West African Journal of Open & Flexible Learning
Volume 5, Number 2, January 2017

Ethics, issues and challenges in quality global Online Distance Higher Education provision

Éthique, Enjeux Et Defis De L'assurance De Qualite De L'enseignement Superieur A Distance A L'echelle Mondiale

Angelo Nicolaides[1], Joseph Mensah Onumah[2]

[1]UNISA Graduate School of Business Leadership
South Africa, Nicola@unisa.ac.za

[2]University of Ghana Business School
Department of Accounting, Ghana
jmonumah@ug.edu.gh

Abstract

The quest for quality in the learning process in Open Distance Higher Education (ODeL) is enduring and it is hopefully persistently leading to better ways which would enable quality learning to take place. It is apparent that many distance education institutions are moving from a purely print-based to an online delivery approach through the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and by making use of numerous technological innovations. Academic institutions are challenged to prepare graduates to compete ethically in the 21st Century knowledge economy. In some ways however, technology is somewhat of a disruptive innovation. This paper discusses the issues and challenges that online distance higher education (ODeL) poses and discusses strategies which could possibly be employed by institutions to diminish unethical practices and further suggests some reasons why students choose to be dishonest in the digital era. It is clear that policy development and administrative changes are required to support innovative teaching practices across an institution. Distance education (DE) is also progressively global, with universities leveraging cutting-

edge technologies to place education within the grasp of many more individuals and this requires additional skills. Suggestions are also proffered as to what academics can do to mitigate unethical academic practices. In this regard, a carefully crafted moral education approach and well-conceived course design are needed to construct a sound academic culture and promote the desired levels of integrity. The core issue is how unethical student practices can be eliminated where the use of information technology is required in all teaching and learning. The findings and conclusions may be relevant for other institutions in the ODeL arena.

Résumé

La recherche de l'assurance de qualité dans le processus de l'enseignement supérieur à distance (ESD) est une quête durable qui permettrait de réaliser une meilleure façon d'apprentissage. Il est évident que de nombreux établissements d'enseignement à distance sont en train de passer d'une approche purement imprimée à une approche numérique, grâce à l'utilisation d'environnements d'apprentissage virtuels (EAV) et à l'utilisation de nombreuses innovations technologiques. Les établissements d'enseignement sont mis au défi de préparer les diplômés à être compétitifs sur le plan éthique dans l'économie du savoir du XXIe siècle. Dans quelques mesures, la technologie est en quelque sorte une innovation perturbatrice. Cette communication examine les problèmes et les défis que pose l'enseignement supérieur à distance numérique (ODeL) et examine les stratégies qui pourraient être utilisées par les établissements pour réduire les pratiques contraires à l'éthique et suggère quelques raisons pour lesquelles les étudiants choisissent d'être malhonnêtes à l'ère numérique. Il est clair que les changements politiques et administratifs sont nécessaires pour appuyer les pratiques d'enseignement novatrices dans l'ensemble d'un établissement. L'enseignement à distance est également de plus en plus mondial, les universités tirant parti des technologies de pointe pour mettre l'éducation à la portée d'un plus grand nombre d'individus, ce qui exige des compétences supplémentaires. Des suggestions sont également avancées quant à ce que les universitaires peuvent faire pour atténuer les pratiques académiques contraires à l'éthique. Cet égard, une approche soigneusement conçue de l'éducation morale et des

matérielles d'études bien conçue sont nécessaires pour construire une culture académique solide et promouvoir les niveaux d'intégrité souhaités. La question centrale est de savoir comment éliminer les pratiques contraires à l'éthique des étudiants lorsque l'utilisation des technologies de l'information est nécessaire dans tout l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Les résultats et les conclusions de la communication peuvent être pertinents pour d'autres institutions de l'ODeL.

Key words: *ODeL, information, interface, technology, academic integrity*

Mots-clés : *ODeL, information, interface, technologie, intégrité académique*

Introduction

This article contemplates apposite literature on ethics, issues and challenges in quality global Online Distance Higher Education provision. An in-depth examination of relevant literature and a narrative review was conducted to explicate both primary and secondary sources including books, research reports, journal articles, magazines, conference papers and various internet materials. The researchers examined various theories and frameworks available in order to obtain an enhanced understanding of the issues at hand. Thus, a holistic understanding is offered underwritten by prevailing practices and challenges.

It is increasingly evident that far-reaching technological changes will impact upon the skill-sets of students who are either future or current employees. Given the technological advances, ODeLs need to consider how to use the latest innovations to their best advantage and strive to gain enhanced opportunities to ensure that they remain competitive in what has become a highly competitive ODeL marketplace.

The speedy advances that are taking place in information and communications technology in the digital age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution are resulting in momentous changes in the practice of distance education (DE). As societal needs are shifting, universities

find they need to transform their offerings to meet the needs of students and guide them towards operating efficiently and productively to serve organizational needs. In this milieu, open and distance education has emerged as critical and it is in a constant state of change due to the ever-growing use of communication technologies. Online distance higher education (Open and distance e-learning' -ODeL) denotes new forms of DE, which are categorized by the convergence of an open learning philosophy, DE pedagogies and a range of e-learning technologies. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is now assumed to include the notion of ODeL and it is widely accepted as a means of broadening access to education. UNESCO (2002:8) states: "The term Open and Distance Learning reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure".

