Strategies for Institutionalizing Blended Learning in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Ghanaian Public University

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents strategies adopted by a higher education institution towards the implementation of its BL policy framework. It does so by reviewing the BL implementation process of a public university in Ghana, noting that there are barriers that have impeded the uptake of blended learning, for which reasons it examines the strategies that can be implemented to overcome these barriers. The insights are drawn from a case study involving qualitative approaches, utilizing interviews with stakeholders in the public university. The paper examines the question: How do educational institutions employ Blended Learning (BL) strategies that contribute to the transformation of the university? Using an inductive approach, the researcher interviewed twenty-two management staff and used Strauss and Corbin’s constant comparative method as the analytical technique to analyze the data. This paper develops an institutional strategy framework that can be used by managers in higher education to facilitate change processes, overcome faculty resistance, and embed blended learning in institutions. The seven constructs of this strategic framework consist of institutional vision and approach, promotion and planning, integrated infrastructure, motivation and encouragement, training, assessment and evaluation and sanctions.

Keywords: Adoption, blended learning, developing countries, higher education.

I. INTRODUCTION

There have been calls for universities to adopt learning technologies in the wake of competition and increasing diversity in the student population (Nkhukhu-Orlando, 2015; Roberts, 2008). Students have different learning styles and thus require delivery approaches that create unique learning experiences in flexible and convenient environments (Jobst, 2016). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are responding with new educational teaching methods, such as Blended Learning (BL), aimed at providing tailor-made, unique learning experiences at and for the convenience of the current generation of students (Nkhukhu-Orlando, 2015; Tshabalala et al., 2014). BL, in its broadest sense, involves combining face-to-face and online delivery methods (Mozelius & Hettiarachchi, 2017).

A model of drivers influencing the adoption of BL in HEIs was described by McNaught and Lam (2009), who found that managers of universities are driven by business and economic prudence, the expectations of students for unique learning experiences and the need to strategically reposition the universities to be responsive and “competitive in the global marketplace” (Roberts, 2008). Viewed as a panacea to address the pressure on HEIs, BL implementations often encounter serious resistance within the domain of the implementing institutions (Roberts, 2008). To exemplify the magnitude of the problem, Ghana Technology University College (GTUC), as part of its blended learning implementation plan, adopted a BL policy framework that aimed to upload 80% of teaching content online by 2021. Courses were to be delivered through a dedicated learning management system called Moodle that included online discussion forums, videos, quizzes, homework, and collaborative activities (Freeman, 2017). However, in 2016, a review of 130 online courses indicated that less than one-third of the faculty were teaching in the BL mode (Freeman, 2017). Evidence abounds to show that HEIs have struggled to scale BL initiatives beyond projects to reap the benefits of its transformative power (Kisanga & Ireson, 2015; Salmon, 2005).

Implementing BL comes with a lot of challenges, such as difficulties in managing the change management process, getting stakeholders’ buy-in, confronting policy-related issues, addressing faculty community concerns and incorporating information feedback into the decision-making (Niemiec & Otte, 2010). There are a lot of studies on BL, particularly drivers and barriers to BL adoption (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2013; Ocak, 2011; Porter & Graham, 2016). However, studies on strategies for implementing and embedding BL are scanty (Niemiec & Otte, 2010; Taylor &
Newton, (2013), notwithstanding the enormous transformational potential of BL in creating unique student learning experiences (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). A study by Halverson et al. (2012), analyzing theses and dissertations on BL research, found over 80% of the researchers focused on course-level issues, with only a little under 1% focusing on institutional issues. With the current gap in the literature not providing answers to the problem thereof, more empirical research into adoption strategies is needed to guide HEIs transition and upscale from the early adopter stage to the fully mature implementers/growth stage (Adekola et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2013; Porter et al., 2014). A better understanding of BL is achieved only when stakeholders are reminded of the larger institutional strategies that promote and shape the narratives (VanderDerlinden, 2014).

Consequently, this case study examines and describes institutional strategies undertaken by the Ghana Technology University College (GTUC) to support BL implementation across the institution. It culminates in an institutional strategic framework for the development of BL at the University. The author does not claim that the framework is exclusive to GTUC but finds it worthwhile to report on the strategies that other universities, particularly those in developing countries with the characteristics and context of GTUC, can consider. The paper, therefore, extends the existing research focus on BL by asking the question: What strategies can HEIs employ to ensure the successful embedding of BL? In addressing the question, the study uses an inductive case study approach to investigate the strategies an HEI adopted in implementing BL.

Ultimately, this study aims to achieve the following research objective: investigating institutional strategies that administrators employ to adopt BL. It draws on the experiences of management on how it implemented BL amidst faculty resistance (Ocaik, 2011).

