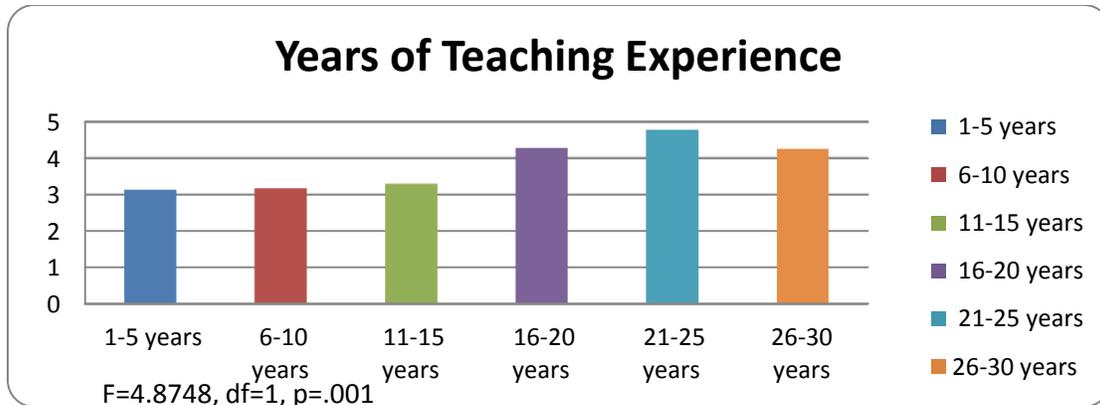


Figure 2. Years of teaching experience

In order to understand each of the components outlined in this study, individual analysis of selected questions were performed. Results with some possible explanations are as follows:

Is nursing faculty comfortable teaching online?

Nearly half of the surveyed faculty reported that they were not comfortable teaching online; while only 12% stated they were very comfortable teaching online. This is of particular concern since all faculty members who completed the survey are presently teaching courses online.

Is faculty comfortable with large number of students in the online environment?

Only five percent of the faculty surveyed reported that they are comfortable teaching large number of students online. The most common response was minimally uncomfortable. Nurse educators are faced with a rising number of students, some online classes have enrollments of over 120 students, yet they are teaching those classes alone.

Is the training faculty received increasing their comfort level with online teaching?

Seventy-two percent of the faculty surveyed reported that they were not comfortable with the amount of training they received to teach online. In fact only three percent stated they were comfortable with the training they received. This supports the need for management to look at faculty development and training since faculty appear to be learning “on the job”. This supports the need for management to look at faculty development and training.

Is faculty comfortable addressing different learning styles in the online environment?

Twenty-three percent of faculty reported that they were comfortable addressing different learning styles in an online course. The most common response was uncomfortable; with twenty-nine percent reporting they were uncomfortable in attempting to address different learning styles in the online environment. This again is a faculty development need which is not being addressed.

Is faculty comfortable with their online teaching workload?

Eighty-two percent of faculty reported that they were not comfortable with their present online workload. One percent of faculty reported that they were comfortable, with 17% reporting that they were not uncomfortable or comfortable. Again, as the number of students grows and the number of faculty members shrinks this is going to be an increasing problem for management to face (Kaufmann, 2007).

Is faculty comfortable with their overall workload?

Sixty-nine percent of the faculty surveyed reported that they were not comfortable with their overall faculty workload. Eleven percent of faculty reported that they were comfortable with their overall workload. Faculty workload issues are growing with increased enrollments; this is a national trend and heightened by the faculty shortage (Kaufmann, 2007).

Is faculty comfortable with the resources required to teach online?

Forty percent of faculty reported that they were minimally uncomfortable with the resources that they had to use to teach online. This was the most common response, with only 22% of faculty reporting that they were comfortable with online resources. This needs to be reviewed by management because the resources which faculty are using are not meeting faculty's needs, and thus can lead to inefficient use of faculty time.

Is faculty comfortable with the administrative support for resources needed to teach their courses online?

In relation to administrative support, 90 percent of faculty reported they were not comfortable with the administrative support they had to teach online. Managers need to look at the difference in online teaching and what support faculty needs to teach in this new environment. Traditional administrative support may be fine for classroom courses, but obviously this group of faculty has other needs when teaching online. Again this leads to an inefficient use of faculty time.

Limitations

This was a small study, which produced a small sample (n= 100). Other limitations included the use of a pilot instrument which may not have ensured specificity of assessment for some items. Additionally, if participants completed the survey at the workplace, distractions or stress from job responsibilities may have distracted from selecting the best response to each item.

The study did produce some interesting data regarding faculty feeling uncomfortable with their overall workload and their online teaching workload. This study discovered that faculty does not feel adequately trained to teach online, but it did not ask what specifically was missing.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the statistical analyses of this study, some recommendations for standardization of faculty development policy and workload policy will be considered. Future research should include replication or extension of the current study, including inclusion of other academic disciplines which would provide a broader evaluation for standardized workload policy which is discipline specific.

This study did demonstrate that nursing faculty is not comfortable teaching online despite the fact that teaching online is typically a required part of their workload; faculty did identify that they feel they did not have adequate training to teach online. This is a significant finding that needs to be further explored; perhaps addressing the faculty development need will change this outcome.

Faculty also stated they are not comfortable addressing different learning styles online, dealing with large groups of students online, and they do not feel they have the support they need to teach online. All of these issues affect faculty workload perceptions. Faculty stated that they are uncomfortable with their workload, so further exploration related topics is important.

Several faculty development needs were identified in this study. While the sample was small, statistically the development needs stood out. Faculty development needs are potentially another area for study using this tool. Universities could begin using this tool to assess their own faculty's needs and data could then be compiled from a large sample to draw conclusions for the industry.

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About the Author

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Editor's Note: This study shows that we can improve instruction by listening to questions and suggestions from failing students. By responding to student needs, the failure and dropout rates can be significantly reduced. This results in better use of academic dollars and a larger number of graduates.

“Improving exam performance among low achievers of third year B.A.(Humanities) programme offered by Institute of Distance Education, University of Swaziland”

C.W.S. Sukati and S Rastogi
Swaziland

Abstract

Exam performance has been an important criterion to judge the Quality of students coming out of the Institutions .It was felt as essential to suggest some remedies after a diagnosis of individual difficulties among low achievers of Third year students for B.A. (Humanities) offered through distance mode by the University of Swaziland, in order to control dropout rate among them. This project was undertaken with a view to a) Diagnose the specific course content found difficult by the target group students in different low performance courses; b) Wash out these difficulties in various courses with the help of a tutor support; c) Help the low achieving learners for enhancing their exam performance and thus passing out in low achieving courses; d) Make concerned tutors aware of learner difficulties enabling them to meet the same among future batches of distance learners, e) Suggest a remedial strategy for enhancing learner performance in various courses under consideration for BA (Humanities) Programme ;f) Recommend to the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) some essential and needy steps for controlling dropout cases by enhancing performance level during examination among IDE students for B.A. (Humanities) programme; and g) Initiate similar projects for other IDE programmes, if the present project is successful.

Out of sixty four (64) low achievers (E or F grade) only thirty two (32 being 50%) had replied regarding difficult content, expectations from their concerned tutors and some other comments in four subjects as cited herewith. The Analysis revealed that in History, the students had some academic difficulties in H202,H213&H305, with some expectations in H202& H305 and some additional comments in H202,H213&H305. Similarly, in Theology & Religious Studies, they had academic difficulties, expectations from the tutor and some other comments in only the T3P2 (TRS 303) course. The scenario in African Language & Literature revealed that they had academic difficulties in AL210,AL300, AL301,AL304, and some expectations from tutors in AL300, AL301, AL304, as well as some other comments about AL210, AL300, AL301, AL304. But, in English, the situation was worse as they expressed academic difficulties in all courses except in Eng 205. The expectations from the tutors and some special comments had been in all courses except in Eng 206.

Concerned tutors have been advised to make it easy to grasp the difficult content and prepare their deliberations among future batches of students in such a way that new students find the same content as easy and not difficult. An urgent orientation of all tutors / teachers about their role and responsibilities must be organised by the Institute of Distance education (IDE). Every Programme Coordinator must organise a one day meeting with all new students and their tutors enabling them to understand their role in Distance Education system and, various activities to be done in addition to course content. Necessary Audio / Video support should be developed to explain the difficult course content. This Audio / Video support may be made available to students on line by the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) as well as off line through the UNISWA Library. The IDE students may be motivated to form a ‘Learner Association’ in their locality by grouping students that participate in the same programme. They may meet in person and talk or chat on line among themselves and discuss their difficulties among themselves. Use of email and Internet for

effective communication is a cheaper media for them. A strong habit must be developed for IDE students and their tutors to use the Internet. It would help them to be in contact, always with each other and from one to another for an academic interaction. In this setting, a question raised by one student and its answer by another will reach everyone and benefit all students. It is good that UNISWA has allotted email IDs to all students. They must develop a habit of using this for interaction and communication among themselves. It may be helpful for the academic counsellors/tutors to become familiar with the course content where the students had some difficulties during study and provide a remedy for the same.

Keywords: Exam performance, low achievers, learner association, tutor/academic counsellor, learner communication, distance learners, human support, tutor orientation, isolated learner

Introduction

Every student has a desire to meet expectations of the University examinations. They compare their performance (perception) with their expectations. When the gap between the two is high, it generates a frustration in their mind and some may even drop out of the system. Also, production of large numbers of students gives society an opportunity to select the “cream” from among them. Thus, low achievement in examination becomes a curse for students regarding their future career. Tens of Thousands of students in England leave school every year aged 16 with no or very limited qualifications (Robert Cassen 2007). The distance education system faces same problem of low achievement for many students. It is observed that those who are rejected for admissions by the traditional system are admitted to Distance Education. And some of these achieve high marks/grades after studying in the Distance Education system. There are some barriers that cause low achievement among students. Diagnosis of these barriers/variables may help the teacher to frame some suitable remedy for controlling these variables to get a better performance by students during examinations. Of the many challenges facing teachers at the School/College/University level today, probably no issue is more frustrating and complex than low student achievement. All students should learn and achieve at their highest possible level and every dedicated teacher, counsellor and administrator must strive for the same. Yet some students just don't reach their potential. It is essential for every teacher to understand barriers to academic achievement that affect some students. Essential efforts must be made to remove those barriers.

Determining point for low achievement in present study

Backwardness or low achievement in subject of studies has no absolute magnitude. It is a relative term that indicates deviation from the normal in the negative direction, i.e. below average. There is no clear cut line of demarcation showing exactly the point of determination of backwardness and vice versa. Backwardness/low achievement is thus a matter of degree and extent of deviation from the norm. Whether a person is backward depends upon his position on the continuum of normal probability curve. A student getting less than 50% marks will be labeled as a low achiever for the sake of present study. As per the University grading system, a student getting 40% to 49% marks gets E grade and below 40% gets F grade. A student achieving these E and F Grades in any course of each subject will be considered as low achiever for that course. Students can repeat their examination to improve their grades in that course (having got E or F grade). However after a third chance, if they fail to improve, they are forced out of the University system. Having no other alternative, they drop out and discontinue their studies.