Distance education in its many forms of web-based or online delivery has developed as a fundamental educational approach since the 1990s. Most DE institutions have shifted their culture and strategic approach from a print-based to a more efficient and cost-effective online delivery system for education provision, making extensive use of the latest Web-based technologies and virtual learning environments (VLEs) (Cleveland-Innes, 2010). ODeL thus embraces the use of e-learning or online learning methodologies so as to enable compound forms of interface and discourse to bridge the often large distance between academics and their students (Garrison, 2009). ODeL necessitates suitable virtual meeting platforms which can fully support student–teacher, student-student interactions as well as tutoring.

Technological innovation is now changing the way universities teach and how their students learn. The challenges and opportunities are great. Where a student gets total online service in aspects such as admissions, registration, tutoring, lecture notes, as well as important reading materials such as academic articles and videos and even online textbooks, learning is greatly enhanced. This is bolstered by value-adding help-desks and effective administration systems and processes (Bates, 2005; Khan & Iqbal, 2015). The management system that is

established needs to be fully comprehensive to support learning effectively. Ideally, each college of a university should have its own portal server with an appropriate bandwidth to host its activities and ensure wireless connectivity throughout an institute.

Technology is somewhat of a disruptive innovation. Nonetheless, current literature suggests that there is a great need to seek pedagogical approaches to ODeL online teaching that improves the quality of student learning, stimulates the intellectual growth of faculty, and which augments general academic productivity (Bishop, 2003).

One challenge is that faculty members used to teaching in one set manner may be reluctant to spend time to learn new methods and approaches; and in addition, institutions may lack the required budgets to allow them to make available the desired support. To meet the intentions of open and distance learning, altered planning models are also generally necessary when allocating workloads to academics tasked with educating students online, since excessive use of IT is problematic since a recent survey at McMaster University in Canada ascertained that people, who use internet for an excessive duration of time in a day can develop mental health problems and "…Scientists also administered self-reported tests to study how internet usage affects the students' mental health. The tests focused on illnesses like depression and anxiety, impulsiveness, inattention and executive functioning, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Researchers found that students who screened positive for internet addiction on both scales had more trouble in dealing with everyday activities" (Health world, 2016).

ODeL is far more cost effective and has the ability to impact considerably more students and thus society. However, it is realized that where there are manifestations of academic dishonesty, this may even lead to endemic corruption (Crittenden, Hanna, & Peterson, 2009). Additionally, the current decade is characterized by huge challenges relating to academic honesty and ethical practice. A further concern is that the quality and standards in ODeL are frequently interrogated where there are high enrolment figures. Quality issues are thus important and the question arises if learning and teaching are, in

fact, able to meet and exceed the fixed and approved standards, such that the graduates from an institution of higher learning will be able to execute desired functions and tasks effectively in their particular fields of study.

On a positive side, ODeL which is highly refined in terms of learning-management systems provides huge prospects for inter-institutional collaboration efforts. What is clear is that academics in ODeL environments are the fundamental players in quality determination since they are the subject matter experts in their particular fields of study. However, unless there are regular maintenance and upgrading of the technological infrastructure which is needed to create a reliable, quality-driven e-learning environment, the faculty members remain hamstrung and cannot perform their important roles as required. It is the academics who ultimately plan the programmes, develop the curricula, manage their courses/programmes and conduct a range of time-consuming administrative duties. Thus, the manner in which an academic approaches their chosen vocation and the degree to which they carry out activities to meet rigorous standards determine the quality of learning and teaching experienced by their students. If they have no effective technological support from IT specialists, they perform sub-optimally and will eventually disengage.

Academics are called upon to familiarize themselves with an ever-growing selection of interactive and multimedia learning resources which may be adopted for their learning environments (Hughes, 2004; Bates, 2008; Haughey, 2010; Tait, 2010). Teaching a socio-economically and culturally diverse student body has important implications, for example in aspects such as which pedagogical approaches to use, mode of service provision, student recruitment and ease of access, progress in learning evaluation, and the administrative systems in place which may all be required to adapt to new demands (Thorn, 2012).

The faculty pedagogical positioning and their approach to education necessitate the augmentation of their awareness of pedagogic opportunities presented by learning technologies. Faculty need to develop their knowledge and skills in online learning design through

professional development programmes that enable them to critically reflect on using technology in their teaching and learning (Daly & Pachler, 2007).

Sound Learning Outcomes

It is evident in current literature that high-quality learning outcomes can be achieved by giving students in higher education institutions greater control over their own learning and by engaging in reflective inquiry and enhanced critical thinking within a constructivist paradigm. In this era of open access and digital-based information and communication, a huge challenge facing higher education is the issue of unethical practices by students. Preparing students to be constantly connected and technology-enabled allows them to participate in a collaborative space which allows, for example, teamwork assignments to be done far more easily than in a traditional modality. It also promotes discussion via forums and online blogs. In this technological age therefore, increasing student's interest and engagement through student-centered interactions and personalized e-learning technologies is no longer a desire but a need.