The paper is structured as follows: Section Two reviews the literature on the definition of BL, drivers needed to promote BL and institutional BL adoption strategies. It is followed by the methodology and research context in Section Three. Finally, the analysis, discussions and conclusions of the study are presented in Sections Four and Five, respectively.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Empirical Review

This section reviews the literature on institutional strategies adopted towards BL implementation. A review of related literature applied to supplement the research design is also presented.

There is ample scholarship in the literature that discusses reasons or factors impacting faculty BL adoption and related strategies that institutions adopt to successfully implement BL. (Amirkhanpour et al., 2014; Gregory & Lodge, 2015; Lisewski, 2004; Maarop & Embi, 2016; Nichols, 2008).

Different authors (Ablebaikan & Troudi, 2010; Maarop & Embi, 2016; Qureshi et al., 2012; Ssekakubo et al., 2011) have investigated and categorized these barriers amongst the commonly cited categories of barriers related to the lack of faculty professional development schemes, institutional barriers that relate to BL policies and implementation, and faculty resistance that mainly has to do with faculty anxieties, perceptions and related phobia of technology (Jones, 2008).

It is imperative to adopt strategies to align institutional vision and goals in higher education institutions to achieve the desired transformation (Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015). VanderDerlinden (2014) reviews institutional approaches to BL and discusses the important role strategies play in ensuring that BL is embedded in institutions. VanderDerlinden (2014) mentions that a strategy should not be viewed as merely a prescriptive set of principles that often gets lost in the narratives of constituents, but rather, a strategy should involve clarifying goals, planning, aligning institutional priorities and mobilization of resources towards achieving stated present and futuristic objectives (Avolio, 2007; Morrill, 2007). A BL strategy for institutions that is responsive to stakeholders improves communication, collaboration and learning (Amirkhanpour et al., 2014). To minimize implementation failures, it is inconceivable to imagine that HEIs will embark on BL implementations without a strategic approach (VanderDerlinden, 2014).

Also, there is literature that investigates institutional strategies. Mackeogh and Fox (2009) describe strategies adopted by a traditional Irish university towards embedding BL and overcoming barriers. The study used an action research methodology and interviewed the management of the University to gain insight into the specific strategies that were adopted to implement BL successfully. The study found that top-down implementation strategies that do not seek stakeholder buy-in often lead to failure or faculty resistance. Thus, to embed BL in the university, Mackeogh and Fox (2009) identify the need for a clear BL institutional policy that clearly articulates the objectives and vision of the university and what it seeks to achieve by embedding BL in the institution. Universities adopt BL to transform the academic process for lifelong learning or to create access for students (Mackeogh & Fox, 2009). Strategies to achieve this desired outcome should include a coordinated institutional program of action that creates awareness of BL to stakeholders, provides the required funding and resources for the implementation, and builds robust institutional structures that support BL at both faculty and central levels (Mackeogh & Fox, 2009).

In a similar study, Liu and Tourtellott (2011) studied a BL implementation process in a small private university in upstate New York. They identified, among other things, that addressing institutional, student, and faculty needs is crucial for any successful BL implementation. They mentioned the institutional vision as a critical component in the BL implementation process. Most importantly, vision and mission statements should be well articulated in BL policies. For example, they mention the need to revisit and validate policies that relate to course design and make changes to delivery methods by addressing policies on contact hours and so on (Liu & Tourtellott, 2011). They call for strategies that enhance inter-faculty and inter-departmental collaboration in using the limited resources that are stretched thin during BL implementations.

Mirriahi et al. (2015) studied BL innovations in an Australian university and proposed a threefold approach to institutionalizing BL. First, their study advances the point that
universities should adopt strategies that redesign academic programs to fit BL designs. Secondly, there should be an institutional commitment to ensuring that BL courses or programs are accredited. Finally, they indicate that teacher certification courses focused on enhancing faculty online teaching competencies should be pursued.

Jobst (2016), reporting on the BL experience of a private mid-western university in the US, indicates that it is a good strategy to adopt a phased-in approach such that an initial pilot program is tested to create awareness. Thereafter, faculty characterized as early adopters can teach blended courses. McNaught and Lam (2009) argue that the successful implementation of BL requires not only adoption by enthusiastic innovators; institutional structures must be put in place to support the sustainability and mainstreaming of BL initiatives (McNaught & Lam, 2009). The development of a university strategy should include, among other things, institutional quality standards and the creation of a central unit that would provide support to faculties.

