

Attitudes, Experiences and Good Practices of Writing Online Course Material: A Case Study in Makerere University

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Abstract : Online mode of delivery in higher institutions of learning, popularly known in some circles as e-Learning or distance education is a new phenomenon that is steadily taking root in African universities but specifically at Makerere University. For slightly over a decade, the Department of Open and Distance Learning has been offering the first generation mode of distance education. In this, learning and teaching experiences were based on the use of hard copy materials circulated through postal services in a rather correspondence mode. There were more challenges to this including high dropout rates, limited support to the learners and sustainability issues. Fortunately, the Department was supported by the Norwegian Government through a NORHED grant to “leapfrog” to the fifth generation of distance education that makes more use of educational technologies and tools. The capacity of faculty staff was gradually enhanced through a series of training to handle the upgraded structure of fifth generation distance education. The trained staff was then tasked to develop modules befitting an online delivery mode, for use on the program. This paper will present attitudes, experiences of the course writers with a view of sharing the good practices that enabled them leap from e-faculty trainees to distinct online course writers. This perspective will hopefully serve as building blocks to enhance the capacity of other upcoming distance education programs in low capacity universities and also promote the uptake of e-Education on the continent and beyond. Methodologically the findings were collected through individual interviews with the 30 course writers. In addition, semi structured questionnaires were designed to collect data on the profile, challenges and lessons from the writers. Findings show that the attitudes of course writers on project supported activities are so much tagged to the returns from their committed efforts. In conclusion, therefore, it is strategically useful to assess and selectively choose which individual to nominate for involvement at the initial stages.

Keywords : distance education, online course content, staff attitudes, best practices in online learning

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