Ensuring academic honesty is a major challenge for traditional classroom teaching, but it is even a more pressing problem for online course-work in which students submit, for example, individual assignments and projects. How can unethical student practices be eliminated where the use of information technology is manifest for all learning and instruction?

Learner support in ODeL on the part of administrators and also academics, is non-negotiable. This must include all the activities and rudiments in education that respond to a student's need, and which are essentially designed to promote the "cognitive, affective, and systemic realms of the learning process" (Brindley, et. al, 2004). The choice of a suitable Online Student Portal (OSP) is critical for the students and should be easy to use and highly functional as an effective online registration space without students needing to call an administrator to assist them in the process. The portal that is used should be stress-free in terms of security and ease of use and also enable students to pay their fees, view their academic records and it should additionally provide

essential information that students need to be cognizant of. ODeL needs to accommodate different cultures, diverse economic systems, different learners and different programmes of study (Mills, 2003) and this is particularly essential in South Africa where many rural communities lack even the most basic internet connectivity. Beetham (2007) highlights that in adopting a learner-centred approach to design it is critical to know learner differences in specific learning contexts, in order that such differences can be suitably attended to.

The students' ability to effectively use a portal easily, one which is functional, efficient, and especially secure, goes a long way in promoting effective learning outcomes along with sound academic information to assure quality educational attainment. ODeL must be both flexible and adjustable in design if it is to be successful (Tait, 2010). Quality driven learner support services are non-negotiable if students are to prosper in an open and distance e-learning (ODeL) milieu. Student services invariably and ultimately serve as the administrative support of higher education and for many, these are the primary and terminal contact points of the students with an institution (Voorhis & Falkner, 2004). Given the huge problem in ODeL of student dropout, and its negative consequences for students and institutions alike, it is imperative to address possible psychological challenges posed to students and efforts should be made to retain them (Johnston & Simpson, 2006).

The literature suggests that many students feel isolated and are thus demotivated when online and prefer some level of immediacy from the support services which could be conceptualized as non-verbal behaviours that diminish physical and/or psychological distance in interpersonal communications (Bozkaya & Aydin, 2007). There should also be secure personalized services for students, faculty and administrative staff (Presley & Presley, 2009). While employing online portals, ODeLs should be supporting both autonomous learning and collaborative learning through a wide range of "increasingly complex pedagogical structures" (Haughey et al., 2008:15) and their academic and non-academic processes should be conducted via the Internet. This implies that the limits concerning course development and course

delivery are increasingly indistinct and previous course development roles are being reviewed and recreated (Abrioux, 2001:1).

Where institutions fail to deliver quality learner-support services, there is an immediate diminution in learning achievement and satisfaction levels of students drop, leading to increases in already high attrition rates (Nelson, 2007). In online learning environments, the role of academics in designing educationally effective learning environments must be stressed (Bennett et al., 2009). Where these are carefully crafted this will contribute to a reduction in a student's sense of isolation. Academic presence online as well as support made available to students anytime and anywhere (Kenworthy, 2003), is vital to ODeL success. Liao et al. (2011) stress the importance of continuously refining the utility of online portals to meet the demands of students so as to promote devotion to the portal. Thus, all users must be provided with cumulative enjoyable online experiences in a one-stop site if learning outcomes are to be realized. Such experiences must, inter alia, include online discussion forums, both synchronous and asynchronous (Mason, 1998; Jara & Fitri, 2007), where candid views can be expressed and learning exchanges are promoted between academics and students and their peers, in dynamic settings.

Markauskaite and Goodyear (2009:617) conducted a study in order to discover how different mental resources are activated and blended in making complex professional judgments about learning design, teaching and inquiry in specific contexts. Evidence was provided of the need for and the intricacy "of integrating pedagogical frames and ICT tools with the other knowledge frames needed to design productive learning tasks" (2009:621) for education in explicit disciplines. Thus an ideal strategy should pursue the idea of confirming a robust link between pedagogy and how technology is utilised. We are of course assuming that students have the required easy access to education via the use of technology, which might well not be the case due to the socio-economic status of some students and additional problematic areas such as internet reach in remote rural communities.

The Role of the Academic

There is no doubt that the quality of the programmes and courses on offer by ODeL institutions, are to a large extent contingent upon academics who are responsible for them as part of their workload. Academics are required to perform a wide range of tasks with requiring distinct skills and ability. These include, inter alia, curriculum development, course planning and management, updating of all modules by supplementing them with pertinent resources and by presenting new learning activities and assignments, setting of high quality assessments in line with the levels of outcomes, research, community development and in most institutions, a plethora of time consuming and laborious administrative duties. The role of a professor is evolving from instructor to mentor and facilitator, and such a paradigm shift offers great possibilities for advancing the value of quality educational offerings. As student population becomes additionally diverse, and especially in the use of technology (Floyd & Powell, 2004), faculty and administrators need to play a joint role in supporting them.