Korr et al. (2012) provide insights into a university’s BL implementation process. They identify three strategies that were used by the university to promote BL. They suggest the development of an implementation plan that should address the current institutional capacity to adopt BL. Implementation plans should also be forward-looking to anticipate future opportunities that will allow the possibilities to test processes and policies (Korr et al., 2012).

Porter et al. (2014) advocate that for successful BL implementation, institutions need to ensure that adequate infrastructure and the logistics required to create an environment that facilitates and supports faculty to develop and design BL courses for users exist. Porter et al. (2014) make the point that institutions’ foremost need is to identify the institutional structure, strategy and support pattern that permeates the institution. They propose, among other strategies, the need to develop BL advocates within the institutions who will create awareness and help promote the “shared implementation vision, obtain necessary resources, and attract potential adopters” (Porter et al., 2014, p. 28). In addition, they argue that an institutional definition of what BL is required.

The role of strategy in ensuring successful BL implementation is well articulated. It is evident from the review that strategies inform planning, clarify objectives, define roles, and guide stakeholders in the journey towards experiencing the transformation that BL is envisaged to yield. Porter and Graham (2016) have suggested that more studies on institutional implementation strategies are necessary to develop solutions to help institute transformational blends.

B. Review of the Related Literature Used to Supplement the Research Design

Table I presents literature related to BL implementation strategies that some universities have adopted to implement BL programs. This related literature gives theoretical, policy and theoretical grounding to the findings of the study, and thus, its purpose supplements the core research design method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Paper focus/methods used</th>
<th>Key findings on adoption strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Graham et al., 2013)</td>
<td>Describes institutional strategies leading to transition into BL universities</td>
<td>Institutional BL strategies are categorized into the awareness/exploration stage, early adopter, and growth/mature implementation stages. Recommends a systematic approach to BL implementations. Finds that stakeholder engagement is key and should include having workshops to get buy-in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobst, 2016</td>
<td>Presents experiences of a private university transition from face-to-face to BL</td>
<td>Proposes the strategic BL performance solutions framework Proposes tips for implementing BL, and these include using substitutes, developing and training mentors and encouraging faculty members to redesign courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Yoon &amp; Lim, 2007)</td>
<td>Review literature on BL definitions and models</td>
<td>Proposes flexible practices for faculty to implement BL, creating communities of key staff and giving opportunities to staff to share concerns and challenges of remedies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Korr et al., 2012)</td>
<td>Identifies barriers to adoption in a US university</td>
<td>Develops and strategy implementation framework (PESTER). Positions BL as a strategic opportunity for organizations to engage in learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sharpe et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Provides insights on a university’s strategy for influencing change for BL adoption</td>
<td>Finds that e-learning environments are not value-free; thus, administrators need to adopt strategies to promote an e-learning culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Jones, 2008)</td>
<td>Discusses barriers against faculty adoption</td>
<td>Develops a planning and implementation framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(VanderDerlinden, 2014)</td>
<td>Discusses the role of strategy in BL</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Newton, 2007)</td>
<td>Investigates e-learning adoption in a military establishment in Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Huang, 2010)</td>
<td>Describes a framework for a hybrid e-learning model</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Niemiec &amp; Otte, 2010)</td>
<td>Argues that BL studies focus on why, with fewer studies focusing on how.</td>
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III. METHODOLOGY

An inductive case study methodology that explored insights into the institutional strategies of a public university in an early adoption stage (Graham et al., 2013) was adopted in Ghana. According to Graham et al. (2013), institutions implementing BL can be grouped into three categories, namely those in the “awareness/exploration stage, the adoption stage, and the mature implementation stages” (Graham et al., 2013). In the case of institutions in the awareness stage, they are characterized by no formalized institutional strategies towards BL but are aware of BL. Those in the adoption stages, like GTUC, have new BL policies and strategies that are informing BL implementation. Finally, the mature stage BL institutions have well-structured BL policies, infrastructure and technical support mechanisms that facilitate BL implementations.

GTUC is a 4-year public undergraduate multi-campus institution established in 2005 with campuses in Accra, Kumasi, Ho, and Takoradi. The University adopted BL in

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furtherance to its online policy framework aimed at uploading 80% of teaching content online by 2021 and subsequently delivered courses through a dedicated learning management system called Moodle that included online discussion forums, videos, quizzes, homework and collaborative activities (Antwi-Boampong, 2018). Unfortunately, the BL initiative has not achieved the objective that it was set to achieve to date. This study steps back to investigate the implementation process and consider the role that implementation strategies can play in guiding successful BL implementations.