Statement of the problem

It was observed from Institute of Distance Education records that 57 students of B.A. (Hum) programme had failed and thus discontinued their respective programmes. The same situation may come in future with existing IDE students for various programmes. It was felt as essential to

avoid such ugly situation in future for every programme. The academic careers of present low achievers might also be ruined if no steps are taken to enhance exam performance. Low achievement is a product of so many external and internal variables that impact the student. Most of them are psychological in nature, like low intelligence, lack of motivation, poor study habits, shortage of study time, fear of a low performance in next examination etc.

Such students are in urgent need of remedial help by their tutors through study. But, learner performance in different courses and every subject indicated they are not low achievers in every course of study. They have low performance in some courses due to academic difficulties/ confusions/ questions/ in understanding some course content at different stages of learning. The tutor can help a student pinpoint problem areas, solve learning problems, and get a better result in examinations. As an experiment, the B.A. (Humanities) third year was considered for this research project. An analysis revealed that 102 students had low performance in BA Humanities III-2011 (Final Results), but it came down to only for 64 students after Supplementary Results. These 64 students became the target group for this Research Project.

Objectives of this study:

Following objectives had been framed by the Project Coordinator, after a careful consideration of whole situation of low achievers, and, a discussion with academic staff members during an internal Seminar at the Institute of Distance Education, University of Swaziland.

To diagnose the specific course content found difficult by the target group, students in different low performing courses set out to:

- Wash out difficulties in various courses with the help of a tutor support.
- Help low achieving learners to enhance their exam performance and achieve a D or better Grade.
- Make concerned tutors aware of learner difficulties enabling them to assist future batches of distance learners.
- Suggest remedial strategies to enhance learner performance in courses under consideration for the BA (Humanities) Programme.
- Recommend, to the University of Swaziland (UNISWA), essential steps for reducing dropouts by enhancing examination performance among IDE students for B.A.(Humanities) programme.
- Initiate similar projects for other IDE programmes if present project gets a success.

Methodology adopted

This was a survey type study covering diagnosis of learner difficulties and Tutor supported remedies for a group students targeted by concerned tutors/counsellors. The Final result and the Supplementary result of low achievers was analysed and it was found that, after a supplementary examination, only 64 students were still trailing behind the passing marks of 50% in some courses. The course wise number of such students was as shown in Table 1, 2, 3, and 4. These students were the sample population for this study. The target group students were given a letter supported with blank pages for each low achieving course (below 50% marks) for their free responses related to following important points.

1. Course wise Learner difficulties.
2. Expectations from the Tutor.
3. Other Comments (if any).

Only Thirty two (32) students out of Sixty Four (64) replied this Questionnaire even though there were frequent reminders for students to submit a duly filled in Questionnaire using a personal

reminder letter, Email, and communication through their Class representatives. After a gap of three months, thirty two (32) students had returned their duly filled in Questionnaire to the Project Coordinator. These responses were summarized, compiled, and submitted to concerned Tutors/ Academic Counsellors who were asked to prepare solutions and remedies for the various difficulties, problems, queries, confusions and questions, mentioned by the target group learners in their responses. Suggestions included question-and-answer, learner-learner interaction, respond to questions by Email or providing notes as options to be adopted by the tutors/counsellors as part of their proposed remedial strategy. The concerned students had been asked to contact the Project Coordinator, as needed, for every academic problem. The Project Coordinator assured them that concerned tutors would also solve problems reported by students in the future. The Project coordinator communicated with concerned Tutors and Academic Counsellors about learner difficulties as communicated by students. The names of students were kept as confidential along with their Questionnaires in order to keep a cordial relationship between both.

Student number for this survey by course

The result analysis for Final examination 2011 and also for a Supplementary examination 2011 helped the Project coordinator to diagnose low achievers, those who had failed to get D or more in both examinations for some courses. The number of such students is stated in following tables.

Table – 1
Achievers in History

Course Name	Course Code	Student Number	Identified	Responded	Percentage
Historiography/Research Methods in History	H 300	04	02		50%
Economic History of West Africa to 1900/Economic History of West Africa since 1900	H302	02	01		50%
Introduction to the History of Colonial Latin America	H305	18	09		50%
Imperialism and Colonialism in Africa in 1920	H 202	01	01		100%
Europe from 1789 to 1870	H213	03	02		67%
Europe Since 1870	H214	02	01		50%

TABLE – 2
Low achievers in African language & literature

Course Name	Course Code	Student Number	Identified	Responded	Percentage
Introduction to Linguistics	AL 210		02	01	50%
Linguistic Analysis of the Main Language	AL300		10	06	60%
History of Linguistics (Western)	AL301		17	09	53%
History of Linguistics (Bantu)					
Modern Literature – II	AL 302		03	02	67%
Oral/ Traditional Literature – II	AL 303		02	01	50%
Introduction to Grammar	AL304		04	04	100%
Contemporary African	AL213		01	00	00%

Table 3
Low achievers in English

Course Name	Course Code	Student Number	Identified	Responded	Percentage
Survey of English Literature The Romantics to the Moderns	ENG 205		03	01	33%
A Study of Poetry	ENG 206		04	01	25%
Introduction to Critical Theory	ENG 204		01	01	100%
Grammar III : Clause Combining & Text Creation	ENG 301		22	08	36%
Conversational Analysis	ENG 303		09	01	11%
Modern Critical Theory	ENG 304		20	07	35%
A Study of Drama	ENG 305		29	13	45%
A Study of Novel	ENG 306		32	13	41%
Research Method	ENG 307		14	06	43%

Table – 4
Low achievers in theology & religious studies

Course Name	Course Code	Student Number	Identified	Responded	Percentage
A study of the old Testament & TRS201	T2P1 TRS 200		01	01	100%
Studies in the New Testament I	T3P1 TRS301T RS302		02	01	50%
African Traditional Religion e	T3P2 TRS303		02	01	50%
Early and Medieval Church/The Reformation	T3P6 TRS 313 &314		01	00	00%

Following table indicates the courses in which students had expressed their content difficulties, expectations from tutors and some other comments in various courses of all four subjects.

Table – 5
Subject wise course codes where students had given opinion

Subjects	Difficult Content	Expectations from Tutors	Other Comments
History (H)	H 202,	H 202,	H 202,
	H213,	----	H213,
	H305,	H305,	H305,
Theology & Religious Studies (TRS)	T3P2 / TRS 303	/ TRS 303	3P2 / TRS 303
African Languages & Literature (AL)	AL 210	---	AL 210
	AL 300/AL310	AL 300/AL310	AL 300/AL310
	AL 301/AL311 & 312	AL 301/AL311 & 312	AL 301/AL311 & 312
	AL 304	AL 304	AL 304
	---	---	AL302/AL313 &314

English(Eng)	Eng 204,	Eng 204,	Eng 204,
	Eng 206,	Eng 205,	Eng 205,
	Eng 301,	Eng 301,	Eng 301,
	Eng 303,	Eng 206,	Eng 307,
	Eng 304,	Eng 303,	Eng 303,
	Eng 305,	Eng 304,	Eng 304,
	Eng 306,	Eng 306,	Eng 305,
	Eng 307,	Eng 305,	Eng 306,
	Eng 307	---	

The following table indicates the courses in which students had not expressed their content difficulties, expectations from tutors and some other comments in various courses of all four subjects

Table – 6
Subject wise course codes where students had not given opinion

Subjects	Difficult Content	Expectations from Tutors	Other Comments
1. History (H)	H214,	H213,	H214,
	H300,	H300,	H300,
	H302,	H214,	H302
2. Theology & Religious Studies (TRS)	T2P1/ TRS 200 & 201	T2P1/ TRS 200 & 201	2P1/ TRS 200 & 201
	T3P1/TRS301&302	T3P1/TRS301&302	T3P1/TRS301&302
	T3P6/ TRS 313 &314	T3P6/ TRS 313 &314	T3P6/ TRS 313 &314
3. African Languages & Literature (AL)	AL302/AL313 &314	AL 210	AL303/AL315
	AL 213	AL302/AL313 &314	AL213
	AL303/AL315	AL303/AL315	AL 213
4. English (Eng)	Eng 205	----	Eng 206

Summary of findings

After a careful analysis, the results were summarised course wise for three main points being the backbone of this research project. These are – Academic Difficulties, Expectations from the Tutors, and, Other Comments.

Academic difficulties in history

The students had expressed following difficulties only in some courses as below.

1) Introduction to the History of Colonial Latin America (H305)

The Colonial Economy (Unit 05) Page 46-52

Approaches to Economic Development in the Nationalist period (Unit 08) Page 81-83.

Revolutionary Change in Latin America (Unit 10) Page 101 – 108.

Land & Labour Mobilization in Latin America Page 33.

The new State of Latin America – Laudillismo & its Impact.

Caudillo Rule Page 73.

Permian Guano Cycle (Not in the Module).

2) Imperialism and Colonialism in Africa in 1920- H202 (H215)

Primary Reaction to Colonial Rule – The case of Africa (North of the Equator).

African Primary Reaction to Colonisation (South of the Equator).

Colonial Administrative Policies during inter- war period.

The Second World War and Politics of Decolonization in British Colonial Africa.

Belgian and Portuguese Decolonisation in Africa.

3) Europe from 1789 to 1870 (H213)

French Revolution (Unit 03)

Expectations from tutors in history

The students had desired following expectations from concerned Tutors only in some courses.

1) Imperialism and Colonialism in Africa in 1920 (H202)

More clarification was desired from the Tutor.

2) Introduction to the History of Colonial Latin America(H305)

The students need more explanation from tutor for every Lesson/Unit. They need Tutor comments on their assignments. It will generate a two way communication between the student and the tutor.

They want to see back the corrected assignments and their exam papers. It will help them to understand their mistakes and they will try to avoid the same in future.

They want a revision exercise before examination.

The tutor must concentrate on the Module content and not on the content taken from Internet.

The teacher should supply a simplified version of the Internet material as the downloaded material is very difficult to understand.

More explanations of the Case Studies are needed.

The tutor should avoid shallow (not clear) illustrations, and, should explain by giving examples, explanations etc.

Notes should not be dictated in class.

There should be explanations and discussions etc.

Some other comments in history

The students had expressed some other comments only in following courses.

1) Imperialism and Colonialism in Africa in 1920 (H202)

The students need Scope of the examination to be given by the Tutor.

2) Introduction to the History of Colonial Latin America(H305)

The module is outdated and it does not have the required information. It should be revised.

The students want a gap between two exam dates for their preparations. Everyday examination from Monday to Friday should be avoided. Different assignments should be given on different dates with different submission dates. It will give enough time with less mental tension for a submission back to the teacher.

Some teachers prefer Full time (regular) students than Distance learners.

3) Europe from 1789 to 1870 (H213)

The Modules should be made easier to understand by inserting some examples and explanations too. The teacher should explain the content in detail.

