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Myvista as a Learning Mode: Case of Zimbabwe Open University

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Abstract: *Zimbabwe Open University introduced myVista learning and tutoring platform in 2012. Preliminary training for lecturers was carried out by the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) department. The plan was that, after the training sessions, the lecturers could use this new delivery method to impart new knowledge to their students through online discussions. The students could share ideas on any course-relevant topics on the myVista platform and the lecturer could guide them to the correct answers. The researcher noted that the students required guidance in accessing and using myVista. The purpose of this research was to find out whether the students welcomed the new approach. Twenty six undergraduate and six MBA students were approached and agreed to complete a closed-ended questionnaire at the end of face-to-face tutorial sessions. The findings showed that the students possessed computer and Internet surfing skills. They had no problems in accessing information from the Internet and appreciated the resources they downloaded. Most of the students did not use the university computer laboratory and did not access the university's e-resources. Most of them also did not use the new platform, myVista. The few that accessed it were checking their examination results. Many of them required guidance in the use of the new platform. The researcher concluded that the lecturers did not introduce the new system to the students. The researcher recommended that the system be introduced during the orientation of new students and each lecturer does likewise with the same students during their first tutorial sessions. An ICT help-desk is recommended to assist the students.*

Keywords: *myVista, e-learning, ICT, e-resources and e-instruction.*

I. Background of the Study

MyVista as an e-instruction and e-learning mode was introduced at Zimbabwe Open University in 2012. MyVista practical workshops were held for lecturers at all faculties at the national centre. By 2015, two years later, one expected the system should be up and running. It was against this background that this researcher decided to find out the progress made on this new development. On the ground it appeared as though not much was happening.

During one of the tutorial sessions with a class of undergraduate students in 2015, the researcher wanted to know whether the students visited the Zimbabwe Open university website, logged on myVista, and selected the courses they were registered in. Most of the students were not aware of the system. Very few, however used to check their results using the system. Some faced problems in logging on the system.

Statement of the Problem

Most of the students were not aware of the system and those who were aware faced accessibility problems. The problem was that the rate of myVista system usage was unknown.

Objectives

The research objectives were to:

- find out the usage rate of myVista platform by students,
- reveal the problems faced by students in the use of myVista and
- suggest solutions to the identified problems.

Research Questions

- What is the rate of myVista usage by the students?
- What are the problems faced by students in the use of myVista?
- What strategies can be used to resolve myVista problems?

II. Literature Review

Dickinson (2005) defined e-learning as a student-centred learning model that reduced operating costs to a greater scale and a technological innovation. He pointed out that it had to be done well. The system called for changes in the study habits as it increased study flexibility also supported by Zembyles et al (2008). According to the research, few students faced technical problems but valued hardcopies. The study concluded that the e-learning system had to be introduced to the staff for it to be established.

Roach and Lemasters (2006) carried out a descriptive study on e-learning. The objective was to reveal the extent of student satisfaction. The students preferred taught courses to online courses. Students preferred timely feedback on assignments. Implications from the study showed that online class sizes should be small to increase student satisfaction and learner needed more direct tutor attention.

Sun et al (2007) produced a framework to guide e-learning satisfaction. Course quality was found to be the most important factor in e-learning environment. Learners should be assisted in building confidence in computer usage. A computer course was recommended. Tutors lacked e-learning skills.

There are a number of benefits that can be experienced when using an e-learning platform. Thomson (2010) stated that it was easier for the teacher to address individual student needs and to offer prompt feedback through the platform. This was supported by Hashey and Stah (2014). The platform motivated students through group emailing and students had more time to think. The author went on to say that students were offered more mentoring and students became self-directed in their learning. A sense of community is developed by the students and Dyrbye et al (2009) referred to this as building team dynamics. Students who enrolled in online courses found out their academic needs were met and their technological skills improved (Leonard and Guha 2001). This was supported by Zembylas et al (2008).

However, there are also challenges in using this e-learning platform. According to Thomson (2014), students may not feel comfortable to email teachers and frustration may creep in when technology does not perform properly yet the teacher cannot tell when a student becomes distressed. Dyrbye et al (2009) pointed out that students may not understand and misinterpret yet missing the contextual cues and body language. They went on to say that lack of face-to-face impeded relationship building between both students and the tutor (supported by Zembylas et al 2008). Their other argument was that lack of classroom presentation and visual stimuli hampered learning. Kremer (2012) also mentioned that cheating was rampant in online learning. Lack of participation by peers as they do not have time and lack of feedback from tutors as well as poor Internet connectivity were all challenges experienced in online learning (Muuro 2014). There will also be free riders and consensus was difficult to achieve. Students may develop stress for the inability to fulfill other obligations such as social life and family.

