

## **Overcoming the split-personality syndrome in Open and Distance Learning (ODL): The dilemma of conventionally trained part-time tutors.**

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**Abstract:** *ODL provides unlimited choices and has a positive impact on the socio-economic transformation of people through life-long learning skills and learner autonomy. ODL as a philosophy in open learning, as a mode of delivery and as a field of practice is facing a severe threat in terms of its nature of delivery. Due to the large numbers of lecturers from conventional institutions, ODL institutions because of the nature of their operations end up hiring these lecturers as part-time tutors whose training is not deeply rooted in ODL systems of learning and philosophies. Therefore, in an attempt to deliver, the hired tutor normally, consciously or unconsciously, slides back into lecturing against the demands of the ODL which are tutoring and interactivity. As a result, the tutor fails to identify with the roles and functions of ODL practitioners. The students who are supposed to lead the way with questions and discussions are also lost in this dilemma. For these reasons, students are not normally aware of the nature of learning that they are supposed to undertake. In most cases, if ODL trained tutors come and start tutoring instead of lecturing, they are normally shunned. The main thrust of this study is on how to manage or overcome split-personality situations. ODL learning philosophies normally respond to its demands, society's welfare needs and national development interests. The philosophies in question should be post-modernism, social constructivism and person – centered approaches. Social constructivist discourse provides interaction and people's interpretation of their world experiences (Freedman and Combs, 1996). Through the social constructivist philosophy, Fraser (2006) emphasizes learning as a process of social construction, where learners, first and foremost learn from their interaction rather than merely relying on lectures or study materials. We conducted in-depth interviews with ODL students, conventionally trained tutors and ODL trained tutors in order to establish how best they can find each other. Study participants were purposively sampled to enable researchers to identify data-rich sources. Document analysis was also conducted on the ODL modules in order to establish their tutorship wellbeing and interactivity. Interview proceedings were recorded, transcribed, validated, segmented and coded. Data were analysed using the thematic content approach. The major findings were that while modules used in ODL are very interactive, conventionally trained tutors prefer lecturing to tutoring and learners prefer to be lectured to. The major recommendation was that conventionally trained tutors should be staff developed in the ODL mode of delivery.*

**Key Words:** *Open and Distance Learning, Philosophy, Life-long learning, Post-modernism, Social constructivist, Split-personality*

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### **I. Introduction**

When ODL was instituted long way back in time, the idea was not that it would serve as a sub-set of conventional learning or as a lower order form of learning but as a mode of learning in its own right. ODL has the capacity to provide unlimited choices as well as having positive impact on the socio-economic transformation of people through life-long learning skills and learner autonomy. The overwhelming numbers of graduates from conventional system institutions may result in such graduates seeking employment (part-time or full-time) from normally, mainly, one ODL institution within a given country, as is the case in Zimbabwe. Given employment in ODL institutions, these lecturers may teach ODL students basing on the systems in which they were hatched to the detriment of the ODL system which encourages tutoring and interactive learning styles. For that reason, the lecturer is caught up in a dilemma of delivery challenges. As such, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the lecturer is found doing what he/she knows best, that is lecturing and as a result the ODL system suffers. To make matters worse, ODL learners may not be familiar with studying at a distance, which requires them to be autonomous and independent learners who have a good control over their learning (Gunawardena and McIsaac, 2004). This study proceeded on the assumption that by failing to identify themselves with the roles and functions of ODL practitioners these lecturers are doing more harm than good. Similarly, by failing to know the nature of learning that they should engage in, ODL learners are also major accomplices in an already defective process. The main thrust of this study was to come up with clear strategies of tutoring and learning firmly and deeply rooted in ODL systems of learning.

## **II. Background To The Study**

The most critical issue in this debate is to clarify the meaning of ODL since the thrust of this research is centered on that. Perraton (2010) defines distance education as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. This means that there is actually physical distance in distance learning. Ibid (2010) goes further to define open learning as an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on the study are minimized in terms of access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, or any of these. Perraton (2010: 95) coined the term open and distance learning to come up with the following definition:

Open and distance learning is used as an umbrella term to include both distance education and open learning. Open educational resources are defined as educational materials, made freely available through technology, for consultation, use or adaptation on a non-commercial basis.

Patterson's views on ODL are echoed by Holinberg (1977: 9) who reiterates that:

Open and distance learning is the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in the lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation.