Academic difficulties in theology & religious studies

The students had expressed following difficulty in African Traditional Religion (T3P2/TRS303) course only.

African Traditional Religions Page 03

Expectations from tutors in theology & religious studies

The students had desired following expectations from concerned Tutor, only in African Traditional Religion (T3P2/TRS303) course.

More content clarity /clarifications is needed during counselling sessions.

Some hand-outs related to Unit should be given by the teacher.

Other comments in theology & religious studies

The students had some other comment, only in African Traditional Religion (T3P2/TRS303) course.

Hand-outs for the course units already covered in class should also be given to students.

Academic difficulties in African language & literature

The students had expressed some difficulties in following courses only.

1) Introduction to Linguistics (AL 210)

Tone (Unit 03 Phonology & Phonological Rules).

Linguistic Analysis of the Main Language (AL300)

Articles and their use (Unit 03)

3) Introduction to Grammar (AL 304)

There were some difficulties in understanding the Language of following topics.

Copulatives page 116-117

The Imperative mood page 109

Locatives(Formation) page 32

The reciprocal page 96

Adverbs page 114

4) History of Linguistics (Western)/History of Linguistics (Bantu) (AL301)

Language in the Nineteenth Century (Unit 05) page 88.

Language in the Nineteenth Century (Unit 06) page 109.

Contributions by August Schleicher (1821 -1868) page 117.

Schleicher's Typological Classification of Languages page 124

Language in the Twentieth Century (Unit 07) page 130.

Language in the Twentieth Century (Unit 08) page 155.

A short history of Linguistics by Robins R.H.(6.1.2) page 112.

Synchronic & Diachronic Universal Grammar (7.4) page 137.

Language in Ancient Times -2 (Unit 03) page 49.

Western Linguistics (Unit 2) page 30-31

The Alexandrian Period- Pre Socratic Philosophers 5th Century Rhetoricians, Protagoras/Pythagoras, Socrates.

Expectations from tutors in African language & literature

The students had some expectations in following courses only.

- 1) Linguistic Analysis of the Main Language (AL300/AL310)
The Tutor/Counsellor is very fast in delivering the content.
The students are unable to cope with this high speed.
They are also unable to take notes in the class during tutor deliberation.
- 2) History of Linguistics (Western)/History of Linguistics (Bantu) (AL301)
The teaching of History of Western linguistics is not clear in the class. British pronunciation is not clear to students. Another tutor for history of the Bantu linguistics is too fast and very brief in the class.
More examples should be given for content clarity in the class.
The students should be encouraged for a class participation for finding a best fit solution of a problem.
The tutor for History of Linguistics (Western) needs to concentrate on examination related course content.
The student need a separate Question paper covering less content than that prescribed for regular students.
- 3) Introduction to Grammar
The students should be given more Homework as this is a second language.
The tutor is giving enough time to students to discuss various issues in class.

Other comments in African language & literature

There were some other comments, only in following courses.

- 1) Introduction to Linguistics (AL 210)
The students do not wish to be combined with the Education students. These Education students seem to be already familiar with some of the content and they are in majority.
The teacher thinks that every student knows this content like these 'Education' students.
The IDE students for this course have desired for a separate class for them.
- 2) Linguistic Analysis of the Main Language (AL300)
One student needed more time to finish his writing work during examination hours.
There should be enough gap between two examinations. It will help in getting enough time for preparations.
One student had failed to submit the assignment in time resulting in getting no grade for assignment in this course.
- 3) History of Linguistics (Western)/History of Linguistics (Bantu) (AL301)
This is a wrong imagination in the mind of one student that some other students were asked to write a special paper while he was not invited for the same. This act made others to pass the examination while he could not.
The issue of Morning classes on Friday is painful as some students are in job and cannot attend the classes on Friday.
The students do not want to be mixed with Education students as these Education students have already read this content and the teacher thinks that everyone knows most of the content. As a result the B.A.(Humanities) students suffer and fail to get the benefit of contact sessions. The Education students are very old and have different behaviour patterns than the BA(Humanities) students. There should be a separate class for B.A.(Hum) students.

The students need more time to IDE students as they are unable to cover all the topics in the prescribed time limit. Also, they need more options in Question paper during Examination. It will help them to select a Question of their own choice.

4) Modern Literature – II (AL 302)

One student agreed to have committed some mistakes and so has failed though he/she had a good performance in continuous assessment.

5) Introduction to Grammar (AL304)

The language is new and it needs much time to understand.

Examination answer scripts must be shown to the low achievers so that they may identify their mistakes done during examination and may try to not repeat such mistakes in future.

Academic difficulties in English

The students had expressed some difficulties in following courses only.

1) A Study of Poetry (ENG 206)

Strategies for analysing Poetry page 21

Imagery page 73

2) Introduction to Critical Theory (ENG 204)

Anglo –American new Criticism Unit 07 page 65

Modern Psychoanalytic Criticism Unit 08 page 77

Marxist Literary Criticism Unit 09 page 89

Approaches to the study of African Literature Unit 10 page 100

3) Grammar III: Clause Combining & Text Creation (ENG 301)

Elaboration Unit 04 Page 141

Extension Unit 05 Page 166

Enhancement Unit 06 Page 184

Paractic Ideas(Projection) Unit 07 Page 207

Elements of Clause Structure (Clause) Unit 01 Page 10

Clause Combining & Text Creation Unit 02 Page 51

Clause Patterns Unit 01 Page 23

Apposition (Clause Combining) Unit 02 Page 94

4) Conversational Analysis (ENG 303)

Problems in Transcription.

5) Modern Critical Theory (ENG 304)

Colonialism / Post Colonialism. Unit 01 Page 11

Modernism / Post Modernism. Unit 02 Page 56

Existentialism Unit 04 Page 158

Deconstruction Unit 05 Page 189

Feminist/Literary Criticism Unit 03 Page 97

6) Study of Drama (ENG 305)

a) Module 305 A

Other Theatres Unit 05 Page 46.

Arena theatre Unit 04 Page 36

From Classical Drama to African Theatre	Unit 06	Page 58
Othello Drama (Literature & Drama)	Unit 01	Page 03
Drama and Theatre	Unit 02	Page 12
Content and Form of ‘The Gods are not to Blame’	Unit 06	Page 62
b) <u>Module305 B</u>		
Elizabethan Theatre	Unit 03	Page 31
Proscenium Theatre	Unit 04	Page 48
Reaction to Proscenium Theatre	Unit 05	Page 64
7) A Study of Novel (ENG 306)		
a) <u>Module 306 A</u>		
Realism	Unit 01(1.9)	Page 11
b) <u>Module 306 B</u>		
The Great Gatsby	Unit 02	Page 23
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Novel		
Great Expectations	A Novel	

The prescribed Novels are not found in the Module. The modules having a discussion about prescribed Novels must be reprinted.

Module one is relevant to the course and gives a background to the study of the Novel. Rest of the content in Module 01 and 02 are not related to the texts that are discussed.

The prescribed texts are not described in the Modules. Other texts are described and it has no relationship with the prescribed texts.

8) Research Method (Eng 307)

Experimental Research (Types of Educational Research)	Unit 02	page 21-23
Graphical Representation of Frequency Distributions	Unit 09	page 108 (Stat Analysis)
Writing a Research proposal	Unit 08	page 83

Expectations from tutors in English

The students had some expectations in only following courses.

1) Survey of English Literature: The Romantics to the Moderns (ENG 205)

The tutor should clearly convey about the Question paper pattern before Exam.
 The exam pattern of Eng 205 for Supplementary exam was totally different than that in Main exam. This changed pattern was not informed to students by tutor.

2) A Study of Poetry (ENG 206)

The tutor should tell students how to answer Questions during examination as well as the points to be covered and weightage to be given to different points while writing the answers.
 The student wishes that tutor should cover all units in a face to face situation as is done with regular students.

3) Introduction to Critical Theory (ENG 204)

One tutor does not explain clearly some chapters. His weakness is telling stories which are irrelevant to the course in class.
 This tutor is also very stingy (not liberal) with marks. He gives only 50% marks even if everything would have been O.K., as per his assessment.

4) Grammar III : Clause Combining & Text Creation (ENG 301)

Must make clarity of concepts.

Must answer all the Questions asked by the students.

Must motivate the students to ask Questions during contact sessions.

Must develop and distribute hand-outs to students with a detailed explanation.

Must answer with patience all queries by students and should not tell students to read themselves.

Must explain how to attempt certain type of Questions during examination.

5) Conversational Analysis (ENG 303)

Give students more practice exercises on transcription.

6) Modern Critical Theory (ENG 304)

The tutor should meet learner queries instead of reading the module during contact session. He should explain slowly in a clear and audible language.

The structure of the examination paper should be briefed during contact session before the examination.

Some Questions were asked from a course content not covered during contact sessions.

What is taught in contact session should be asked in Examinations. A set of some Model Questions be given before examination from which the Question paper should be declared.

Confusion is created when a teacher teaches different things than what a module contains. There should be a similarity between the two.

Tutor must be friendly and punctual with the students during contact sessions.

Tutor must motivate the students to put their queries and should try to cover all Questions/ Queries etc. raised by students.

Tutor should give a detailed explanation of every concept.

7) Study of Drama (ENG 305)

The tutor had taught something which is not in the module. In the examination there were Questions she had never taught. For example, a question about 'Revenge Tragedy' (Sec. A) is not in the Module given to students. The tutor also, had never taught the same and the paper setter was perhaps not the tutor but someone else.

The tutor must teach whatever is going to be asked in examination.

The tutor should consult full time lecturer about what is important for examination and teach accordingly.

The tutor is not lenient but is very strict in giving marks.

The tutor should give some tips to students about what is expected from them while writing the answers during examination. A Model Question and its model answer must be supplied to students.

Regardless of the insufficient time the tutor should try to cover up every topic on the course outline. There should be some choice of Questions during exam.

The tutor should discuss his/her notes with the students.

Tutor should concentrate more on Academic Queries rather than delivering Lecturers. There should be perfect co-ordination between the IDE tutor and the Regular student teacher for the same course. It will not develop any communication gap with the students.

The tutor should give more details about Novels which are not in the Module.

The Question paper should bear questions covering the course content given in the modules only and not from outside the Module. One student was expecting Questions from 'The Lion and the Jewel (play)' but there was no question from this play. The Continuous Assessment (C.A.) marks/grades were also very low as a result he/she could not pass the examination.

IDE tutor should have a better course clarity than a regular teacher. Students should not be referred to the Regular Programme Teacher for course clarity.

8) A Study of Novel (Eng 306)

The teacher must make effort for a timely supply of the Course material.

The teacher must make an “Analysis of the Novel”.

The teacher should explain how to answer the Theory and Practical examination questions.

Number of Contact sessions should be increased.

The teacher should discuss the Questions (given in the Module) during contact session.

The tutor should explain all five Novels. It will help the students to have a choice during examination.

