

INTEGRATING GROUP—SELF EVALUATION IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Every instructional process involves a strategic assessment system for a complete teaching leaning circle. Any assessment system which is seriously flawed, should call for a change, a rethink or a repackaging for sustainability, and to be a part of teaching and learning. Assessment should be meaningful to both the assessors and the assessees. The learners who are the assessees in this case should not be left out in the process of assessment. This is an era of democratization and liberalization of the educational opportunities through the use of Open and Distance Learning. Therefore the components of the educational system, including assessment and evaluation should also be democratized through the group- self evaluation of learning outcomes in the Open and Distance Learning system.

This paper takes a look at the benefits of the group- self evaluation, the concept of Open and Distance Learning, characteristics of learners in Open and Distance Learning and integrating group- self evaluation in the Open and Distance Learning system.

Keywords: Assessment, group-self evaluation, open learning, distance education, open and distance learning.

INTRODUCTION

In a university programme concerned with learning and teaching in higher education, an important component is in the form of a group presentation. In Open and Distance Learning (ODL), a very important component of the study skills is group discussion. This involves self, peer, and group participations. Learning experiences of students can be enhanced through individual, peer or group-self assessment of assignments, projects and or tests. Much recent literature on assessment in higher education gives strong support to the use of both group and self- assessment (Boud1995, Brown and Knight 1994, Gibbs 1992, Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997, Brown and Glasner 1999, Brown and Dove 1990). According to Boud (1995), self-assessment is a transferable skill which is a principal part of the students' learning experience. For Brown and Knight (1994), students will be expected to practice self- evaluation in every area of their lives on graduation and it is a good exercise in self- development to ensure that their abilities are extended. Assessment or evaluation is an integral part of the learning process. It therefore becomes unfair to exclude the learner in the exercise. This is important because of some evidence that the assessment of learning outcomes carried out by the teachers for formative evaluation of students' performances or academic achievement is not perfect.

They are coloured with biases and abuses which tend to make the evaluation invalid and unreliable. (Sexton 1961, Metzener 1971, Oboemata 1980, Akinjobi 1982, Angelo 2000, and Pratt 2003). The point being made is that the learner should be involved in the assessment of his educational achievement. This means that if we want to focus instruction on the total development of the learner, he must be seriously involved in every aspect of the instruction.

Some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of this method of developing test instruments and in helping students develop real understanding. (Heller and Hollabough 1992; Sweller 1988; Mawer and Ward 1982; cited in Scott et al 2003). But Scott et al (2003), confirm that it is a proven method to teach both understanding and problem-solving which use fairly complex problems that require conceptual understanding and a systematic attack and to explicitly teach and coach good problem-solving strategies.

According to Lewis (2006), learning experiences of students can be enhanced through individual or group assessments of assignment, projects and tests. This is necessary for continuous improvement and appraisal of the quality of instruction and overall effectiveness of teaching and learning (Palomba and Banta 1999, Angelo (2000).

Group- self evaluation activities can be a useful and valuable avenue in helping students promote personal and academic growth including developing their critical skills in the evaluation process. It results in their consciously improving how they learn. If we want teachers to be more objective and less personally involved in the outcomes of learning than the students are, it becomes very necessary to encourage group- self assessment in our school system especially in the ODL system. This is because according to Curtz (2006), the deepest reasons for asking students to formally assess their own work have little to do with a particular piece of work. They have to do with the students' development over the long run.

To this effect, we expect pleasure, enduring interest and the ongoing illumination of experience by ideas to affect the quality of student's academic work. The need for students to practice self- assessment arises in order to improve the quality of their objective work. To Curtz (2006), the practice of self- assessment is a central way for students to acquire the reflective habits of mind which are essential to their ongoing capacities to do good work and to progressively improve their work overtime. This will bring about growth in intelligence or thinking, which is precisely growth in the capacity for ongoing reflective self- assessment. Curtz (2006), says that this is the core of Dewey's analysis of the difference between mere activity and educational experience in democracy and education. Democratization in the educational processes has become very popular. Therefore group-self evaluation of learning outcomes should be popularized in our school system especially in the ODL situation. The rest of this paper discusses the benefits of group- self evaluation of learning outcomes, the concept of ODL, characteristics of the learners in ODL and integrating the group self evaluation in the ODL system.

