

## Online Postgraduate Students' Perceptions and Experiences With Student to Student Interactions: A Case for Kamuzu University of Health Sciences in Malawi

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**Abstract :** Online Learning in Malawi has only immersed in recent years due to the need to increase access to higher education, the need to accommodate upgrading students who wish to study on a part time basis while still continuing their work, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the closure of schools resulting in academic institutions seeking alternative modes of teaching and Learning to ensure continued teaching and Learning. Realizing that this mode of Learning is becoming a norm, institutions of higher Learning have started pioneering online post-graduate programs from which they can draw lessons before fully implementing it in undergraduate programs. Online learning pedagogy has not been fully grasped and institutions are still experimenting with this mode of Learning until online Learning guiding policies are created and its standards improved. This single case descriptive qualitative research study sought to investigate online postgraduate students' perceptions and experiences with Student to student interactive pedagogy in their programs. The results of the study are to inform institutions and educators how to structure their programs to ensure that their students get the full satisfaction. 25 Masters students in 3 recently introduced online programs at Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHES), were engaged; 19 were interviewed and 6 responded to questionnaires. The findings from the students were presented and categorized in themes and subthemes that emerged from the qualitative data that was collected and analysed following Colaizzi's framework for data analysis that resulted in themes formulation. Findings revealed that Student to student interactions occurred in the online programme during live sessions, on class Whatsapp group, in discussion boards as well as on emails. Majority of the students (n=18) felt the level of students' interaction initiated by the institution was too much, referring to mandatory interactions activities like commenting in discussion boards and attending to live sessions. Some participants (n=7) were satisfied with the level of interaction and also pointed out that they would be fine with more program-initiated student-to-student interactions. These participants attributed having been out of school for some time as a reason for needing peer interactions citing that it is already difficult to get back to a traditional on-campus school after some time, let alone an online class where there is no physical interaction with other students. In general, majority of the participants (n=18) did not value Student to student interaction in online Learning. The students suggested that having intensive student-to-student interaction in postgraduate online studies does not need to be a high priority for the institution and they further recommended that if a lecturer decides to incorporate student-to-student activities into a class, they should be optional.

**Keywords :** online learning, interactions, student interactions, post graduate students

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