The Tutor should explain the tips for ‘Reading a Novel’. If possible, the Modules must be developed for this course. Tutor should give time for consultation even during mid-week.

The tutor should answer student queries in place of a lecture during contact session. Tutor should be friendly and freely motivate students for raising questions during contact session.

Some Homework should be given to students by the tutor for a Drill and Practice.

9) Research Method (ENG 307)

The tutor appointed should have concept clarity.

The tutor should, ask questions, make sure that the students have understood, and, try to simplify every difficulty in the course during contact sessions.

In absence of a suitable tutor, the contact programme did not last for a long time.

The tutor should explain his expectations from the students during writing of exam papers.

Some tips must be given in the class for writing a reliable and valid answer.

Other Comments in English

There were some comments in following courses only.

1) Survey of English Literature: The Romantics to the Moderns (ENG 205)

One student had failed in 2009/10 because of not following the instruction to choose Question 01 being compulsory for everyone.

The same student could not pass second time as he/she had made (by mistake) a gap of two pages between two Questions.

This student failed again in Supplementary examination because exam pattern of Eng 205 for Supplementary exam was totally different than that in Main exam. The paper seemed to be for some other course as there were Questions which were never discussed by IDE tutor for Eng 205.

2) Conversational Analysis (ENG 303)

The student feels that he had missed one test and so he had failed.

3) Introduction to Critical Theory (ENG 204)

One student had to devote much time to ailing mother being HIV positive (+). This student had to face some financial problem also, and so, could not pay much attention to her studies.

4) Grammar III: Clause Combining & Text Creation (ENG 301)

This has been found a difficult subject by one student since first year.

One student needs a three hour time to write a full answer as he/she could not write all answers completely in the prescribed time limit.

5) Modern Critical Theory (ENG 304)

One word answer type questions should not be given in examination as these create some confusion in mind.

There should be a gap between two exam papers. In no case, there should be two exam papers on the same day. It will help the students to prepare nicely for exam.

The pattern of the paper must be informed to students before the examination, if it has been changed by the paper setter.

6) A Study of Novel (ENG 306)

The Question paper must have Essay Questions as the students are used to write answer of such questions.

An adjustment of time table is needed for students of English and African Language. It will help them to participate in both subjects.

The course content was not available in Book Shop. The text given to students is difficult to understand. The Book shop had delayed in supply of this text.

The textbooks were not available in Book shop and as a result one student wrote all the three tests without a book. He got these books late.

Very lengthy and difficult to understand Novels are prescribed. Some simple and readable Novels need to be prescribed.

The exam time table must have gap between two exam papers. It will give a chance to prepare for the same.

There was not sufficient time during examination for analysing the lengthy Novels.

In no case two exam papers should be on the same day.

Novels must be converted into Modules of shorter lengths using very simple language.

Availability of Novels in sufficient number at Book shop is essential.

7) Study of Drama (ENG 305)

A provision in the exam. Time table should be made for more time to prepare for every exam paper.

A clear demonstration of different Theatres will help to understand them easily. Examples given by the tutor should be in the modules. The text discussed in class during a contact session should be as given in the Modules. It will help the students to read and interact with the same as and when needed.

The concepts of this course were not explained in details by the tutor who has never discussed the Exam. Paper pattern and expectations from students.

8) Research Method (ENG 307)

One student had observed a low continuous assessment and so failed in this course.

The exam time table should have a gap between two exam papers for preparation.

Friday classes should be resumed enabling students for more contact sessions.

Objective Wise Discussion

This Research project was undertaken to diagnose difficulties with low achievers of B.A. Humanities programme with an intention to upgrade their exam performance. This project had revolved around seven objectives. An objective wise discussion of the findings is stated on the coming pages.

To diagnose the specific course content found difficult by the target group students in different low performance courses.

The target group low achievers were served Questionnaire/ Opinionnaire for different low performing courses in all four Subjects. They had expressed the specific course content where

they need some additional help/support for a content clarity. These have been listed in Gist of various findings of this study.

To wash out these difficulties in various courses with the help of a tutor support.

The concerned tutors had been informed about the course content which was found difficult by the low achievers who had desired some help/support for the same. Also, these tutors were advised to prepare the same content with more explanation for coming batches also. Apart from the academic difficulties, the expectations from the tutor, and some other comments by the students, had also been informed to the Tutors with a purpose for an improvement. The tutors were advised to take necessary steps for meeting these difficulties.

To help the low achieving learners for enhancing their examination performance and to achieve a 'D' or a better Grade.

The diagnosis of the difficult course content had been done on the basis of an opinion survey from target group low achieving learners through a Questionnaire/ Opinionnaire. This might had been done by the concerned tutors to help these low achieving learners through an academic support. A further analysis of exam performance may be done about these low achieving students, to see the improvements made by these low achievers.

To make concerned tutors aware of learner difficulties enabling them to meet the same among future batches of distance learners.

The concerned tutors have been advised to present the difficult Course Content easier to grasp and prepare their deliberations among future batches of students for same course in such a way that new students find the same content as easy one and not as a difficult one.

To suggest some suitable remedial strategy for enhancing learner performance in various courses under consideration for BA (Hum) Programme.

An analysis of low achieving learners' opinion revealed that the tutors and the learners did not know their role in Open & Distance education system. They need an orientation of the same. The students had expressed a desire for more contact sessions and the tutor should deliver lectures based on every Unit of the course content during these contact programmes. This is wrong and should not be expected in a distance education scenario. In fact, the students are supposed to learn self as an isolated identity. He may present his difficulties/confusions etc. to the tutor concerned in advance using Email/Phone/in person/fax etc. The tutor would like to provide his feedback using Email/ Phone/ in person/fax etc. or he may also take up the same during the contact programmes and discuss with the students. It would help other students also in the class. The tutors (deployed to provide human support to learners) have been in a habit of delivering a lecture on a topic of their own choice in the name of Tutoring/Counselling. They are supposed to motivate the learners for a self-study. These tutors should diagnose learner difficulties/queries/questions using various available media and must prepare their contact session deliberation in such a way that all these difficulties/ queries/questions are covered. They may like to motivate students for a group discussion and interaction among themselves. The Institute of Distance Education (IDE) may orient these Tutors as well as the students about their role and responsibilities with each other.

To recommend the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) some essential and needy steps for controlling dropout cases by enhancing performance level during examination among IDE students for B.A. (Humanities) programme.

The discussion of findings in this research project had revealed following recommendations to the Institute of Distance Education, University of Swaziland (UNISWA) for implementation.

An urgent orientation of all tutors about their role and responsibilities must be organised by the Institute of Distance education (IDE).

Every Programme Coordinator must organise a one day meeting with all new students and their tutors enabling them to understand their role in Distance Education system, and, with various activities to be done as well as course content to be covered by them.

Necessary Audio/ Video support be developed to explain the difficult course content. This Audio/Video support may be made available to students on line by Institute of Distance Education (IDE) as well as off line through UNISWA Library.

The IDE students may be motivated to form a 'Learner Association' in their locality by grouping students for the same programme. They may meet or talk or chat on line among themselves and discuss their difficulties among themselves. Use of Email and Internet for an effective communication would be a cheaper media for them.

A strong habit must be developed for using Internet by the IDE students and their tutors. It would help them to be in contact, always with each other and from one to another among students for an academic interaction. In this setting, a question raised by one student and its answer by another will reach to all, and thus ,making all students benefitted. It is good that UNISWA has been allotting Email ID to all students. They must develop a habit of using the same for interaction and communication among themselves as well as with their tutors also.

To initiate similar projects for other IDE programmes, if present project gets a success.

Looking to activeness and a good response by the target group learners, it is recommended that Institute of Distance Education (IDE) should take similar projects for other programmes as below.

- Certificate in Portuguese
- Bachelor of Commerce
- Bachelor of Arts (Humanities)
- Certificate in French
- Bachelor of Education (Adult Education)
- Bachelor of Education (Primary Education)
- Bachelor of Education (Secondary Education)
- Diploma in Commerce
- Diploma in Law
- PGCE

Outcome of this Project

The purpose of Distance Education system is to educate the mass as per their mental abilities. Discontinue an educational programme after being failed three times in some courses may compel the persons to remain uneducated throughout their life. Society may feel this group as a burden on them. This case study has become a help to low achievers for washing out their Difficulties, Confusions, Questions and Queries in course content of low achievement, and, finally a ray of hope to get necessary remedy from their tutors for coming up as a successful graduate studied through distance mode of education. It may be helpful for the academic Counsellors/Tutors to become familiar of the course content where the students had some difficulties/problems during study. These tutors may prepare some remedy in the form of more explanation by using various techniques for the difficult course content. This will open all doors for further education as well as for a suitable job to Distance Learners to meet the Bread & Butter needs of their families. This type of remedial work may be initiated in future too for other programmes offered by the Institute of Distance Education, if present project has been found successful in raising learner performance among third year low achievers of B.A.(Humanities) Programme

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Certificate in Portuguese

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Editor's Note: Classroom dialog is an important way to learn, but dial is more cumbersome in distance learning. However, it has advantages in terms of global reach. And with extended time between communications, it provides the opportunity for thought out answers.

Dialogue journaling for English Language Learners (ELLs) through Distance Education

Tanvir Malik
New Mexico

Abstract

Dialogue journaling was done during the fall semester between four students from different countries. Three of the four students were enrolled in the distance education setting while one was taking online courses along with her formal education. All students used email for the purpose of dialogue journaling. There was no time frame for the emails and they can email anytime of the day. All students accepted that dialogue journaling helped them learn and they were happy with their distance education programs.

Introduction

This year I, engaged one of my students to have a dialogue journaling done with students of international backgrounds. The student is enrolled in a distance education setting so communication is mostly through email, telephone, mail or Skype. Most of the researches that deal with dialogue journaling have been conducted in the formal classroom setting. There are very few efforts have been made to do any such research in a distance education setting ,particularly in this part of the world (Asia).

Dialogue journaling is a valid teaching strategy, particularly for ELL students (Lorotta, 2009) where an ELL practices English language with either a native English speaker or with proficient English language speaker (Payton, 1991). I introduced dialogue journaling to achieve two purposes. One purpose was to assess students' learning in biology. Another purpose was to provide help and support to ELL students so that they can practice English language acquisition and as well as biology concepts.

Distance learners lack the physical presence of co-learners for dialog and collaboration. At Empire State College (Oaks 1995), a structured learning journal replicates for distance learners many of the functions of a collaborative writing group. The learners are given specific questions that stimulate their journal entries and reinforce their movement through the writing process. In a sense, the journal substitutes self-dialog for communal discourse.