BENEFITS OF GROUP- SELF EVALUATION

There are so many benefits derivable from the use of group- self evaluation in our school system. According to Langan and Wheeler (2003), the potential benefits are:

- **An educational process that installs autonomy in learners.**
- **Empowerment of the learner in a learning environment.**
- **Development of learners' confidence in assessment/ marking (through practice).**
- **Developments of learners to self- evaluate and reflect.**
- **Greater understanding of what is required by teachers in assessment.**
- **Interactive classes for marking / feedback.**
- **Reflection on recently completed assessments with full explanation of the answer (improving information and understanding).**
- **Clear, open marking systems (seeing what is required and improving work).**
- **Seeing standards set by peers as well as mistakes of others and avoiding them in future.**
- **Gaining an ability to 'stand back' from own work for assessment purposes. (an essential ability of an objective, unbiased scientist).**
- **Rapid way for a teacher to assess a large amount of students' work and provide specific feedback.**

Commenting on the group- self evaluation the Institute of Interactive Media and Learning (2004), says that it has a role to play in formative assessment and helps the learners to make independent judgments of their own and others' work, and lists the advantages as;

- **Helps the students to become more autonomous, responsible and involved.**
- **Encourages students to critically analyze work done by them and others, rather than simply seeing a mark.**
- **Helps to clarify assessment criteria.**
- **Gives students a wider range of feedback.**
- **Reduces the marking load on the teacher**
- **Several groups can be run at the same time as not all the groups require the presence of the teacher.**

For Boud (1995), self assessment is a transferable skill and is a principal part of the students' learning experience. And to Brown and Knights(1994), students will be expected to practice self-evaluation in every day life and in every area of their lives on graduation. It is a good exercise in self development to ensure that their abilities are extended. Witson (2002), listed a number of perceived advantages as:

- **Students have more ownership of the assessment process.**
- **It can involve students in devising and understanding assessment criteria and in making judgment.**
- **It encourages formative assessment- learning through feedback.**
- **It has validity—it measures what it is supposed to measure.**
- **It encourages the reflective student (autonomous learner).**
- **It can emphasise the process not just the product.**
- **It is expected in working situations.**
- **It encourages intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation.**
- **It challenges the role of the teacher as the sole arbiter of assessment.**

THE CONCEPT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Open and Distance Learning refers to educational patterns, approaches and strategies that permit people to learn with no barriers in respect of time and space, age and previous educational qualification—no entry qualification, no age limit, no regards to sex, race, tribe, state of origin etc. (Alaezi, 2005).

According to Jegede (2005), it has developed from a modest and inconsequential beginning through correspondence courses to a full-fledged modern day technology—facilitated, flexible and learner driven, self-directed learning which involves learners who are often in locations remote from the institutions and/or the instructional or tutorial facilitators. ODL is a composite concept. This is because it is made up of two components. These are Open learning and Distance Education. To Jegede (2007), open learning has the flexibility of/and access to instruction in order to ensure broad availability of educational opportunities to all. Openness disregards age, previous level of academic achievement and other factors such as sex, rigid evaluation system, social and cultural barriers to education. Openness removes all factors which create artificial barriers to education as a life-long pursuit in a democratic environment. It makes education more learner-centred, using a wide range of teaching strategies and media. According to Holmberg (1997), it is a system of education that does not operate through convention which is essentially restrictive in nature—admission restriction, attendance restrictions, subject combination restrictions among others.