III. Methodology

A quantitative approach was used in order to have a wide coverage. A closed questionnaire was distributed to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. SPSS was used for data analysis.

IV. Data Analysis and Discussion

Twenty six undergraduate and six postgraduate students completed and returned questionnaires. The analysis of data was done below

Figure 1 below shows that sixty two percent of the students possessed Internet skills. Such skills could be of useful in the implementation of myVista.

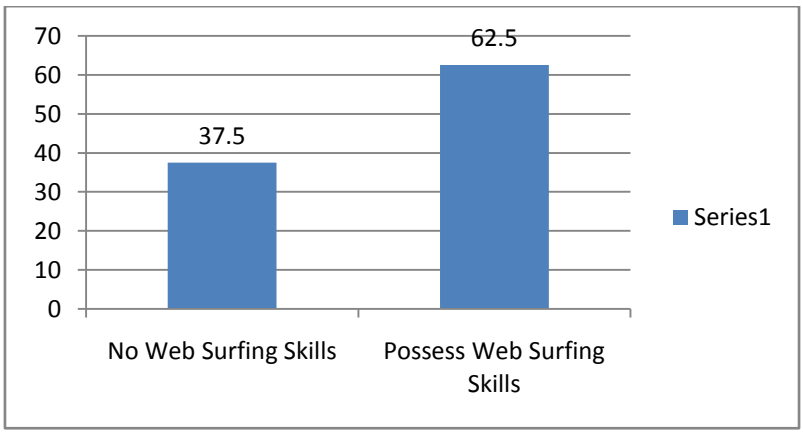

Figure 1 Experience in Internet Surfing

Figure 2 shows that most students had expertise in Internet learning. This meant that the usage of myVista would not be a problem since it is an Internet programme.

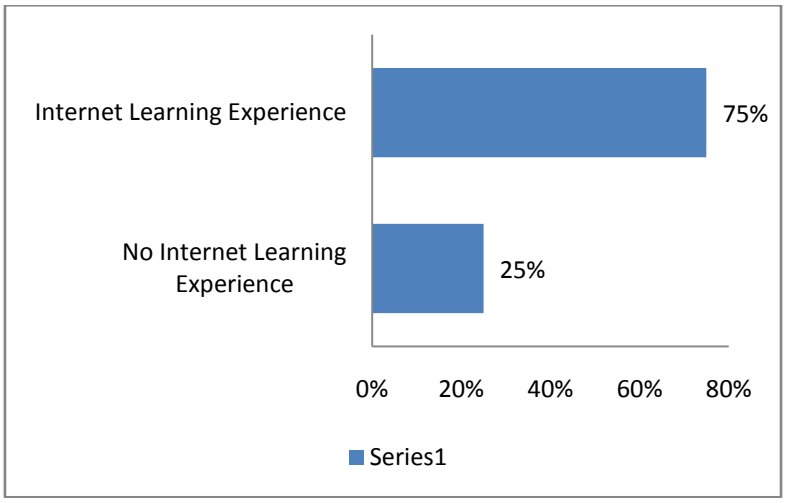

Figure 2: Internet Learning Experience

Figure 3 confirms findings in tables 1 and 2 above. Most of the students possessed computer skills that explained why they were able to surf and learn through the Internet.