Procedure

Procedure, I used in this research, was simple. Distance education students of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Pakistan were asked to find the distance education students of the world through FaceBook, Twitter or any other chat site. The students were asked to team up with two or three students for the purposes of dialogue journaling. If they find a partner who is willing to do dialogue journaling, then they should contact through email and keep a record of the conversation between them. Students were allowed to use notes or print email records. The condition was that the students should be dialoguing with an English proficient person also. This was a laborious process and many were not able to find distance education students from English proficient countries or if they found anybody, that person was not willing to join a process of dialogue journaling via email. Shiasta was successful in teaming up with several students overseas. This was why I chose Shiasta and her team for this study. Dialogue journaling was of three way

conversation. It was between student to student, students to teacher and teacher to students. The main objective was to see convenience, effectiveness and comfortable the process of dialogue journaling was. Another goal was to see how students feel about distance education setting of their countries. The purpose was to practice English language skill with an English proficient. Dialogue journaling was done during the autumn (fall) semester 2011.

Many students tried to find friends and a few succeeded in finding a friend who was willing to do a dialogue journaling with them. Shiasta found Hiba from Jordon, Mirriam from Spain and Richard from England to do a dialogue journaling via email. Since the mail was considered really slow process so was not used. For the dialogue journaling students asked many different types of questions. In the beginning students asked more general questions such as weather, politics, family life but later on they concentrated more towards education. Shiasta was an undergraduate student at AIOU and Hiba studies science at a college. She was also taking some on line classes in English language in order to improve her English language skills, Mirriam was also a distance education learner and was studying literature as an under graduate student. Richard was enrolled in UKOU. He was studying in the field of sociocultural studies. The email addresses for the students are fake in order to conceal and respect their identities.

Some of the examples of their dialogue journaling via email have been given here:

Note: eMail addresses below are altered to conceal the identity of the students.

From:shiasta1576@yahoo.com

Cc: professor@aiou.edu.pk

To:mirriam1531@hotmail.com;hiba99@gmail.com;Richguyhere@hotmail.com

Date: Wed, 14 Sept 2011 12:39:45 +

How are you folks and hw is the weather over there.

From: mirriam1531@hotmail.com

To: shiasta1576@yahoo.com; Richguyhere@hotmail.com;hiba99@hotmail.com

Subject: RE:

Date: Thurs, 29 Sept 2011 7:14:12

I m great how about you

Whether fine bit cold

Sincermente

Mirriam

From:shiasta1576@yahoo.com

Cc: professor@aiou.edu.pk

To:mirriam1531@hotmail.com;hiba99@gmail.com;Richguyhere@hotmail.com

Date: Wed, 5 Oct 2011 1:13:09

I am feeling difficulty in all my subjects. It seems like a lot of work in a little time. I have many assignments due soon.

From: Richguyhere@hotmail.com
To: shiasta1576@yahoo.com;mirriam1531@hotmail.com;hiba99@hotmail.com
Subject: Studies
Date: Wed, 5 Oct 2011 11:21:57

Hay

Good news for me!!! I passed!!!! Wow

Weather here is bit cool.

Miss sunny days. lol

Inform me about your successes and future plans girls.

oxoxoxox

Richard

From: shiasta1576@yahoo.com
Cc: professor@aiou.edu.pk
To: mirriam1531@hotmail.com;hiba99@gmail.com;Richguyhere@hotmail.com
Date: Wed, 5 Oct 2011 9:32:57
Congratulations!!!!

From: mirriam1531@hotmail.com
To: shiasta1576@yahoo.com; Richguyhere@hotmail.com;hiba99@hotmail.com
Subject: RE:
Date: Fri, 29 Oct 2011 10:31:47
I have to run to the other siti quickly for an arrangement.
Was not here two days before.
Mirriam

From: hiba99@hotmail.com
To: shiasta1576@yahoo.com; Richguyhere@hotmail.com; mirriam1531@hotmail.com
Subject: RE:
Date: Tue, 21 Nov 2011 7:22:12
Salam
My computer no good, problem, nobody fix, I am mailing brother computer.
How about you
Hiba

Findings and discussion

Dialogue journaling outside the boundary lines of the classroom or even country or continent was an excellent experience for me. Students express comfort with the process of dialogue journaling via email. Shiasta and Hiba said that they were happy with the of dialogue journaling across the world but they were upset with the availability of the computers or internet service at home or at university. Shiasta and Hiba have to go to university or internet café to receive or email. Mirriam had the computer but the internet service was really slow in her town. She said that she had to wait sometimes 5 to 10 minutes to load the program. Only student who was enjoying the facility in its full extent was Richard who also mentioned that dialogue journaling provided him with a great deal of precious knowledge about the world.

Mirriam, Shaista and Hiba also enjoyed the opportunity of dialogue journaling with one another beyond the boundary lines of an institution. Hiba described the experience unexpected and like a dream. Mirriam, Hiba and Richard appreciated the efforts of Shiasta to find the students in the field of distance education and arranged the opportunity to discuss their thoughts about the dialogue journaling and distance education programs. All students considered the process of dialogue journaling through email was a convenient, effective and comfortable process. They enjoyed discussing various issues with their peers. Since Hiba and Mirriam were ELLs and Shiasta was ESL but still they felt this opportunity to practice English language skill with an English proficient worthwhile. All the three girls admitted to learn new vocabulary words for English language from Richard. None of these girls had a minimal exposure to English at home. Richard on the other hand appreciated the opportunity to directly learn about the different cultures of the world. He also agreed to learn many vocabulary words of Spanish and Arabic. In the later part of the semester Richard developed the habit of starting his journals with “Salam” and ‘Hola.’”

The other objective was that to compare the distance education system of the countries from where students were belonged to. Students were satisfied with the programs they were attending through distance education setting. Everybody agreed on the flexibility of time as the best benefit of the distance education. Hiba and Mirriam were upset on the difficulty of the curriculum and lack of available support. Richard was worried about the cost of the program and he was supporting himself for the education. Richard was the only one who was on the job while all the three girls were full time students and they were supported by their parents. On the whole all the four students were doing well in distance education setting and consider that they would have not done better if they did not have an opportunity of distance education setting.

Looking and teaming up with the distance education student was a difficult process. The probability was 1 out of 20. Many students tried but only a few were successful in matching up with a distance educator. Load shedding of electricity was another issue which Shiasta felt the most. Electricity was not available for her a part of every day. Hiba and Mirriam faced difficulty in expressing her viewpoint in English. They also said that it was hard to find an English speaker in their neighborhood. Richard explained that he has a job and studies going on at the same time so sometimes he feels overwhelmed with workload.

Shiasta, Hiba and Mirriam appreciated the opportunity to practice English with Richard. They believed that they have improved their reading and writing skill a great deal but they were still shy in speaking English. They tried a couple time on Skype and were not able to understand one another well. Shiasta was much more confident in speaking as compared to Hiba and Mirriam as her curriculum was in English and she had a little bit more exposure to English. On the whole everyone considered dialogue journaling as beneficial for all of them.

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Editor's Note: This research has widespread practical implications because the technology is widely available and frequently used.

Multimedia messaging service (MMS) vs. short message sending (SMS) and second language learners' vocabulary

Malahat Yousefzadeh
Iran

Abstract

Our aim in this paper reviewed the current state of mobile learning to examine the extent to which mobile device can support English vocabulary learning. This paper studied the application of students' English vocabulary acquisition in multimedia environment. It involves the comparison of the effect of MMS (multimedia messaging service) and SMS (short message sending) on vocabulary learning. Fifty (50) elementary level learners were randomly divided into two groups: Group 1: MMS group and group 2: SMS group. This study investigated the superiority of MMS in comparison with SMS. The results (pre- and post-tests) were analyzed using t-test. The statistical analysis of the results showed that presenting L2 vocabulary with MMS resulted in significantly better learning.

Keywords: mobile-learning, MMS(multimedia message service), SMS (short message sending)

Introduction

Mosavi and Nezarat (2012) said mobile learning is characterized by its potential for learning to be spontaneous, informal, personalized and ubiquitous. Such learning is reinforced when people encounter shortage of free time as the result of working longer hours. In such an environment, busy people tend to use portable devices to learn new materials rather than taking time for traditional classroom-based courses. Also, they mentioned the rising speed of mobile technology is increasing and penetrating all aspects of their lives so that this technology plays a vital role in learning different dimensions of knowledge. Today, with a clear shift from teacher-led learning to student-led learning that m-learning allows, students feel that using the technology is more effective and interesting than before. In fact, we can provide a richer learning environment through mobile phones for our language learners.

It is claimed that, in Iran , mobile technology is a familiar part of the lives of most teachers and students. Yet it seems to be in its infancy and its adoption in learning and teaching has been more gradual, as educators have sought to understand how best to use this tool to support various kinds of learning. As learning with a mobile phone is fundamentally different from classroom learning, a new field of study has come in to shape, namely that of Mobile learning (Sharples, 2000). This study investigated how the use of multimedia messages (MMS) via mobile phone affects learners' English vocabulary acquisition.

Laufer (1997) said for students of English as a foreign language (EFL), 5000 base words are considered a minimal requirement for understanding non-specialized English texts. Vocabulary knowledge is considered by both L1 and L2 researchers to be of great significance in the development of language competence (Nation, 2001; Laufer, 1998).

To reduce stress from encounters of unknown words and to enhance vocabulary learning glosses or annotations on a text are designed. This design increases exposure of the target words and calls learners' attention to them and the information provided by the design helps learners avoid incorrect guesses and inferences in given context (Nation, 2001:175).

Kost , Foss, and Lenzini (1999) found that EFL learners performed better on both production and recognition vocabulary tests when they were allowed to use a combination of visual text and graphics. In recent years, some interest has been expressed towards modality of input in language learning due to the increased use of multimedia materials. Multimedia, that is, a combination of print, audio and imagery, has been argued to enhance input by making it more comprehensible (Plass & Jones, 2005).

Paivio's Dual-coding theory (1986) states that learning improves when the information is received through two channel (verbal and visual) to construct meaning.

Chen and Hsieh (2008) present a study using SMS and MMS messages for the study of English vocabulary. The results showed that the validity of both dual coding and cognitive load theories, that is, using more than one modality is more effective than the use of a single modality.

The aim of the study

The goal of this study is to find out whether learning vocabulary via MMS will result in better learning than learning vocabulary via SMS.

Research question:

What are the effects of MMS vs. SMS on vocabulary learning of second language learners?

Alternative Hypothesis:

H1: There are significance differences between MMS and SMS in vocabulary learning of second language learners.

Methodology

Participants were selected from 5 classes at the same level of language proficiency (elementary level). The subjects were selected among the students who had MMS supported mobile phones. 50 elementary level English learners were randomly divided into two types of treatment. Half of these 50 students formed the group 1(MMS group) and the other half the group 2(SMS group). The multimedia messages in this study allowed students to see the definitions of words, example sentences and pictorial representations, while through SMS, just the word with Farsi meaning was sent. These students were selected regarding their use of mobile devices.

Procedure

Before performing the experiment, all participants perform a pre-test to assess their initial vocabulary abilities. In treatment sessions MMS group received English vocabulary with Farsi meaning as well as picture and an example related to vocabulary, while SMS group received the same vocabulary only with Farsi meaning. During these sessions, three times a day, at 9:00, 13:00, 18:00 hours, I sent three MMS to MMS group and three SMS to SMS group each day and students read my messages as they arrived. After four weeks of learning activities they performed a posttest to assess their English vocabulary learning achievements. It was composed of 80 items with a full score of 20. Both the formats of the pre-test and post-test are all common. These tests were a list of English words and asked the participants to answer their meaning in Farsi. The testing time is 45 minutes for pre-test and post-test.

