

Videoconference Technology: An Attractive Vehicle for Challenging and Changing Tutors Practice in Open and Distance Learning Environment

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Abstract : Videoconference technology represents a recent experiment of technology integration into teaching and learning in South Africa. Increasingly, videoconference technology is commonly used as a substitute for the traditional face-to-face approaches to teaching and learning in helping tutors to reshape and change their teaching practices. Interestingly, though, some studies point out that videoconference technology is commonly used for knowledge dissemination by tutors and not so much for the actual teaching of course content in Open and Distance Learning context. Though videoconference technology has become one of the dominating technologies available among Open and Distance Learning institutions, it is not clear that it has been used as effectively to bridge the learning distance in time, geography, and economy. While tutors are prepared theoretically, in most tutor preparation programs, on the use of videoconference technology, there are still no practical guidelines on how they should go about integrating this technology into their course teaching. Therefore, there is an urgent need to focus on tutor development, specifically on their capacities and skills to use videoconference technology. The assumption is that if tutors become competent in the use of the videoconference technology for course teaching, then their use in Open and Distance Learning environment will become more commonplace. This is the imperative of the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) on education generally. Against the current vacuum in the practice of using videoconference technology for course teaching, the current study proposes a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the efficacy of videoconferencing as an approach to student learning. Using interviews and observation data from ten participants in Open and Distance Learning institution, the author discusses how dialogue and structure interacted to provide the participating tutors with a rich set of opportunities to deliver course content. The findings to this study highlight various challenges experienced by tutors when using videoconference technology. The study suggests tutor development programs on their capacity and skills and on how to integrate this technology with various teaching strategies in order to enhance student learning. The author argues that it is not merely the existence of the structure, namely the videoconference technology, that provides the opportunity for effective teaching, but that is the interactions, namely, the dialogue amongst tutors and learners that make videoconference technology an attractive vehicle for challenging and changing tutors practice.

Keywords : open distance learning, transactional distance, tutor, videoconference

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