The faculty member, supported by specialists (Kirkwood & Price, 2006), must strive to create a user-friendly environment so as to take full advantage of quality e-learning modules. Faculty are not merely dispensers of knowledge any longer, but should rather create space in which knowledge can be created, explored, and connected and where also students' liberty to explore is unbounded (Siemens, 2007). Moreover, they should also be a part of suitable learner support services and play their part in generating a sense of belonging for their students (Usun, 2004).

In the South African context, academics are severely overloaded when compared to similar positions abroad. In addition, as stated by Abrioux (2001:1) the old models of distance education now require major revamping as academics take advantage of the new developments in the e-learning environment. This is highly challenging for many academics since the previous support functions in the hands of administrative staff, leading to desired academic student outcomes based on a high quality learning environment for distance learners, are now dissipating and the academics are further burdened by

administration and feel increasingly constrained. Many thus lose the desire for innovative practice implementation and this negatively affects the quality of both teaching and learning, and also research. Burge and Polec (2008) assert that faculty usually need some new teaching models which differ from what they are used to, but there are some who simply view e-learning as a novel way to transmit pre-digested information which should not be the case. The faculty need to change from being teacher-focused knowledge transmitters to a learner-focused knowledge generation (Swan, 2010). However, the efficacy and proficiency of academics is also constrained by what are often inequitable and non-transparent workloads. It is critical that any academic workload model must be fair, realistic and transparent and in line with a university's vision and mission.

Distance education in South Africa cannot currently afford the levels of funding that are ideally needed for a more individual and proactive academic-student interaction approach since this would necessitate much higher levels of staffing and far smaller classes than is currently the case in most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). At the same time, faculty require reasonable workloads (Kenny, 2017).

The number of students taught by an academic greatly influences their workload. Dobele and Rundle-Thiele (2014) assert that academics teaching fewer students tend to have more academic publications in peer-reviewed journals and are internally promoted far quicker when compared to their fellow academics who are teaching far larger groups of students. This is where subject markers and tutors become important role players, but once again with a huge cost implication. The answer then lies in out-of-the-box ODeL initiatives with an increased stress on resource-based course designs and good mentorship which enhances quality teaching and learning. Such initiatives have great positive impacts on desired learning outcomes in ODeL. Carefully developed policies are needed for ODeL institutions to be successful (Collis & van der Wende, 2002) and faculty need to become part and parcel of a community of practice (Laurillard, 2011).

How Technology is Changing Today's Learning

ODeL needs a range of models of how to effectively use technology so as to develop required understanding of the differences in interacting with diverse technologies and how these impact on learning (Price & Oliver, 2007). In ODeL, technological advances are creating deep variations in the way courses are taught. Teaching is far more student-centred and outcomes-based and faculty need to revamp their instructional paradigms. The advent of technology has also led to less teamwork when it comes to developing new course(s) and their related materials (Power, 2007) in which individual faculty designs and delivers asynchronous material online. Technology does however offer multi-modal teaching, and to an extent promotes online research and greater collaboration between students and their peers and also their faculty. There are however cases where faculty use Web-based conference approaches and also social networking services.

Online technology enables students to engage in independent study albeit guided by faculty. Technology is clearly improving the quality of student learning and especially when faculty are driven to add real value including forums, which are both synchronous and asynchronous, blogs, wikis and even some podcasting technologies. Such technology will promote learning and stimulate important discussion between students and their peers as well as faculty (HEFCE, 2018). Students are no longer required to focus on memorizing material, but rather concentrate applying their knowledge to specific problems highlighted in carefully selected case studies. Students should be able to submit assignments online which can also be assessed online, and in some cases they are examined online. They are also able to be involved in collaborative team-learning activities and assessment with any partnering international institutions and invariably get to communicate with faculty more easily (HEFCE, 2018). Virtual learning environments are commonly used nowadays and serve as useful for faculty who are able to upload important documents for students such as academic articles related to an area of study, exercises for students' completion, gamification and quizzes, podcasts, videos, power-point slides and other items such as past examination papers. Such items invariably enhance learning.

Today's e-Learning strategy necessitates the incorporation of a range of knowledge systems and items such as those described above, and various other new advances in distance learning including Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), tablets, e-books, online library resources, and even smartphones which can be used for bolstering needed inspirational support at a time when student attrition is at high levels. The beauty of the technological innovations is that they support the notion of student-centred learning and provide a huge measure of autonomous learning. Technology enabled learning which is well used in carefully crafted systems promotes efficiency, effectiveness and transformation (HEFCE, 2018). Faculty will require assistance to address several pedagogical and technical challenges they may face and such support for them is essential (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). They will need to consider ideal content and also the needed software to support individually paced learning. Course design is becoming increasingly resource-based (Naidu, 2007), and all pedagogical transformation is highly multifaceted and challenging for academics who require good support systems. Learning management systems (LMSs) are bringing e-learning to smart devices making the issue of learning more accessible (Reed, 2017); and virtual classrooms and the use of digital learning resources and textbooks have greatly improved the quality of learning in ODeL. They provide a flexible, challenging and receptive learning environment. Student should now have greater accessibility to all library electronic documents and a range of course related e-books.