Data analysis

For data analysis, the difference score between MMS group and SMS group was the dependent variable whereas the treatment types (MMS, SMS) was the independent variable. All of the 50

participants were homogenous based on a pre-test that was administered before starting the study. Results obtained by participants in the post-test were compared for the MMS and SMS in order to determine each of their effects on vocabulary learning outcomes. A t-test was run to test the alternative hypothesis.

Table (1) shows groups descriptive statistics, from this we can see that $\bar{x} = 16.2$ and $SD = 2.47$ (MMS group) and $\bar{x} = 14.7$ and $SD = 2.32$ (SMS group).

Table 1
t-test result - Means and Standard deviation obtained in post-test

	N	Mean	Std. deviation
MMS	25	16.2	2.47
SMS	25	14.7	2.32

Also the result of t-test showed that $t(48) = 0.031$, $p < 0.05$, therefore MMS is significantly different from SMS, and we can support the alternative hypothesis.

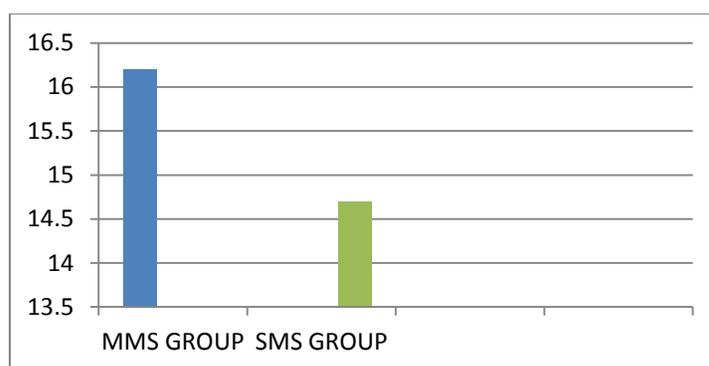


Figure 1: Comparison of means obtained in post-test by two groups

The mean differences indicate the magnitude of the differences between two groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to explore the impact of multimedia messages vs. short message on vocabulary learning of EFL learners. In this regard a t-test was conducted to probe the alternative hypothesis in this study. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the means of MMS group and SMS group. Therefore, it can be concluded that using MMS has a significant impact on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL elementary level students and hypothesis of study stating that MMS group would outperform the SMS group is met. The result of this study is in line with dual-coding theory (DCT theory) as well as Lie, Moore, Crahan, & Lee (2002). They said that designing pedagogically effective multimedia instruction in language learning has been an important issue. The findings of this study support the idea that the use of visual media supports vocabulary acquisition and helps increase achievement scores. We can say that sending and receiving MMS which has a substantially higher information-carrying capacity than SMS is more impactful.

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I thank my dear sons, Pouya and Nima.

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Editor's Note: Although developed initially for the Japanese language, this study has widespread implications for keyboards in any language, especially for non-alphabetic languages.

A visual eight-fingered typing skill for the general public including school children with literacy

Junichi Watanabe

Japan

Abstract

In 1986 when locally designed personal computer (hereafter, PC) appeared, the author unexpectedly suffered from calamitous key-search difficulty on the PC keyboard provided with too many keys. He created a special device which was finally enhanced to an aid for obtaining superior *visual* eight-fingered typing skill. With the help of it, even school children can obtain the skill *shortly* and *comfortably*. To the contrary of remarkable progress in PC capabilities, the general people have been without any typing method since invention of typewriter. The aid is ready to contribute to bridge the gap. The aid will be with the general people even eternally, because ideas, thoughts and others in the human brains are the last thing to be typewritten automatically.

Keywords: multi-fingered typing aid, visual eight-fingered typing skill, bird's eye view of the keyboard, graphic conditioned response, finger assignment principles on the keyboard, school children with literacy, something invisible, the general public, human teacher, touch typing, the huge gap, calamitous key-search difficulty, typewriting literacy, PC software manufacturer, untutored fingering, dissemination, typing efficiency, transcribing exercise

Introduction

The research was forced to start urgently without ascertaining nature of the research or without establishing a purpose, schedule or organization of it. When the author was aware of it, the first half of the research had already passed away. Reflectively, purpose of the first half of the research had been struggling with an accident occurred at the first daily job. The latter half inherited the result of the first half making it a starting point of the latter half.

The total story started when the author unexpectedly encountered an accident on the PC keyboard. The accident forced the author to cope with it at once. The accident was caused by a large number of character keys (i.e., keys other than control keys) on PC keyboard.

Modern *personal computer* (PC) appeared at the beginning of 1980's provided with locally designed keyboard. New-born Japanese PC keyboard, for example, was a hybrid keyboard provided with both native-lettered key-set for *primary* native-key typing and alphabet key-set for *secondary* native key typing (i.e., foreign-key typing). The latter was also used for typing in American English language. Apparently there was a big difference between the primary and the secondary typing method. When they selected *primary* native-key typing, they could concentrate on striking native-lettered keys. Unfortunately, the native-lettered keys threatened them a calamitous key-search difficulty caused by randomly arranged 46 native keys on the keyboard. As for *secondary* native-key typing, they had to search target keys among only 20 alphabet keys. However, twice as many alphabet keys must be struck for the makeshift secondary typing method. Additionally, translation was inevitable from a native input character to a couple of alphabet keys. It dimmed a little. Most of the young adult people did not worry about it. They seemed to select *secondary* one without fail. This selection sowed the seeds of typing problem. The author dared to select *primary* one. This selection brought about strange accident immediately after entering the first typing job on that day.

Method

Opening with nervous accident

One day in 1986, brand-new huge PCs were delivered to the office, an education center of a computer manufacturer. The author had a planned job of transcribing a draft for the next week. On Monday afternoon, the author started the first typing job in native language in an office room with very few instructors inside. As anticipated, it took average 20 seconds to search each target key on the keyboard. Input characters came into PC disorderly whereas randomly arranged keys on the keyboard were to be searched thoroughly according to “left-to-right, up-to-down” rule. When about a quarter minutes had passed, the author felt the eye became blurred; then the eye and the neck were suddenly restrained from moving and would not move any more. The eyes were fixed at the central part of the keyboard. The author became unable to continue the job. In a serene atmosphere of the room, the author felt as if something invisible were monitoring the room silently. The author was quite at a loss what to be done. Additional few minutes passed away slowly and silently.

Something invisible and the author were expecting together something to happen. When the author happened to be aware of the forehead getting feverish, he dared to stand up from the chair to leave the job. The restraints were released all at once. On the way home, the author was thinking regrettably, “Even a bit of information about the target key location would be of great help.”

A powerful graphic reference table

Next morning, before getting out of bed, “a bit of information online” about the target key location was growing. On his way office, an image of a *bird’s-eye view of PC keyboard* (hereafter, BEVK) was in his mind. In the office he created a graphic reference table containing 46 indexed BEVKs. Then, all the couples of index letter and BEVK were arranged orderly for quick reference. Finally, corresponding target key on each BEVK was colored in black. The author tested the BEVK on the way. It guided him to the point straight (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Specialized Graphic reference table

In Figure 1, couples of index letter and BEVK are arranged orderly for quick reference. Each black key denotes target key location. It helps learners find key locations easily. Several types of referencing makes learners learn key locations by heart accurately and unconsciously.

The author was astonished to find the world had changed utterly from the previous day. Immediately after glancing at the black key to locate it within BEVK, the author could pinpoint the target key straight on the real keyboard. The author thought that the reference table turned to pinpointing the target key. (In reality, the author’s actions of “locating the target key within BEVK and hopping onto the real target key” worked most effectively.) Additionally, while encountering the same character several times, graphic conditioned response was formed for it stepwise. After completion of the formation, the eye was steered reflectively to the target key location straight at the sight of the character in the input stream. (This was due to *graphic*

conditioned response which will be mentioned later.) With the double surprise, the job progressed in accelerated manner. A number of key locations memorized unconsciously increased day-by-day. Every morning, draft for the day was handwritten. In the afternoon, the draft was transcribed on PC with the help of the graphic reference table. All of the 46 key locations were memorized unconsciously and the transcribing job finished in far less than four half days.

Reflecting the first half of the research finished in a week

It was the very first chance of typing in *native language* which had been longed for quite a long time. The graphic reference table (or BEVKs, to be exact) was casually found fitted for *an aid for obtaining two-fingered typing skill*. True character of “something invisible” was not yet made clear at this time (2008), however, the fact that it saved the author from the accident cannot be forgotten all of the author’s life.

Beginning of latter half of the research

PC installation to primary and secondary school started in 1998. At primary school they were regulated to learn *primary* native-key typing without any help for it. At secondary school, they had to learn *secondary* native-key typing discarding barely learnt *primary* native-key typing skill. One day in 2001, the author happened to notice a primary school child (a granddaughter of the author’s) striking keys quite slowly with a single forefinger. The author feared if the school children were going to follow the author’s wake in 1986. Actually, child depression was spreading in parallel with the latter half of the research going until 2008. The cause of child depression has not been discussed or made clear even by the survey team of a certain Japanese university (Denda, 2008).

The author hurried to incorporate a fingering facility into the inherited typing aid. At the same time, he began to think that the typing aid under development should be applied to the general public including school children with literacy.

The first trial of incorporation

At first, the author regarded incorporating fingering facility as an easy task. Hundreds of personified hand-shaped items were drawn to evaluate the legibility of them. Three kinds of information were needed for denoting active hands, striking fingers and target key locations. As a result, it proved too difficult to memorize different kinds of information located separately. The author used to forget part of them during conveying them from BEVK to the real keyboard. The first trial was discontinued in a year.

The second trial

It was found by chance that a small circle placed on the target key location in the BEVK was not obstructive for locating the target key itself. Then the author drew a small circle to be placed on the target key for denoting its location. Other necessary information was pushed together into the circle.

Author’s wife who had been kept PC at a distance from the beginning suddenly wished to make an address book of hers providing 50 entries. The author handed her the result of the second trial with some instructions for typing addresses and others. She completed it in three half days without querying about locating target keys. However, she gave up learning *fingering* on the way. The author reflected that for a temporary typist, learning fingering seemed to be only a bothersome effort.

Reflecting the result of address book, he mailed directly to 2000 school masters and principals in Tokyo metropolitan area advertising the result of second trial, in vain. He also mailed it to more than 40 Local Education Committees. No response came to him, either. From this result and others, he had to feel something concealed or hidden within educational organization including

responsible administration. He decided to give up the second trial. Then he began to think of advertising the research *from abroad*.