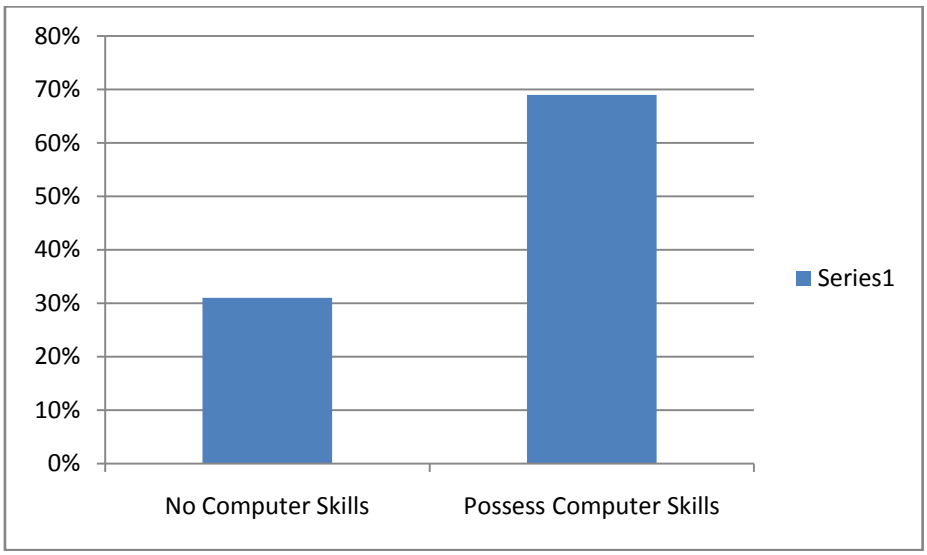

Figure 3: Computing Skills

Figure 4 below shows only one student out of 32 had no email address. This is a positive sign that they can use Internet.

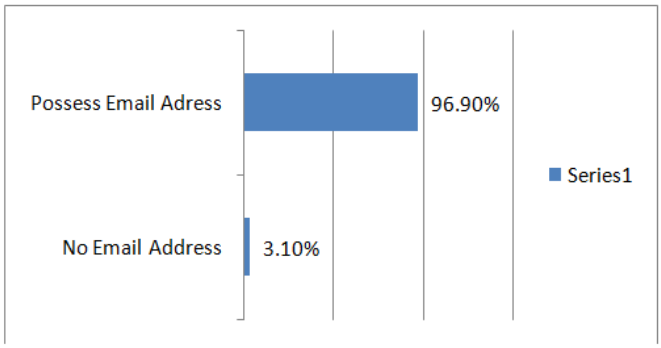

Figure 4: Email Possession

The figure below shows 67% of he students used email for educational communication.

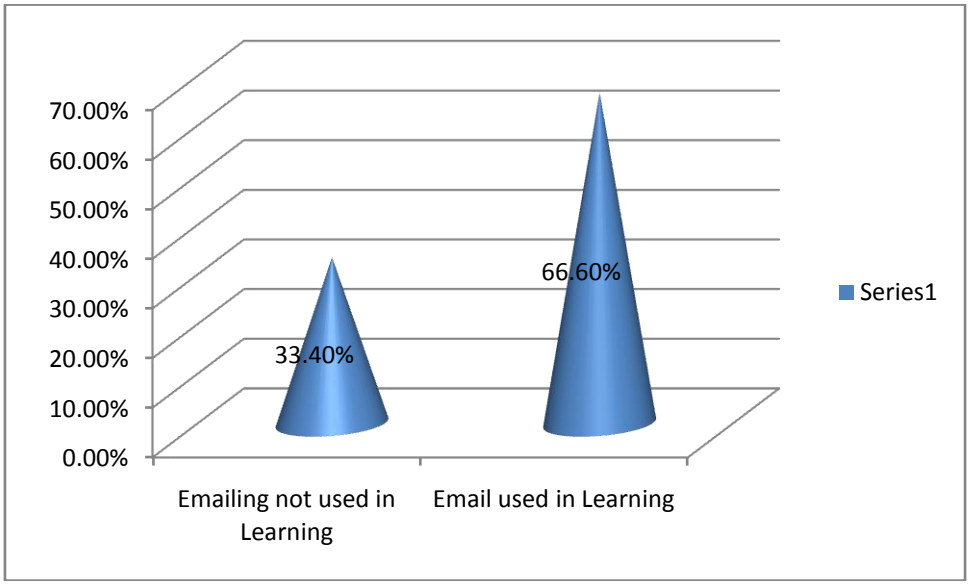

Figure 5: Email Usage in Learning

Very few students (32%) experienced ICT problems as revealed by figure 6 below. The majoriy were familiar with ICT products.