In our view, as conventionally trained lecturers are recruited by an ODL institution for either a part-time or full-time work, not enough efforts are made to familiarize the lecturer with the norms and values of distance education. Sometimes after a bit of orientation, these tutors would still want to prove that their system is better than the ODL one. As such they would make a deliberate effort not to change because of poor perceptions towards ODL institutions. Normally it begins with issues of purely simple semantics, for instance in ODL systems, there are no lecturers but tutors or instructors whereas in conventional institutions, a tutor is lower than the level of a lecturer. As a result it is somehow demeaning for a lecturer from the conventional learning institution to come to an ODL institution only to be called a tutor.

In the case of Zimbabwe, students who enroll for ODL may not have background knowledge of the delivery mode used in ODL institutions. They are products of a conventional learning system from pre-school, primary and then secondary. They are also not sufficiently trained to engage in the learning system that is completely different from what they already know. As a result they are also not aware of the system that they are supposed to operate in.

In this respect, ODL students benefit from the guided learning materials, and have little guidance from instructors. Instructors should be made aware that students have various ways of taking the knowledge and information. Instructors need to modify to ODL format (Hawk and Shah, 2007). This means that, the hired conventionally trained instructors need to modify their teaching to the requirements of ODL. Peters and Britz (2008: 18) also concur that:

. . . open and distance education involves a commitment to openness and is therefore inevitably a political and social project . . . bound with philosophical foundations of modern education with its commitments to freedom, citizenship, knowledge for all, social progress and individual transformation.

This assertion also means that the bucket system of teaching is not permissible in ODL. One thing that needs to be clear to the proponents of conventional learning system is that, conventional approaches to teacher education have not met all the demands of upon the profession and this has led to an interest in ODL alternatives (Perraton, Creed and Robinson, 2002).

### **Philosophical orientations of ODL**

ODL doesn't operate in a vacuum but it is deeply entrenched in progressive philosophical orientations. Within the philosophical orientations of teaching, Zinn (1998) distinguishes five philosophies into which educators of adults can be divided: i) Behavioural – the one that promotes competency, development of skills and behavioural change. It assures conformity to standards and social expectations. ii) Liberal Arts – develop the intellectual capacity of the students, increases learning in the broadest sense and furnishes a general and multifaceted education. iii) Progressive – supports responsible participation in society, offers the students practical knowledge and problem-solving skills. iv) Humanistic – increases personal growth and development of the students, in such a way to facilitate individual self-realisation. v) Radical – achieves fundamental changes in society, through education, in social, cultural, political and economic order. These philosophies are affected by the experiences that each instructor has had throughout his/her career as a teacher, or, better said, by influences of other instructors in his/her own time as a student. These philosophies can be better described as 'person centered.' They can also be complemented by other philosophies like constructivism and connectivism. Together, these philosophies will be discussed in detail, later in this unfolding discussion. The idea is to find out how they influence open and distance learning in order to circumvent the 'the split-personality syndrome.'

### **Statement of the Problem**

Tutors who have not been trained under the ODL system operate against the demands of ODL by lecturing instead of tutoring and interactivity. These tutors are failing to identify themselves under the roles and functions of ODL practitioners. Students are not normally aware about the system they are supposed to operate in. These ODL learners face a barrier of not being familiar with studying at a distance, which requires them to be autonomous learners, independent and have a good control over their learning. Therefore this study sought to explore how the split-personality syndrome of conventional trained tutors working in ODL system can be addressed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to unmask the split-personality syndrome of conventionally trained tutors working in ODL systems and suggest strategies to ensure that these tutors if employed in ODL institutions use appropriate delivery modes.

### **Research Questions**

- i. Which factors militate against the conventionally trained tutors' attempt to deliver within the ODL systems?
- ii. What are the causes of the 'split-personality' syndrome in conventionally trained tutors in their attempt to deliver within the ODL systems?
- iii. How can we overcome or manage the 'split-personality' syndrome in conventionally trained tutors so that they are able to deliver within the ODL systems?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Some of the theories that are critical to this study are driven by the following philosophies: Constructivism, connectivism, progressivism, humanistic, radical, behavioural and Liberal (Arts). These theories are highly interactive in nature and they appeal heavily to ODL systems.