The third and final trial

After twice failures, the author wished to know touch typing methodology rather deeply. Since touch typing was based on “non-visual training” completely, the author could not obtain any philosophical or descriptive documents at all. From an introductory book of touch typing, nothing suggestive was gained except a title less and page-numberless piece of chart inserted in the book. The chart can be seen broadly in the related site of the Internet. It was supposedly drawn by the inventor of touch typing in 1880’s.

At a glance, the primitive chart impressed the author calmly. The chart seemed to have been drawn for showing principle of finger assignment on the keyboard (hereafter, the finger assignment principle). The author considered that drawing hand postures was the most urgent and indispensable task for the incorporation. The task started immediately modeled on own hand. The author began to draw hand postures *at the moment of striking target key* in each BEVK. Drawing/amending was quite a time-consuming task spending nearly four years. It is commonly heard that only expert painters should be able to draw human hand precisely and lively.

To return to the subject, the drawing/amending task produced fruitful results. At nearly end of the task, the author could deduce three hidden principles from the drawings; “Individual finger should be responsible for predetermined keys nearby” and “Individual key should be struck with predetermined finger nearby” and “Every finger must be able to type any responsible keys without horizontal/vertical hand movements.” The author sublimated the hidden principles to rules of “Discrete finger movement” and “Flexible finger movement”, which will be mentioned later.

The author confirmed that for incorporating those principles into the developing typing aid, hand postures and BEVKs were most appropriate vehicles for accepting them. As a result, Figure 1 was improved to Figure 2 below. This concluded the third trial successfully.

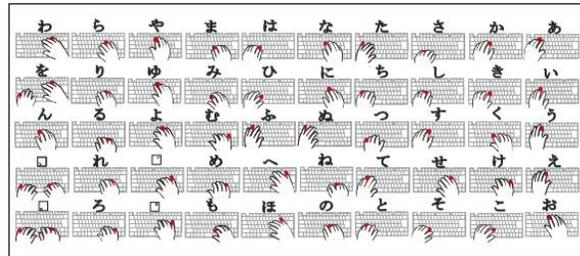


Figure 2: Innovated graphic reference table

Figure 2 shows a visual typing aid for obtaining eight-fingered typing skill. It contains both pinpointing and fingering facilities. Hand postures take charge of fingering facility. Target key location is a basement of pinpointing facility. Thus the old graphic reference table has been innovated to eight-fingered typing aid in 2008.

Results

A long journey to eight-fingered typing aid

More than two decades had passed since a device was created for reducing the scope of the calamitous key-search difficulty. The reducer developed in 1986 has been innovated to a *visual aid for obtaining eight-fingered typing skill* (hereafter, Vaid-8). With the help of the aid, even

school children with literacy can obtain the skill through transcribing exercise (hereafter, the exercise) shortly and comfortably.

Structure of Vaid-8

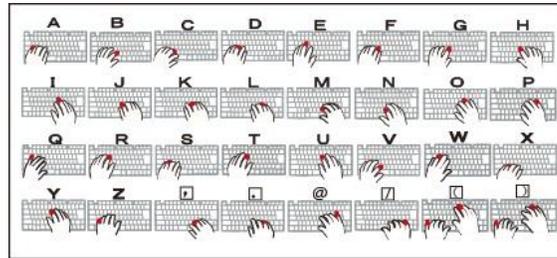


Figure 3: Vaid-8 of U.S. Version

Figure 3 shows Vaid-8 of U.S. version. Vaid-8 is internationally available through simple customization. In this Figure, BEVKs are seen inherited from the initial typing aid (i.e., graphic reference table). Index letters on each BEVK show the same character is to be typed when corresponding target key is struck. Black keys seen in Figure 1 have been replaced by hand postures. Hand posture shows the figure of hand at the moment of striking corresponding target key. Idle hand postures have been expelled from Vaid-8 for clarity. Individual hand posture is unique in shape. The reason of it is that according to the finger assignment principle, each key is struck by nearby responsible finger with a fulcrum of the wrist.

One indexed couple (i.e., hand posture and BEVK) is shown enlarged in Figure 4. A red-fingertip (hereafter, red-tip) in hand posture can denote both striking finger and target key location because striking finger is piled just on the target key for easier exercise operation and for prevention of ignoring striking finger. Beginners are apt to ignore striking fingers from the author's experience. This piling up is possible because striking finger and target key location are on friendly terms. It is valid because target key location must be identified absolutely whereas striking finger can be denoted anywhere within the same BEVK. Figure 4 tells learners that the target key under the red-tip should be struck by the red-tip (i.e., striking finger).

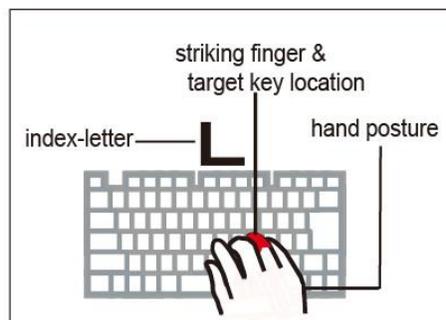


Figure 4: BEVK of American version (enlarged)

How to Learn Eight-fingered Typing Skill

Basic procedure

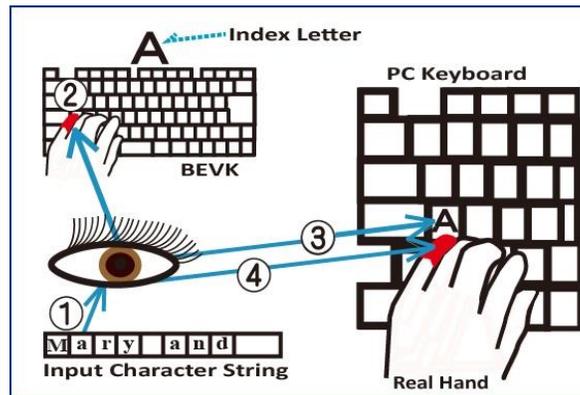


Figure 5: Four steps during consulting

The eight-fingered typing skill is learnt through four steps of consulting as shown in Figure 5.

The following four steps are done serially for each character in the input stream (or in mind.)

1. Take up next character to be typed. Find corresponding index letter. Look at BEVK under it.
2. Locate the red-tip within BEVK for grasping the location of red-tip on the real keyboard.
3. Hop onto the target key on the real keyboard *as imitating the hand posture*.
4. Find and strike the target key with real red-tip (i.e., with real striking finger)

While repeating the consulting several times, the four items (i.e., index letter, striking finger, target key location and active hand) can easily and firmly be memorized with the help of graphic conditioned response and the following attributes.

Coordinated denotations within hand shape

Piled up items (striking finger and target key location)

Associative and real-shaped items (hand posture and fingers within it)

Actually, “to learn typing skill” does not mean here “to be given typing skill” but “to obtain typing skill willingly and comfortably”. Willing attitude is fostered naturally during the exercise.

Formation of graphic conditioned response

During repeating the consulting several times, all the steps ①—④ can be memorized stepwise.

Time needed for the steps is reduced accordingly. The moment the time for steps ①—④ reduced to zero is the moment of completion of forming the graphic conditioned response. After that, at the sight of the character (at step①), the eye is reflectively steered to the target key location at a bound (at step③) with necessary information firmly learnt by heart. The target key can be struck immediately, of course.

After all the graphic conditioned response has been formed in the same way, post-learners can type at the rate of about five characters per second. (Time depends on individual differences and number of character keys on the keyboard. It usually improves more and more with proper volume of typing.)

Source of Typing Efficiency

While typing, hand movements should be expelled from learners' fingering for the sake of rapid and accurate fingering. Discrete finger movement expels horizontal hand movements by way of finger assignment on the keyboard. Flexible finger movement expels vertical hand movements by stretching/bending striking finger to reach target key properly. These desirable finger movements influenced hand postures without fail. Accordingly, learners can obtain the desirable finger movements during the exercise naturally and almost unconsciously.

In visual typing, it is usual to confirm a target key-letter just before striking it. The confirmation contributes to typing accuracy and thereby to reducing correction time for typing errors. The two kinds of finger movement together with confirmation of accurate typing form a firm basis for pursuing ultimate typing speed and accuracy in visual typing.

Capability of Vaid-8

While transcribing some document with the help of Vaid-8, even brand-new typing beginners can obtain eight-fingered typing skill shortly, effortlessly, willingly and comfortably.

Learners can learn entire typing skill (i.e., pinpointing and fingering skills) through the exercise with the help of Vaid-8. The exercise makes it easy to learn typing skill because everything is shown graphically or picturesquely except index letter. Graphic conditioned response helps learners to learn typing skill easily, shortly and effortlessly. So they can do the exercise with little help of human teachers or without hard effort of memorizing key locations and its fingering. The intuitive and guessing nuance (i.e., locating and hopping) during the exercise encourages learners to do the exercise willingly and comfortably. It takes them net 3-6 hours to finish the exercise. (Time depends on the number of character keys registered on Vaid-8 and on individual differences.) After finishing the exercise, post-learners can type rapidly, accurately and continuously owing to obtained pinpointing skill and fingering skill leaving off Vaid-8 of course. (School children with smaller hands may not cover some remote keys. Moving hand(s) while typing is allowable for them until time resolves the difficulty.)

Effects of Vaid-8 international

Depending on the type of the keyboard in use, attitude of the general people would be varied at the news of Vaid-8. (Category-1): The general people using keyboard provided with ordinary number of character keys, Vaid-8 will be moderately welcomed because they will be able to obtain eight-fingered typing skill shortly with minimum effort or cost of introducing Vaid-8. This category should be an overwhelming majority. (Category-2): A Far East island country falls into this category. Nearly all the national people who escaped from *primary* native-key typing disappointedly in 1986 will be wild with joy at the news of Vaid-8 (hopefully). (Category-3): Another Far East country and areas with ideograms only fall into this category. The general people with original non-alphabet keyboards will also enjoy the effect of eight-fingered typing, although they are unable to overcome entirely the restraint of enormous number of ideograms even this time.

Potentiality of the general people

The general people occupying most of the population essentially support countries or areas where they live in. Many of them are working in a variety of fields of business or administration where PC is used as indispensable tool. If their untutored typing is enhanced to uppermost typing technology shortly, they will act much more effectively and comfortably in their business and private lives. The more volume they type, the more merits will be enjoyable. Supposedly large amount of saved time will be at their own discretion.

Comparison among typing styles

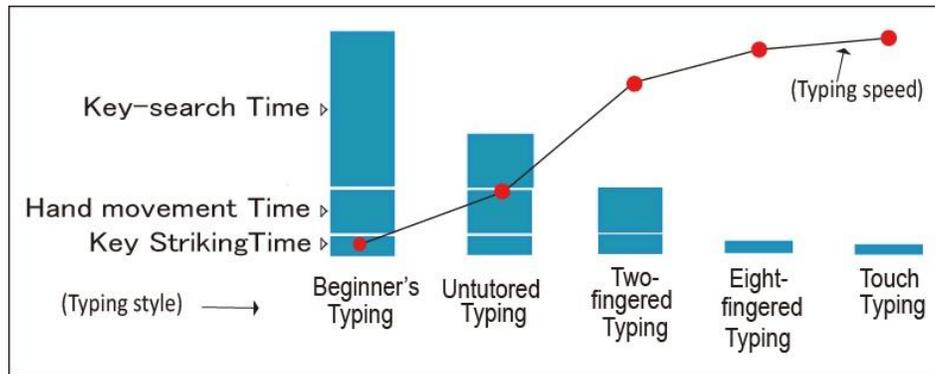


Figure 6: Typing styles in terms of times and speed

Figure 6 presents comparison among typing styles in terms of times and speed. *Beginner's typing* is done by brand-new typing beginners who consume maximum typing time in key-searching and others. Hence, performance (speed and accuracy in typing) should be the lowest.

