Approaches to academic and TVET integration and implementation

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The previous article presented training models for the training and collaboration. For providers to successfully offer TVET using ODL the following approaches can be adopted:

Materials development and production

- Develop own materials: this requires expertise and finance.
- Commission other organizations to develop materials. Knowledge of reliable organizations is vital.
- Buy off the shelf. This requires knowledge of availability and quality of the materials.
- Modify existing materials. This requires knowledge of content and distance teaching expertise and copyright agreement.
Course delivery needs consideration too.

Learning materials and course delivery bought from same provider

The model involves a client buying from the same provider learning materials and tuition-the most common academic and training model. For example, ZOU, national open School in India (NOS) which targets poor school age children in rural and isolated areas most of whom are already at work. The latter has an enrolment of 130 000 students. The original aim was to provide opportunities for continuing and developmental education at the school stage. It also has more than 6000 enrolled on a wide range of vocational courses and another 26 000 studying both academic and vocational courses. Courses on offer include word processing, jute production technology, carpentry, solar energy technicians, laundry services, cabinet making etc. Learners are supported through a network of study centres throughout the
country. Materials used are print based with some supported by ICT and audiovisual.

The main advantage of the model is that buyers can see the courses they are buying because they already exist. All they need is money to pay for them and also the qualification is recognized.

The disadvantages are: courses on offer may not cover all the ground as required by the student, may not be available in some areas, may not be at the right level as required by the student, different language, or duration and intensity required and may be very expensive if a buyer is sponsoring only a few students.

Outsource materials development and delivery

- The provider, usually the employer, outsources the development and delivery of courses and pay for the services. The courses are customized to the employer’s requirements. A good example is the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) which writes course materials for the UNHCR and delivers using ICT. Study material is print based and student support is by email. Student support, assignment submission and marking and feedback are all computer mediated. Tutor training is done via videoconferencing. Microsoft uses online training for its staff to update them on latest developments. Some of the courses are credited allowing them to study for certificate and diploma courses thereby enhancing their promotion prospects.

- The advantage of the model is that a standard qualification or training is delivered worldwide increasing relevance in the global world of work. Buyers can specify exactly what they want in terms of content, level, language of instruction and duration, hence meets the buyer’s needs and avoid problems associated with courses bought off the shelf. If there are many learners the training becomes cost effective and very efficient. Infrastructure can be developed to meet the needs of all those the buyer wants to participate.

- Distance taught courses that are tailor made can be very expensive at least during the initial stages, and take time to develop and deliver.

Outsource materials development but deliver course

Some distance learning institutions use external consultants to develop courses but can also partner with reputable institutions such as London University or School of Economics and Stanford University (own online training course) to provide high quality materials which they will deliver themselves. On the whole the materials are prepared and who prepares them is up to the organization or industry. What is important is that the learning materials are authentic, relevant to the needs of individuals and organizations and that they are user friendly.

The model enjoys the advantage that a wide range of courses can be offered without recruiting addition content expertise. The reputation of the partner institution can be used to guarantee quality of the content. Existing infrastructure can be used more efficiently.

The main disadvantage is that such collaboration is difficult to administer and it may not always be possible for external experts to work closely with the material designers to optimize teaching and media use.
Providers buy off the shelf materials and deliver them

However, for employers the course material may have some redundant materials or some missing content that they may need. Hull College of Further Education is an example which offers a distance training course in plant operations on behalf of BP Chemical processing Plant. The course is print based with weekly supervision by college tutors. Students study during their own time. Their materials were developed by Cleveland Open Learning Unit and through Open College. This is an example of partnership between education provider and employer. Students require self-discipline in order to cope with their studies. A tight support and monitoring system has been put in place and the employer plays an active role in support of the trainees.

Off the shelf packages from the provider or supplier

Distance training courses may consist of packages for the learners. Packages include videos, audio visual and/or CD-ROMs. However, the problem with this model is that the materials do not always match the needs of users. Consequently there is a shift to delivery to expand market for the materials. Providers buy off the shelf materials and deliver them.

This is a model which conventional institutions can use. For employers it is a least cost option with more flexibility than the face-to-face mode. Existing experienced staff can be utilized to deliver and provide student support. It is suitable for course that led to national qualifications which need to cover a standard curriculum.

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Use of online courses has been fashionable in the modern day and age. Properly selected institutions can provide customized courses which satisfy the needs of individual companies or organizations. Learners can learn while they work and be able to associate the learning materials with the work they do. This increases relevance and applicability of the course content and skills learnt. Not only will it be relevant to the organisation’s needs but a more relaxed learning atmosphere with opportunities for collaboration by workers as they work and learn. There lies the beauty of ODL, integrated learning and collaboration.

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Bibliography