Digital learning technology which is used in digital learning includes social learning and can be used to support blended learning. Videos are a very influential and prevailing e-learning tool. Institutions that adopt online video platforms for e-learning tend to have more engaged students, who are able to re-watch videos as the need arises (Reed, 2017). In fact, video and general presentation tools have a deep effect on the quality of academic understanding. The availability of simulation and virtual labs is also a very useful addition (Khan & Iqbal, 2015) and especially in the era of gamification in education. Online collaboration tools are an important aspect for students, both from academic and administrative perspectives.

Wearable E-Learning Tools such as Google Glass and the Apple Watch are trending e-learning wearable devices. The former offers student's special features such as Head Up Display (HUD), which allows them to access supplemental resources while they are engaged in learning. Faculty are also able to monitor their students' performance using live feeds. Learning analytics allow e-learning platforms to tailor-make all aspects of their online activities for students. Through this faculty and students have important access to data such as the time spent on specific assignments, projects, video viewing and even student predilections and generally the effectiveness of an institution's e-learning marketing strategy. A Learner Management System (LMS) allows faculty to evaluate a learner's aptitude and also their progress in a module or other course. An LMS is then an expedient tool for evaluating continuing distance learning creativities (Engelbrecht, 2003). It incorporates a highly diverse use of eLearning technologies and requires great faculty awareness and interest in the use of available technology which should be driven by digital literacy courses in for example the use of digital applications such as podcasting, video recording, Zoom or Skype meetings, blogs, wikis, web-based workspace and course management systems. The idea is to offer students a flexible digital learning experience in which there are also self-correcting learning pathways for them (HEFCE, 2018).

Ethics in ODeL

The contextual factors in which ODeL takes place may encourage student academic dishonesty and this perpetually involves policy, administration issues, mal-use of technology and of course poor care on the part of faculty. It is often the case that student unethical actions are instinctive and unconscious, and thus ethics requires a strong perceptible presence. ODeL is there for students to acquire knowledge and skills relevant to their chosen vocations. In addition, it is also intended to stimulate personal reflection and illumination which facilitates understanding. It is common knowledge that academically dishonest behaviour in ODeL is on the rise and is demonstrated in various ways including inter-alia, plagiarism in which students use the work of others and which they fail to disclose through acceptable citation methods or even fail to acknowledge. Many find it expedient to cheat and some may even condescend to bribery. There are also

instances where students manufacture information and falsify what they present as the fruits of their own labours. Whether in assignments or portfolio work, or other such activities and assessments online, there are cases in which students either offer, or obtain assistance from other parties in their formal academic activities, fabricate information, are guilty of misrepresentation and thus act out-of-line from an ethical perspective and demonstrate that they are found wanting of ethical practice. It is thus vital to integrate academic ethics education in all core programmes so that students and their faculty become conversant with what is expected as an absolute minimum when it comes to academic honesty. Faculty should also be obligated to immediately report where cases of dishonest activity are evident in student submissions and stern action should be meted out to guilty parties.

The internet is a highly technologically workable platform through which students' populations can be accessed; however, this also poses a number of ethical challenges and dilemmas for students. A review of current literature relating to ethics in student submissions to universities emphasizes the fact that very little research has been conducted in this area when it comes to ODeL. Berge and Mrozowski (2001) state that the research that has been undertaken typically concentrates on issues such as the impact of individual technologies on e-learning rather than on the interface between multiple technologies in e-learning. The achievement of ethical education is necessarily important for ODeL providers and the promotion of an academic culture displaying integrity is non-negotiable (Anitha & Harsha, 2013) and this is especially the case in the era of digital education in which opportunities exist for students to select 'an easy way out'. The use of technology in ODeL is self-evident but it has regrettably also become a major reason for the high incidence of dishonesty in student submissions (Butakov, Dyagilev & Tskhay, 2012).

Institutions need to enforce standards, especially ethics and academic honesty and when students behave badly, there must be severe consequences. Where there are big ethical breaches, students should be suspended and expelled. This is where universities should not lose their souls and "more schools should be willing to throw people out for bad behaviour. They wouldn't have to throw too many people out

before everyone learned the lesson…the problem starts with the university" (Bisoux, 2016: page?). Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke (2005) identified three major implications of academic dishonesty on the quality of education. Firstly, academic dishonesty threatens the equity and efficacy of instructional measurement. This means that students' comparative abilities are not correctly evaluated; Secondly, students who cheat undoubtedly reduce their level of learning so they are ill-prepared for advanced study or application of knowledge. Thirdly, on a societal level, it is probable that students who lack academic integrity will not respect ethics in their future professional roles as business leaders. The credibility of degrees and university credits can also not be ensured where there are unethical practices in assessment. ODeL institutions have an enormous capacity to impact society in many ways, and especially in providing ethical graduates. They thus need to differentiate themselves in the online marketplace. The world is changing rapidly in many ways that are not conducive to ethics. For example, there are numerous online sites which guide students on how to be academically dishonest and not risk being found out (Howell, Sorenson & Tippets, 2009). A socio-technological phenomenon popularly referred to as "the online dis-inhibition effect", could well be responsible for some other forms of unethical behaviour that digital technologies appear to be facilitating (Suller, 2005) and ODeL providers need to be cognisant of this. The fundamental aspect to delivering excellent online education is to provide the same high standards and commitment to ODeL programmes as those offered in the traditional programmes.