Untutored typing is learnt unconsciously by non-typing beginners. Nearly all of them have little memory of key locations. This typing style has commonly been seen among the general people in the world.

Two-fingered typing All the key locations are learnt through the exercise. The new skill expelled key-search time completely. The typing skill worked pretty well more than a decade until enhanced to eight-fingered typing.

Eight-fingered typing provides eight-fingered typing skill. It displays touch typing-like performance beautifully, though there is a big difference the two typing styles. Owing to optic nerve, visual typing skill can be learnt shortly, effortlessly and comfortably.

Touch typing provides utmost typing skill obtained through minutely designed *blind touch training*. Every finger is trained so as to reach any keys rapidly without using optic nerve at all. Touch typing people say that own fingers can type autonomously as if eyes were on each of eight fingers.

The above comparison is done based on pure typing time excluding impure typing time such as thinking time and elaboration time. Thinking time is usually indispensable in most of the typing works done by the general people whereas thinking time in stenographic work, for instance, would be restricted to a minimum.

Hopeful candidates of Vaid-8

Primary school children with literacy are hopeful candidates of Vaid-8. First of all, they are yet free from untutored fingering. Their brains and fingers are young and elastic. Most of them are interested in PC and are full of curiosity. They may need less time for the exercise. If the exercise is planned to be added to a curriculum of compulsory education, they will surely be making a new member of literacy, namely typewriting.

Elaboration after composition

Elaboration should not be underestimated. During elaboration of own writings, reading, amending and composing ability is stimulated and polished. As a whole, elaboration is a powerful tool for improving quality of writings as is known widely. Young people should learn more while elaborating their writings with the help of modern powerful editing functions of PC software. After all, their typewriting literacy will be enhanced remarkably in the long run.

Customization of Vaid-8

Vaid-8 can be customized using Skelton Model (Figure 7). Customization is needed for each unique *keyboard model* in use. It is done regarding index letters and arrangement of them on Skelton Model (Figure 7). Number of Special Characters to be registered on Vaid-8 is optional. It is not advisable to include all of the Special Characters without considering usage of them.

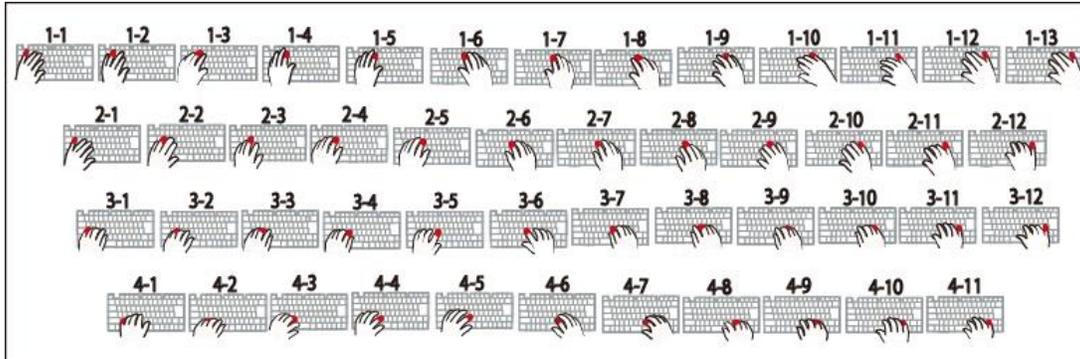


Figure 7: Skelton Model for Customization

For customizing Vaid-8, an electronic copy of Skelton Model can be used. Customization is done by replacing coordinate's numerals on the Skelton Model with corresponding index letters of the keyboard in use. A Skelton Model is needed for *each type* of the keyboard. In any case, hand postures must be kept unchanged. (The Skelton Model was drawn based on Figure 2. Adobe Illustrator is used for drawing, copying and customizing Skelton Model.)

For the people with untutored fingering

Most of the adult people have been unable to get out of untutored fingering by themselves. They are now able to do it with Vaid-8. A knack in doing it is as follows. *Slowly but steadily* doing the exercise is ideal way of it. Anyway, the result of it may come earlier than expected.

For the handicapped

Vaid-8 may be used for obtaining *only* pinpointing skill. This typing skill is obtained through the exercise ignoring fingering denotations altogether. Sole Pinpointing skill acquired contributes to considerably rapid and accurate typing. Single-handed typing can be learned through the exercise using single active hand. All the hand postures should be regarded as belonging to the single active hand with/without fingering. Even with leg(s) or with a stick in his or her mouth, pinpointing skill without fingering may be learnt through the exercise in its own way.

The exercise

Principle of the exercise

The exercise is the most efficient way of obtaining eight-fingered typing skill. It takes 3-6 hours in total depending on the number of character keys on the keyboard and on individual differences.

Preparing for the exercise

It is strictly advisable an exercise is to be divided into sessions of 20–30 minutes each accompanied with a break. Any familiar document may be used for the exercise; text pages, newspapers, magazines and so forth.

When using printed Vaid-8, PC should be prepared for transcribing some document into work area where elaboration can be done.

Key procedure of the exercise

Key procedure of the exercise is Main step preceded by Pre-main Step-1 and 2. Both open hands are over the keyboard and both wrists are beside the keyboard holding Space Key and/or equivalent between them. Be sure red-tip denotes *both* striking finger and target key location. Keys are to be struck lightly and calmly and rapidly, if possible.

(Pre-main Step-1) Read word(s) on the transcribing document. Keep them in mind.

(Pre-main Step-2) Take up one character to be typed.

(Main Step) Enter from index. Look at hand posture and red-tip. *Locate* red-tip (i.e., target key location) within BEVK *intuitively* and then *hop* to the target key location on the real keyboard to find the target key as *imitating* shape of hand posture with own hand. Strike it with own red-tip (i.e., striking finger).

When the fingering or target key location is forgotten on the way, the main step must be redone much more slowly than usual. If input character exhausted, go to Step-1. Otherwise continue from Step-2.

After learnt by heart a target key location with its fingering, learner's eyes are suddenly steered to the real target key location straight *at the sight of the character to be struck in the input stream (or in mind)*. This has been the result of graphic conditioned response. The target key can be struck immediately. Number of such keys will surely increase and the exercise is accelerated accordingly.

Usually at the beginning of a session or of a day, slower starting speed is preferable. The typing speed will soon be accelerated naturally beyond usual speed. The exercise should be continued until the end of a session or until the entire target key locations with fingering are memorized by heart. Most realistic means of improving typing speed should be to have a plenty volume of typing at times. Most effective way of improving typing quality should be elaboration at any moment.

Joyful presents for learners of eight-fingered typing skill

At nearly end of the exercise in American English language, the author was given joyful spiritual presents in the brain. One of them was an imaginary short and thick woolen string in dark blue. During the very slow movement of the string from right to left, the author perceived indescribably pure and serene feeling for several seconds. At the secondary encountering, a couple of days later, the author could perceive its coming beforehand, because the string was taking time in preparing for the appearance. The same show was perceived as before.

Another kind of present experienced was a show of fingertips on the keyboard. When fingers were working discretely and flexibly, they were seen displaying showers of fingertips on the keyboard. The showers of fingertips may be seen at near end of the exercise probably more than several times in a short period of time.

Learning additional typing key-set

After learning a typing skill on a certain keyboard *perfectly*, another key-set can be learnt on the same/different keyboard without confusion. On the contrary, concurrent learning of different key-sets on the same/different keyboard(s) should be avoided because of confusion.

Vaid-8 in e-learning environment

Initial Vaid-8 was printed on a sheet of paper. Modern Vaid-8 could work online much better when provision for it is made by PC software manufacturer. Figure 8 is just an example of Vaid-8 in e-learning environment.

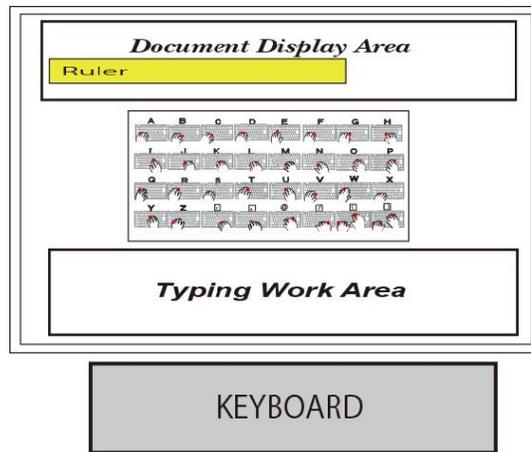


Figure 8: Example Screen Layout for Vaid-8 online

Document Display Area is for document data to be transcribed in the exercise. It would be convenient if replaceable and scrollable. Ruler is for reading convenience. Vaid-8 should be displayed on the center of the screen. The Vaid-8 should be selectable and replaceable on the screen according to the keyboard currently in use. Characters typed in go into Typing Work Area. Contents in this area should be editable and scrollable for elaboration. Real keyboard is placed on normal position.

Findings

Saved from calamitous key-search difficulty

In the midst of the calamitous key-search difficulty in 1986, the eye and the neck were suddenly restrained from moving. When the author decided to give up the transcribing job, all the restraints were released at once. Resultantly, the author was saved by something invisible in a manner stated above. Without its help, the author may not have started the research at all. Later, the author reached the conclusion that something invisible should be a nerve center.

Graphic conditioned response

The author discovered a mechanism of graphic conditioned response (as stated in "*Formation of graphic conditioned response*"). From the first encounter, the phenomenon could be utilized unconsciously and conveniently.

Conclusions and recommendations

By way of recognizing BEVK as basic elements of multi-fingered typing aid, the author could reach eight-fingered typing aid via two-fingered one.

For disseminating Vaid-8, many things should be prepared including data about the keyboard worldwide. People participating in the planning of dissemination are to be acquainted with many things including educational situations worldwide, eight-fingered typing, e-learning environment and so forth. For smooth, orderly and perfect dissemination, advanced PC software manufacturer can be considered to be the ablest organization.

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About the Author



Jun_ichi Watanabe graduated from Hitotsubashi University, Japan. He entered “IBM, Japan” as systems engineer, then as an Information Systems instructor until 1991. In 1986, while working in IBM, he met with calamitous key-search difficulty on the PC keyboard. To cope with it, he created a graphic reference table which grew finally to a visual eight-fingered typing skill obtainer for the general public worldwide.

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