### **Social Constructivist theory**

The roots of the constructivist model most commonly applied today spring from the works of Vygotsky and Dewey. Social constructivist pedagogy acknowledges the social nature of knowledge and its creation in the minds of individual students. Teachers do not merely transmit knowledge to be passively consumed by students; rather, each student constructs meanings by means of new knowledge that is both created and integrated with existing knowledge. Kanuka and Anderson (1999) state that Social constructivism includes the following important themes:

- i. New knowledge as building upon foundation of previous learning;
- ii. Learning as an active rather a passive process;
- iii. Language and other social tools in constructing knowledge; and
- iv. Knowledge needing to be subject to social discussion, validation and application in real world context.

Constructivists, also exploit human capacity for role modeling (Bandura, 1977), imitation and dialogic inquiry. Garrison (1997) argues that constructivist-based learning with its rich student-student and student-teacher interaction constituted a new, "post industrialist era" of open and distance education. Social interaction is a defining feature of constructivist pedagogies. Social constructivist theory is considered to be a critical component of quality in distance education (Garrison, 1997).

Lunenberg (1998) maintains that constructivism may be the most significant recent trend in education relative to the dynamic relationship between how teachers teach and how children learn. While obviously applicable to all forms of learning (constructivism), ODL students benefit from instruction, which motivates them to learn, allow learners to exercise control over their learning experience, and requires them to be accountable for their own learning outcomes. Additionally, personal experiences, everyday occurrences and environmental influences provide rich sources for constructing meanings of concepts and phenomena.

### **Connectivism**

Siemens (2007) argues that learning is the process of building networks of information, contacts and resources that are applied to real problems. Connectivism developed in the information age of a network era (Castells, 1996) and assumed access to networked technologies. Connectivism assumes that much mental processing and problem-solving can and should be offloaded to machines. As argued by Siemens (2005), "... learning may reside in non-human appliances." Connectivism is built on the assumption of a constructivist model of learning, with the learner at the center, connecting and constructing knowledge in a context that includes not only external networks and groups but also his/her own histories and predictions.

### **Progressivism**

This philosophy supports responsible participation in society, offers the students practical knowledge and problem-solving skills that empower them to be progressive members of the society. The progressive strand includes more active and participatory learning methods, is less authoritarian, places more demands on teachers and contains elements of constructivist thinking. The progressive agenda encourages the development of reflective practices among teachers. It is one of the principles of progressive education that the child must learn to expect, and adapt to, an ever-changing environment (Barker, 1994). Progressive educators advocate an education system which emphasizes the individual worth and dignity of the students and their personal self-fulfillment, which at the same time, does not forget that the student must be fully cooperative and socially-responsible member of the society. Progressivism is particularly strong in the belief that the student is a complete, dynamic, living organism, existing in a continually moving and changing environment.

### **Humanistic**

Proponents of this theory argue that that tutor should increase personal growth and development of the students, in such a way as to facilitate individual self-realisation necessary for confidence building and personal worth. Humanism became an acclamation of faith in the supreme importance and worth of man as an individual; not born to serve or be subservient to other men, nor even to serve God –but to develop himself for his own happiness and self-satisfaction. It is for this reason that it is called humanism: an ideology concerned wholly with the welfare and happiness of the human being (Barker, 1994). Humanist education is primarily concerned with the overall growth of the pupil-growth in both the cognitive and affective areas.

Jensen (1973) summarised some of the goals of humanism as follows: Humanism seeks to provide students with an opportunity to explore and come to grips with their sense of identity, including their self-concepts and value systems. Humanists or ‘wholists’ are committed to an education which involves the feelings, emotions, likes and dislikes of students. By attending to the whole student (feelings as well as cognition) humanists hope to foster personally meaningful and integrated learning. Humanists are concerned with the development of content which is relevant to the student’s own needs and interests, students should have more freedom and responsibility for what they learn, when they learn it, and how they learn. Humanists believe that human learning is growing and changing so fast that students need more than yesterday’s knowledge. Humanistic education attempts to adapt students to change. It seeks this end by involving students in change and by helping them to learn how to learn, how to solve problems, and how to effect change in their own lives.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Moore and Kearsly (1996: 125) argue that: “. . . the nature of teaching and the role of the instructor in distance education differ from the traditional classroom.” In this view, instructors need to become good facilitators of acquisition of knowledge on the part of the students, but also in being vehicles to promote students to become more self-directed and to collaborate with other colleagues that they encounter in other geographical latitudes, whose messages can synchronous (Conrad and Donaldson, 2004). The student-instructor relationship should also acquire a new meaning. The interactions between the two are subject to the physical absence of one to the other.