If ODeL institutions wish to maintain their accreditation they will be required to validate that they have processes in place that will moderate opportunities for students to submit work unethically. Safeguarding academic honesty is in any event a challenge in the traditional classroom context but it is far more pressing a problem for online course where technology use is self-evident to learning and teaching. It seems that the more technology advances, the more innovative and creative students become in finding electronic avenues to act dishonestly. Literature refers to digital cheating as "a term used to describe students who find a way to cheat using computer technology. One specific form of digital cheating is "e-cheating" which specifically

relates to the use of the World Wide Web to assist with cheating" (Rogers, 2006).

It cannot be acceptable that student success which is devoid of ethics should be accepted (Dixon, 2011). There is thus a dire need to review the unethical issues which plague ODeL given the increasing use of e-learning. The creation of an integrated model for ethical education is required through which academic dishonesty can be eliminated while an academic culture and ethical practices in ODeL can be engendered. Where institutions offer ODeL the issue of quality assurance of integrity is becoming more rigorous than ever before, and this is important since the academic culture of any university must essentially be regarded as one which embraces integrity and ethical practice in all areas.

Bombaro and Mitchell (2012) ascertained that when students are given well thought out guidelines and valuable information concerning issues of academic integrity, academic dishonesty diminishes. The setting of ethical standards for academic work by students is important as it sets the tone for their work and coherently communicates what their behaviour and attitude should be to ODeL. If students are to make the correct choice when faced with moral dilemmas such as for example, plagiarising or cheating, they should be able to turn to a code of ethics which can guide and even encourage them to act ethically as is the case for all educators (Campbell, 2001). Faculty need to develop methodologies and styles that engross students and make them mainly responsible for achieving the learning goals. Faculty should thus seek to implement active learning methodologies and challenge students individually and in a group context, by using case-studies, problem-based learning, group projects and even simulations.

A carefully considered code of ethics would be adhered to by all ODeL students if their sense of dignity, self-esteem and integrity are enthused by it and the way in which it is made available to them. The code should systematically improve student performance by educating and guiding them to achieve lawful and appropriate individual academic goals. It will assist them to make informed decisions and experience a sense of true accomplishment. The academic decisions they will make will be

based on both morally and ethically acceptable stances regarding their academic work. It is critical that ODeL institutions and their faculty self-reflect and challenge their current teaching roles and what they impart to students. Faculty and administrators alike must be provided with guidelines and possible interventions for addressing academic dishonesty as it manifests. Effective faculty training will lead to better-quality student behaviour and this invariably enhances the academic milieu. Course construction and content must be cognisant of academic dishonesty likelihood. The methods used to teach ODeL programmes should make more effective use of online learning platforms which support ethical academic submissions by students. Where there is unchecked academic dishonesty in education this can manifest in dishonesty in the workplace. There is no doubt that academic dishonesty by students undermines the veracity of the entire ODeL institution, and where publicized does not bode well for sustainability.

Conclusion

There are numerous issues and challenges that online distance higher education (ODeL) poses**.** Distance education (DE), again, is increasingly global, with universities leveraging cutting-edge technologies to place education within the grasp of many more individuals and this requires additional skills. It is hoped that the various suggestions proffered in this conceptual article, as to what academics can do to improve their offerings and mitigate unethical academic practices will be noted by readers and enhance the quality of ODeL. Furthermore, ODeL requires a highly effective use of technology by faculty as well as deep understanding of the differences in interacting with diverse technologies and how these impact on teaching and learning. ODeL should strive to accommodate different cultures in diverse economic systems, diverse learners and diverse programmes of study, and remove a sense of isolation that many feel when operating in this milieu. Students should ideally experience a series of cumulative enjoyable online experiences in a one-stop site if learning outcomes are to be fully realized.

It is evident that, a carefully crafted moral education approach and well-conceived course design are needed to construct a sound academic

culture and promote the desired levels of integrity. Faculty should not merely be dispensers of knowledge; they should rather create space in which knowledge can be created, explored, and connected by students who should have total liberty to do so. Moreover, faculty also need to be a part of an apposite learner support services team, including administrators, and should play their part in generating a sense of belonging for their students. If students are to have truly worthwhile learning experiences and ultimately benefit society, they need to recognise the importance of academic honesty and become more responsible for their own learning. Their mindset should not condemn them if they honestly go through an ODeL which is structured characteristically to operate on their integrity without personal contact and supervision by both the lecturer and administrator.

References

Abrioux, D. (2001). Converting to online course and program delivery: Global perspectives. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 1 (2).

Anitha, C., & Harsha, T. S. (2013). Ethical perspectives in open and distance education. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*-TOJDE, 14(1), pp.193-201.

Arinto, P. B. (2013). A framework for developing competencies in open and distance e-learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning,* 14 (1). Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1393

Bates, T. (2005). Technology, E-Learning and Distance Education. New York: Routledge.