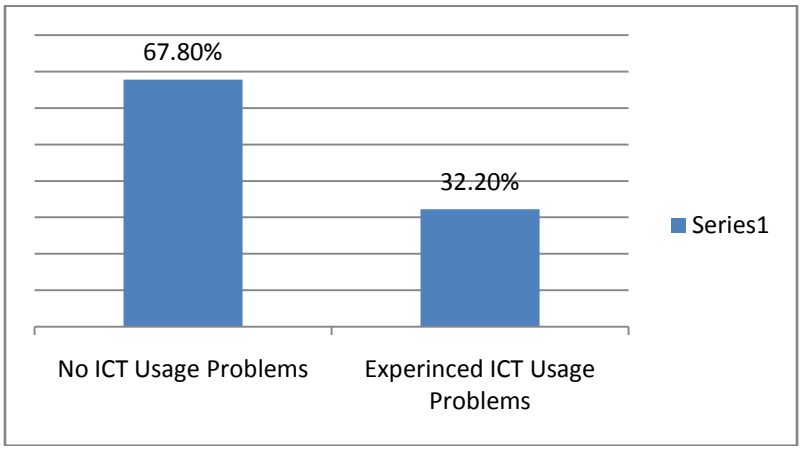

Figure 6: Experiencing ICT Usage Problems

Figure 7 shows that 67% of the students indicated that the Internet platform was clear and easy to use.

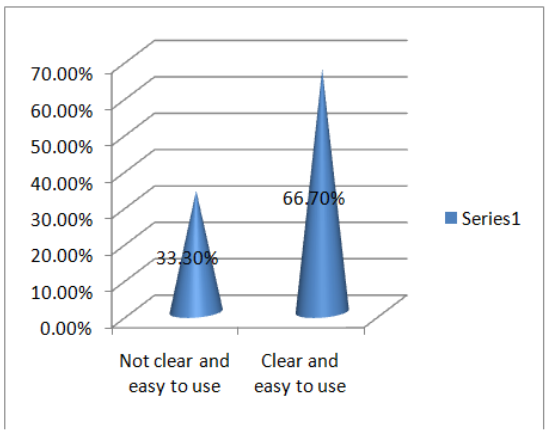

Figure 7: Clarity of Internet Platform

Most of the students (90%) were of the opnion that navigating through the Internet was flexible as shown in figure 8 below.

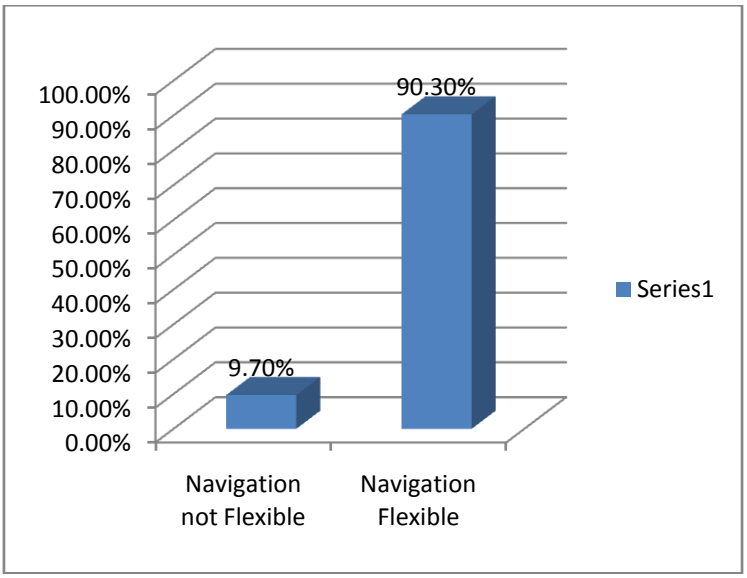

Figure 8: Flexibility of Internet Navigation

The majority (80%) of students revealed that the design of the Internet resources was acceptable to them as shown below.

