Harnessing New Media to Teach and Learn Communication Skills: Possibilities and Challenges at the Technical University of Kenya

Alice Wanjira Kiai and Claudior Kerubo Onsare
Department of Language and Communication Studies, The Technical University of Kenya
E-mail: ally.kiai@gmail.com

Sub-Theme: Arts, Social Sciences, Entrepreneurship for Societal Transformation

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the possibility of adopting Blended Learning in the teaching and learning of UCCC 1101: Communication Skills, a common course offered by the Department of Language and Communication Studies at the Technical University of Kenya. The purpose of the course is to enable students use the four basic language skills effectively and efficiently for communication in academic and all human settings. In 2017, the scope of the course was broadened to include content on the use of “New Media” in academic settings, which inspired the present study. New Media includes interactive, two-way communication that uses some form of computer technology, such as social media, DVDs, blogs and wikis. The study sought to examine the existing challenges faced by instructors and learners in meeting the expected learning outcomes of Communication Skills at The Technical University of Kenya, and to explore how New Media can be incorporated as a tool to overcome these challenges. In 2017, University records indicated an enrolment of 2416 first year diploma and degree students. The Department subsequently divided learners into five groups of approximately 500 students each for purposes of teaching Communication Skills. One group was selected using convenience sampling, leading to a population of 500 students representing 16 departments. Subsequently, snowballing was used to obtain a student sample of 200 participants. All six instructors were included in the study. Both students and instructors responded to a questionnaire. The findings will be of use in providing information on the effectiveness of the current methods of delivery of Communication Skills in view of the expected learning outcomes, and the viability of incorporating new technologies to address existing challenges. In addition, the study provides a basis for further research into innovative methods of teaching and learning of common courses, which are generally characterized by large class sizes.

Key words: Common University Courses, Large Classes, Communication Skills, Innovation, New Media