Bates, T. (2008). Transforming distance education through new technologies. In T. Evans, M. Haughey & D. Murphy (Eds.), *International handbook of distance education* (pp. 217-236). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

Bennett, S., Agostinho, S., Lockyer, L. & Harper, B. (2009). Researching learning design in open, distance, and flexible learning: Investigating approaches to supporting design processes and practices. *Distance Education*. 30 (2), 175-177.

Berge, Z. L. & Mrozowski, S. (2001). Review of research in distance education: 1990 to 1999. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 15(3), pp.5 19.

Bishop, T. (2003). Linking cost effectiveness with institutional goals: Best practices in online education. In J. Bourne and J. C. Moore (Eds.) Elements of Quality Online Education: Practice and direction. Needham, MA.: Sloan-C, pp.75-86.

Bisoux, T. (2016). The World has changed. *BizEd,* AACSB International, March/April, pp.71-74.

Bombaro, C. & Mitchell, E. (2012). Doing honest work: A campus-wide approach. In: 5th International Plagiarism Conference Proceedings & Abstracts 2012: Celebrating Ten Years of Authentic Assessment (CD-ROM), Newcastle GB: Iparadigms Europe Ltd., 2012.

Bozkaya, M. & Aydin, E.I. (2007). The relationship between teacher immediacy behaviors and learners' perceptions of social presence and satisfaction in open and distance education: The case of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 6 (4). Retrieved May 11, 2018 from http://www.tojet.net/articles/v6i4/647.pdf

Brimble, M. & Stevenson-Clarke, P. (2005). Perceptions of the prevalence and seriousness of academic dishonesty in Australian universities. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 32 (3), pp.19-44.

Brindley, J. E., Walti, C. & Zawacki-Richter, O. (2004). Learner support on open, distance and online learning environments. *Bibliotheks-und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg 2004*. Available at http://www.unioldenburg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/c3l/master/mde/download/asfvolume9_ebook.pdf [Accessed on 23 August 2017]

Burge, E. J. & Polec, J. (2008). Transforming learning and teaching in practice: Where change and consistency interact. In T. Evans, M. Haughey & D. Murphy (Eds.), *International Handbook of Distance Education* (pp. 237-258). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

Butakov, S., Dyagilev, V. & Tskhay, A. (2012). Protecting students' intellectual property in the web plagiarism detection process.

The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 13(5), pp.1-19**.**

Cambell, E. (2001). Let it be done: Trying to put ethical standards into practice, *Journal of Education Policy*, 16 (5), pp.395-411.

Cleveland-Innes, M. F. (2010). Teaching and learning in distance education: Enter a new era. In M. F. Cleveland-Innes & D. R.Garrison (Eds.), *An Introduction to Distance Education: Understanding Teaching and Learning in a New Era* (pp.1-10). New York: Routledge.

Collis, B. & van der Wende, M. (2002). Models of technology and change in higher education. An international comparative survey on the current and future use of ICT in higher education. Enschede, Netherlands: University of Twente.

Crittenden, V. L., Hanna, R. C. & Peterson, R. A. (2009). The cheating culture: A global societal phenomenon, *Business Horizons*, Elsevier, 52(4), 337-346.

Daly, C. & Pachler, N. (2007). Learning with others in mind. In J. Pickering, C. Daly, & N. Pachler (Eds.), *New Designs for Teachers' Professional Learning*. London, UK: Institute of Education.

Davis, A. (2001). Athabasca University: Conversion from traditional distance education to online courses, programs and services. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning,* 1 (2). Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/19

Dixon, S. (2011). The plagiarism detection learning curve – the experience of a further education college. *Journal of Research & Scholarly Output*, 4, pp.13-19.

Engelbrecht, E. (2003). A look at e-learning models: investigating their value for developing an e-learning strategy. *Progressio*, 25(2), 38 -47.

Floyd, D. L., & Casey-Powell, D. (2004). New roles for student support services in distance learning. New directions for community colleges, no. 128, Winter 2004 © Wiley Periodicals, Inc. Retrieved April 3, 2014 from http://faculty.education.illinois.edu/abenson/472cc/w4articles/floyd_chap7.pdf

Garrison, R. (2009). Implications of online learning for the conceptual development and practice of distance education. *Journal of Distance Education/Revue de L' education a Distance*, 23 (2), 93-104.

Haughey, M. (2010). Teaching and learning in distance education before the digital age. In M. F. Cleveland-Innes, & D. R. Garrison, (Eds.). *An Introduction to Distance Education. Understanding Teaching and Learning in a New Era*. New York: Routledge.

Haughey, M., Evans, T. & Murphy, D. (2008). Introduction: From correspondence to virtual learning environments. In T. Evans, M. Haughey, & D. Murphy (Eds.), *International Handbook of Distance Education* (pp. 1-24). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

Healthworld (2016). "Excessive use of Internet can lead to mental health issues: Study", *The Economic Times,* September 20, 2016, Available online at: https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/diagnostics/excessive-use-of-internet-can-lead-to-mental-health-issues-study/54428193 [Accessed 20 May, 2018]

HEFCE (2018). Higher Education Funding Council for England. Efficiency and value for money in higher education. Available online at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/efficient/ [Accessed on 09 July 2018]

Howell, S. L., Sorenson, D. & Tippets, H. R. (2009). The new (and old) news about cheating for distant educators. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 12* (3). Retrieved on 15 December 2015 from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall123/howell123.html.