On the other hand, Distance Education lays emphasis on the physical distance which does not permit direct interaction between the teacher and the learner. The striking difference from face to face or contact education is the apartness of the teacher and the learner. This is why Otto-Peters (1993), says that it is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes rationalized by the application of division of labour and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technological media, especially for the purpose of reducing the physical distance between the learner and the teacher or the distance learning institution.

It makes use of high quality self-learning materials which make it possible to teach a large number of students at the same time and wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning. The combination of Distance Education and Open Learning will give a composite picture in the context of the term "Open and Distance Learning". According to Otto-Peters (1993), this composite picture can be viewed when we take ODL as a special form of education in which:

- **Teachers and students work apart from each other, i.e. at a distance.**
- **Teachers and students do not communicate "eye ball to eye ball" with each other.**
- **Printed materials are exchanged with the aid of a mailing system.**
- **Learning usually takes place in the students' home.**
- **Teaching and learning process assumes the form of self study but guided by the teacher.**
- **Learning and learning processes allow a degree of openness with regards to access, age , goals, methods, duration, location among others.**
- **The student does not cease to work for a living as it is a study alongside work.**

ODL provides affordable, cost effective and flexible educational opportunities for all. It accommodates diverse learning styles. It provides access to remote and naturally inaccessible and under-represented groups. It meets the specific and special educational needs of variety of learners. It also dwells and thrives on economies of scale. It is highly recommended as an avenue to learning in ways most appropriate, efficient and effective to the individual learners.

Characteristics of Learners in ODL

Distance learners are people who because of time, geographical locations or other constraints choose not to attend a traditional classroom. Financial considerations, family obligations, or work requirements may point to distance education as an appropriate way to meet their educational needs and goals. According to Looksmart (2008), they come from a wide variety of background s and are of all ages. They turn to ODL largely for convenience.

They are highly motivated to succeed. They are disciplined to incorporate study time into their busy daily lives. Some of the characteristics as itemized by Rowntree (2008) are:

- Mostly from 35—49 years old (some are more some are less).
- Come from a variety of organizations including public sector, but a few have no job.
- Some are sponsored, but most are self funded.
- Some seek to develop work skills, others to prove themselves.
- A few have degrees but most have A-levels or less.
- Few have management experiences, but many are skilled in craft or profession.
- Most have relevant experience, e.g. of being managed or of managing children or family budgets.
- Few have idea of management as an academic discipline.
- Some have shaky self-esteem.
- They usually have work or family pressure.
- Some have partners who are unsupportive.
- Few have tried distance learning before.
- Most see the study skills as rusty or undeveloped.
- Most of them are activists/pragmatists rather than theorists or reflectors.
- Most have done no systematic studying since leaving school.
- They differ in their types and level of learning expertise.
- Some will be apprehensive about relating to a teacher.
- They will have or get access to a variety of equipment.
- Most of them are paying for the programmes themselves.

INTEGRATING THE GROUP- SELF EVALUATION IN THE ODL SYSTEM

ODL, more than most other kinds of learning, often claims to be learner- centred. Many people come to the educational arena with different backgrounds and experiences. People's lives run in different ways. Therefore, the educational and training situation has become segmented and diversified. ODL providers now face new demands from a greater varieties of learners- more matured ones. These learners have rights as well as responsibilities.

We have to agree to think of our learners in ODL as our partners in learning. This means that for us to focus instruction on the total development of the learner, he must be seriously involved in all aspects of the instruction including assessment and evaluation.

Considering the characteristics of the learners in the ODL system and the benefits derivable from the use of group- self assessment of learning outcomes, it becomes necessary to integrate group- self assessment in the ODL system. This is because ODL is democratic and learner- centred.

Therefore this should be extended to the assessment process in ODL. The learners are matured and responsible enough to express their capacity for reflective assessment.

CONCLUSION

The modern world is moving towards democratization and liberalization of educational opportunities through the use of open learning and/or ODL. Therefore educational should not be left out. It should be democratized, through group- self evaluation. This is because of its mutuality. Every body should judge. Everybody is judged.

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