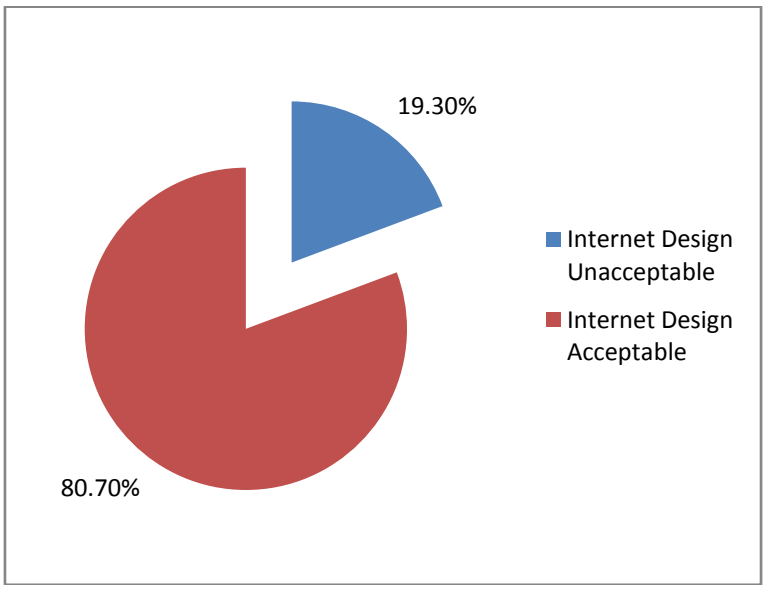

Figure 9: Acceptance of Internet Resource Design

However most (71%) of the students did not use the University computer laboratory at the regional office shown in figure 10 below. This was an indication that the students possessed their own computers, laptops and cellphones.

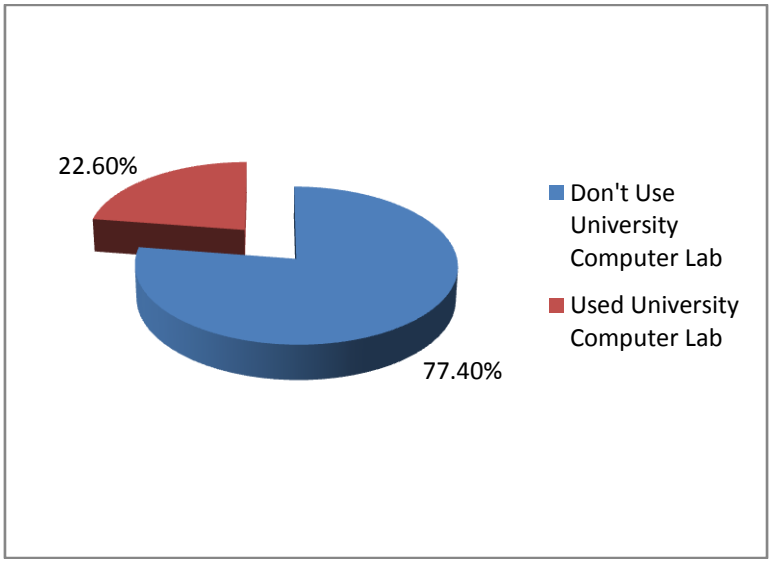

Figure 10: University Computer Lab Usage

Figure 11 below shows that, 61% of the students did not even visit the university computer laboratory and 25% visited it only once per week.

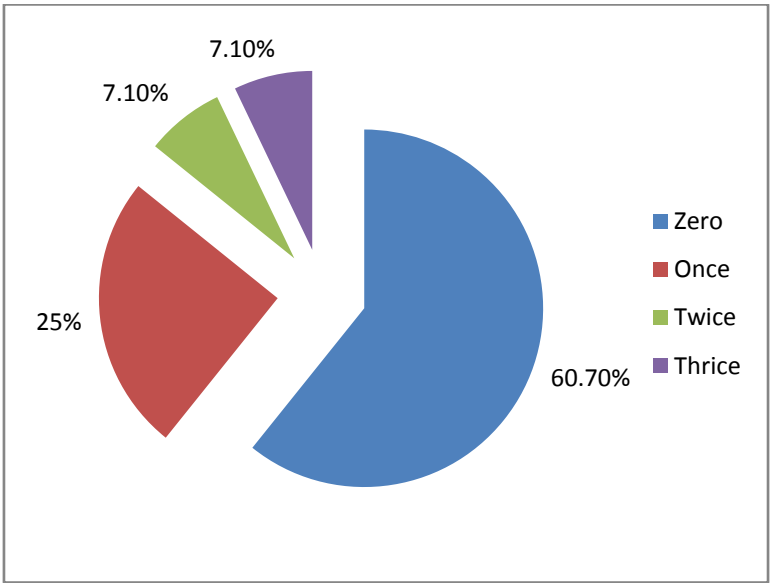

Figure 11: Visits to University Computer Lab/Week

Figure 12, below shows that almost 70% of the students did not use the university e-resources. They were not aware of the e-resources subscribed to by the university.