Hughes, J. (2004). Technology learning principles for preservice and in-service teacher education. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 4 (3), 345-362.

Johnston, V., & Simpson, O. (2006). Retentioneering higher education in the UK: Attitudinal barriers to addressing student retention in universities. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 8, 28–36.

Kenny, J. (2017). Re-empowering academics in a corporate culture: An exploration of workload and performativity in a university. *Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-0170143-z

Kenworthy, B. (2003). Supporting the student in new teaching and learning environments. *Rethinking Learner Support in Distance Education,* No.104. Routledge Falmer: NY

Khan, K. U. & Iqbal, J. (2015). Strategic Planning for E-Learning Implementation in Higher Education, IAMOT Conference Proceedings. Available online at http://iamot2015.com/2015proceedings/documents/P150.pdf [accessed on 22June 2018]

Kirkwood, A. & Price, L. (2006). Adaptation for a changing environment: Developing learning and teaching with information and communication technologies. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 7 (2). Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/294/614

Kirkwood, A. (2009). E-learning: you don't always get what you hope for. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education* 18 (2), 107-121.

Laurillard, D. (2011). Supporting teacher development of competencies in the use of learning technologies. In *Proceedings of IITE 2010: Policy, Open Educational Resources and Partnership*. Moscow: UNESCO Institute of Information Technologies in Education.

Liao, C., Liao, C., Chuang, Shu-Hui., Kuo, Pu-Yuan & To, Pui-Lai. (2011). Factors influencing the intended use of web portals. *Online Information Review*, 35 (2), 237-254.

Markauskaite, L. & Goodyear, P. (2009). Designing for complex ICT-based learning: Understanding teacher thinking to help improve educational design. Paper presented at the 26th Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ASCILITE), Auckland, Australia.

Masterman, L. & Vogel, M. (2007). Practices and process of design for learning. In Beetham, H. & Sharpe, R. (Eds.), *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age* (pp. 52-63). London: Routledge.

Mills, R. (2003). The centrality of learner support in open and distance learning. *Rethinking Learner Support in Distance Education*, No.104. Routledge Falmer: NY.

Mishra, P. & Koehler, M. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A new framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108 (6), 1017-1054.

Naidu, S. (2007). Instructional designs for optimal learning. In M.G. Moore (Ed.), *Handbook of Distance Education*. New York and London: Routledge.

Nelson, R. (2007). Student support services for distance education students in nursing programs. *Annual Review of Nursing Education*, 5, 183-XIII.

Presley, A. & Presley, T. (2009). Factors influencing student acceptance and use of academic portals. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 21(3), 167-182.

Price, S. & Oliver, M. (2007). A framework for conceptualising the impact of technology on teaching and learning. *Educational Technology & Society,* 10 (1), 16-27.

Reed, V. M. (2017). 10 powerful e-Learning tools trending right now, e-Learning- *Training Industry*. Available online at https://trainingindustry.com/articles/e-learning/10-powerful-e-learning-tools-trending-right-now/ [Accessed on 13 July 2018]

Rogers, C. F. (2006) Faculty perceptions about e-cheating during online testing. Consortium for computing sciences in colleges. *Journal of Computing Sciences in Colleges (JCSC)*, 22 (2), pp. 206 – 212.

Siemens, G. (2007). Networks, ecologies and curatorial teaching. Retrieved from http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=41484

Suller, J. (2005) The online disinhibition effect. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 2(2), pp. 184-188.

Swan, K. (2010). Teaching and learning in post-industrial distance education. In M. F. Cleveland-Innes & D. R. Garrison (Eds.), *An introduction to distance education: Understanding teaching and learning in a new era* (pp. 108-134). New York: Routledge.

Tait, A. (2010). Foreword. In M. F. Cleveland-Innes & D. R. Garrison (Eds.), *An introduction to distance education: Understanding teaching and learning in a new era*. New York: Routledge.

Thorn, R. (2012) in Thorn, R., System Performance – from fixed to flexible learning Lynn, M. & Campbell, C. (eds.) Enhancing flexibility in higher education: *A Report on the Supported Flexible Learning Project undertaken by the Institutes of Technology in Ireland*, Institutes of Technology Ireland. Available online at https://www.ioti.ie/about-us/flexible-learning-project [Accessed on 28 July 2018]

UNESCO (2002). Open and Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy Consideration. Available at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001284/128463e.pdf [Accessed 14 March 2018]

Usun, S. 2004. Learner Support Services in Distance Education System (A Case Study in Turkey). *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*. October 2004 ISSN 1302- 6488 Volume: 5 Number: 4. Retrieved April 3, 2014 from http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde16/articles/s_usun.htm

Vorhiss, S. N. V. & Falkner, T. (2004). Transformation of Student Services: The Process and Challenge of Change. Retrieved June 9, 2018 from http://www.c3l.unioldenburg.de/cde/support/fa04/Vol.%209%20chapters/VanVorhissFalkner.pdf