Cooperative learning is highly valued especially among adult or non-traditional students (Berkeley, 2005) in Rowland (2006). Therefore communication developed between the adult open and distance learner and his/her instructor is decisive for the learning outcomes. Contacts with peers and students is recognized by open and distance learners as the most important among six learning support features (UL-Hag et al., 2003). This one to one relationship between tutor and learner is described as ‘unique’ and ‘beneficial’ (Bartlet et al., 2006). In comparison to learners in a traditional classroom, open and distance learners are more motivated to continue and finish their education by having this relationship. Distance instructors need to spend more time in preparatory activities than traditional teachers (Ibid, 2006).

Open and distance learners have one tremendous barrier. They are not familiar that they are studying in a distance, which requires them to be autonomous learners, independent and have good control over their learning (Gunawardena and McIsaac, 2004). ODL is now focused on learner-centered instruction and thus educators should investigate how learners and the instructor collaborate to generate the knowledge and enhance satisfaction (Thu et al., 2011). One of the issues is to understand the learner learning styles (LS) in order to accommodate the teaching to meet the learners’ needs. Unlike traditional (conventional) classes, ODL instructors cannot rely on visual cues for student understanding. Open and distance education learners’ benefit from guided learning materials, and have little guidance from the instructors. Instructors should be made aware that learners have various ways of taking the knowledge and information. Therefore instructors need to modify their teaching to distance learning format.

The other most important issue in ODL is interactive learning, which is defined by Kyriakon (1991) as active learning that makes the learner autonomous by enabling him/her to control the learning process and conduct as well as directing how to learn and what to learn. Activities in interactive learning should give the learner enough chance to turn the module into an interactive learning instrument. Interactive learning should be applicable to the learner's real-life situation. This real life situation must be that of the learner not the tutor.

### **Research Methodology and Design**

The study adopted a qualitative case study design based on interpretive philosophy. In-depth interviews were carried out with ODL learners; ODL trained tutors and conventionally trained tutors in order to find out how best they could find each other. Study participants were purposively sampled to enable the researchers to find data-rich sources. The study sample consisted of six conventionally trained, six tutors trained in ODL and six ODL students. Document analysis was carried out on some of the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) modules in order to find out their tutorship well-being as well as their interactive nature. Interview proceedings were recorded, transcribed, validated, segmented and coded. Data were analysed thematically.

## **III. Findings And Discussion**

### **Tutors torn between their own training and ODL demands**

Interviews with conventionally trained tutors established that the tutors are torn in between the requirements of ODL and the nature of training they received. Whilst they would want to fulfill the needs of the ODL system appropriately, they are also faced with a situation where ODL learners want to be lectured. Furthermore there is also the issue of the conflict in semantics which appear to affect them. In conventional institutions they are called lecturers while the tutorship title is for those who are not yet lecturers. To these conventionally trained part-time tutors, the title is a bit demeaning. It has also come to their knowledge that ODL learners evaluate the tutor on the basis of lecturing not tutoring, as a result they end up lecturing instead of tutoring.

Findings from tutors trained in ODL?

- i. ODL trained tutors expect learners to be accountable and independent learners.
- ii. They see tutorship as flexible and affording more time to learners rather than the tutors.
- iii. They view ODL tutorship as affording learners opportunities to learn through their own real-life experiences as opposed to the tutors' real-life experiences.
- iv. They also see ICT as a vital component of ODL tutorship.
- v. ODL tutors see lecturing as much easier and less empowering than tutoring.
- vi. They see tutoring as improving learners' interactive and participatory techniques.

### **Challenges of employing conventional teaching strategies in ODL.**

- i. Failure to cover the course in stipulated 6 contact hours;
- ii. Failure to adequately provide ICT skills to the learners who come from remote rural areas; and
- iii. Too much reliance on the module sometimes lead to convergence on the part of the learners.

### **Tutor expectations of learners' knowledge**

Interviews with the ODL trained tutors indicated that they expected learners to have the knowledge of the system in which they operate in even when they are not trained to do so. They expect learners to learn from them when they are tutoring and they also emphasized that ODL is not only about tutoring but there are other critical materials like the module which they referred to as the tutor as it is very interactive. They also mentioned that the internet is also a valuable tool in ODL.

### **Learners' own expectations**

Learners who were interviewed emphasized that since they do not meet their tutors quite often, they expect to be given lots of notes when they come for weekend tutorials in order to compensate for what they called lost time. They emphasized that even when they have the modules they still expect tutors to teach those areas that give them problems.