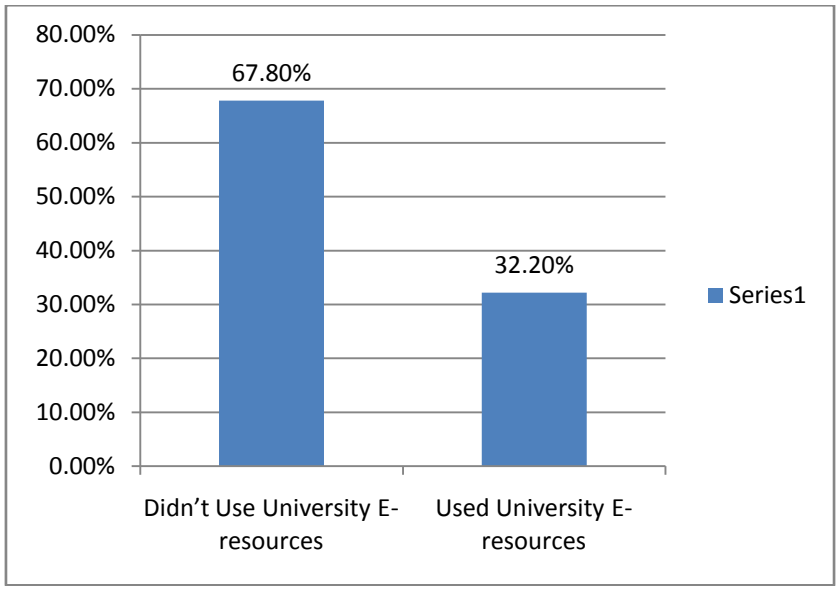

Figure 12: Usage of University E-Resources

Figure 13 shows that, 60% of the students reported that they did not use myVista and 20% were not sure whether they used it or not. The researcher's conclusion was that 80% of the students did not use myVista. Those who use it were checking their results.

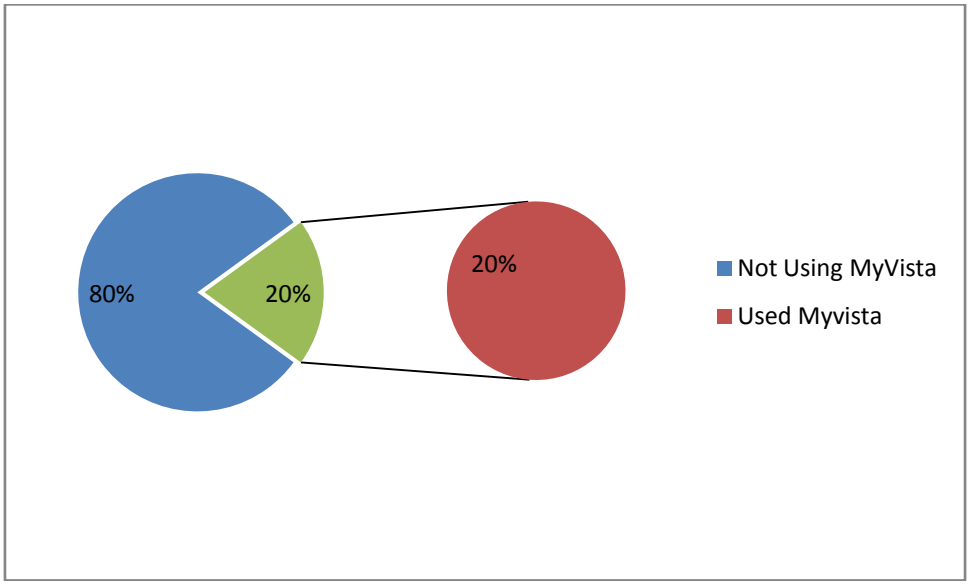

Figure 13: Usage of MyVista

V. Conclusion

The study findings confirmed what Dickinson (2005) concluded as it concurred with the fact that although the students possessed computer and Internet skills, the staff did not play their part in e-learning.
The students required guidance to make use of the new platform. Confidence building was more crucial at the initial stage as explained by Sun et al (2007).

There is need for a follow up study to assess student satisfaction with the new delivery system as outlined by Roach and Lemasters 92006).

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