### **Document analysis**

Five samples of the ZOU modules were analysed in order to establish their tutorship value as well as their nature of interactivity. According to Atkinson and Coffey (1997) one can establish the quality of teaching through an analysis of documents used or produced.

First to be analysed was the "Introduction to Communication Module – AECS 103." On page 11, item 1.2 Defining Communication has a leading statement that reads as follows:

“Below are some definitions of communication given by experts who have studied various situations. Your approach to these definitions should be that they are not the only ones. As you read more in this area of study, you will notice so many definitions of the term. It should not worry you. After all, a definition is only an attempt to put together perceptions on a subject so that it can be studied in a more systematic way than before. A definition is only a working tool.”

The other quotation is on page 31, item 1, 9 Conclusion, which reads as follows:

“In this unit, we hope you have come to grasp some basic concepts in communication as a human activity. You should be familiar with the participants in a communication situation. Basic concepts like communicator, message, medium and recipient should be, by now, part of your vocabulary in this unit. It is also important to note that human society is centered on communication as a lubricant for life in as much as it is lived at work by interest groups, communities and social structures. You should also be able to your own definition of what communication is.”

These items show the interactive nature of the module and the writer walks the learners through and through without living them behind. The above statements also enable the learners to interact with the learning materials, investigate the environment as well as go further than the prescribed texts. The materials draw the learner back into the intellectual world (Vengesai, 1999). Also according to Perraton (1995), it is easier to design materials that teach the facts in face to face situation and get the examination passes for the learner than to encourage reflexive thinking.

The other module to be analysed was the “Environmental Education Module” GED 312 for the Bachelor of Science Geography and Environmental Studies. The quotation is on page 23, item 2.2 Responses from Governments, Science, Technology and Business, which read as follows:

“With an increasing awareness of environmental problems, environmental movements developed. Concerned people have written books, held meetings and recommendations as to how the crisis should be addressed.”

“We will look at several of the global, regional and national responses. You will have studied some of these in your module Environmental Management. In each case we will include special reference to communication and education as integral parts of each response.”

A critical analysis of the above quotations is that, the lexical items that are inherent in all ZOU interactions is the use of the words ‘we’ and ‘you.’ These are called collective pronouns in linguistic terms. These types of interactions bring the interactants closer to each other thereby enhancing the mutual understanding and relationships. In this view, interactive learning must be applicable to the learner’s real life situation. The real life situation must be that of the learner, not the tutor (Vengesai, 1999).

The other module is the ‘Human Development II Module’- PSY201 for the B.Sc. Psychology. The quotation is on page 23, Activity 1.1 which reads as follows:

“You are to find out more about different cultures and their values, and as such we would suggest you interview various organisation and some religious leaders or parents about their needs. Choose an organisation or person that has a different background to yours. Some examples given here but you may choose from others. Do not be afraid to say do not know and you want to find out and learn.”

“Seek out voluntary organisations such as Jairos Jiri Association for the Blind/Deaf, St. Giles Association for the Physically Handicapped, ZIMCARE for the mentally handicapped, The Child Protection Society, SOS Children’s Home and learn about children with disabilities and their needs.”

The activities give the learner enough chances to turn the module into an interactive learning instrument. These activities go beyond giving a view, calculating a scientific value, and taking that as the final state of learning (Perraton, 1995). The way the modules are written is quite interactive, communicate mutually and they always put the learner at the centre. This is witnessed by the constant use of the collective noun ‘we.’ This means that the learners are always included and they are an important stakeholder in the learning process. Morgan (1995) argues that the module approach is content-specific to a particular task in which the learner is engaged.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The conventionally trained tutors do not try to modify their teaching to open and distance learning models. ODL learners are not quite familiar with the system that they are supposed to operate in. This is witnessed by the fact that they favour lecturing instead of tutoring. ZOU modules are the tutor; they are interactive and quite engaging. The ODL systems, instructor-tutor is there to create the right conditions and appropriate atmosphere that attracts the participants to learning. Learners are not evaluated on the basis of lecturing but tutorship.

## V. Recommendations

- i. ODL learners should be more familiar with the system they operate in.
- ii. Conventionally trained tutors should modify their teaching to ODL requirements.
- iii. ODL learners should not be evaluated on the basis of lecturing but tutoring.
- iv. Conventionally trained tutors should go an extra mile in trying to avoid the split-personality syndrome.
- v. The ODL institutions should periodically organize workshops on ODL delivery mode.
- vi. Tutors should be inducted on how to make use of modules.

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