A. Research Design

A mixed-method research design involving Qual (Grounded Theory) + qual (secondary data) was adopted for the study (Morse, 2010). In this research design, the researcher used two data sets and two main research participants, i.e., management staff members and secondary data from reviewed literature. These two designs were inductively driven (Morse, 2010). No preconceived or prior theory underpinned the generation of questions or the design of the interview protocols. The Grounded Theory (GT) method was used for the core Qual design, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the strategies that were used in GTUC BL implementation. Data from all the participants in the Qual (GT) was pooled together and analyzed using the constant comparative analysis technique (Charmaz, 2015) for themes and categories and not as individual units as would have been the case if it was not a mixed study (Morse, 2010). The secondary data generated from the literature and analyzed using content analysis (CA) was used as a supplementary component. However, due to the Qual and qual being different methodological approaches, they were analyzed independently of each other and converged at the result stage. The results from the CA were used to confirm or disconfirm the outcome of the findings in the core research stage. This research design enables the comparison of the two independent perspectives, and in most cases, the supplementary qual (secondary data) yields additional information that the researcher can feed into the core Qual design phase.

B. Data Collection

The first stage, which is the core phase of the study, involved the collection of primary data from administrative managers of the university. The 22 senior managers who were directly involved in the policy and implementation of the BL process were purposively sampled. Those sampled were familiar with the institutional objective for pursuing BL and the challenges that have been faced since 2013, when the BL initiative was adopted and implemented. An interview guide was developed to shape the interview process and to situate the discourse within the boundaries of the research inquiry. The guide asked respondents questions related to their understanding of BL, the institutional policies, the institutional BL strategies, and the attendant challenges that the process faced (see Appendix for the interview guide). The purpose of this was to establish, on record, the institutional strategies adopted by GTUC in their quest to embed BL. The researcher personally conducted the interviews in November 2017 at the GTUC main campus in Tesano-Accra. The interviews were conducted in the offices of the respondents and recorded with their prior permission.

The second phase involved a systematic review of selected literature on institutional BL strategies. The purpose was to get insights into the state of the art on strategies adopted by universities as they implement BL. The procedure described by Clarke (2011) and Hemingway and Brereton (2009) guided the systematic review process. First, a research string was formulated based on the researchers’ understanding of the knowledge area. Second, Google Scholar and Aalborg University library repositories and databases were thus queried using the search string in November 2019. These two databases were selected because they both had access to the Social Science Citation Indexed (SSCI) and Science Citation Indexed (SCI) journals. Third, keywords such as “BL adoption strategies” and “BL implementation approach” were used to search for literature that addressed the aims and objectives of the research questions. In other words, the research question for the study was used in approaching the literature search.

The scope of the search was limited to studies published between 2006 and 2020. The rationale for the limitation was to situate the study within the current BL state of the art. In all, 32 published and unpublished related works on BL adoption strategies were found, of which 10 were selected for the study. The 10 papers used for the literature study phase were purposefully selected because their central theme was on adoption strategies and focused on BL adoption in educational settings (Rasheed et al., 2020). In terms of relevance, the papers selected contributed to confirming or disconfirming the findings that emerged in the core Qual stage. The findings were summarized and presented in a balanced and unbiased manner (Zhang & Zhu, 2016).

C. Data analysis

The first stage of the analysis was done using Barney Glaser’s Grounded Theory (Glaser, 2002) constant comparison analytical method (Licurish & Seibold, 2011). The recorded audio files were transcribed into text by the researcher and then sent to the respondents to confirm the accuracy of the records, following which coding was done. The transcripts were read repeatedly to get an insight into what the data was saying. Individual thought units that represented an adoption strategy were coded. Codes were constantly compared with each other and grouped together when they bore contextual meaning and relation. The process of constant comparison of codes that had been grouped into categories was continued as had been with the early coding stage. The findings were summarized and presented in a balanced and unbiased manner (Zhang & Zhu, 2016).

In all, over 76 unique codes were generated, following which they were grouped into categories and sub-categories. To ensure the reliability and validity of the research, a faculty member with competence in qualitative research methods and insights into BL was approached and used as the second coder. Five of the transcripts were sent to him for coding and returned after two weeks. Then, a meeting was held to resolve discrepancies in codes and emerging categories. A folder of the data records was stored in NVIVO for tracing and
possible tracing of the research procedure.

In the second stage, the findings relating to adoption strategies were thematically analyzed and grouped into themes (Terry et al., 2017). Thereafter, a comparison was made between the findings of the core Qual stage and that of the outcome from the literature review on the institutional strategies for BL adoption.

IV. RESULTS

The results detail BL strategies that emerged from the analysis. The respondents were 75% male, with the rest being female (25%). The analysis from the core Qual phase indicates that the implementation of BL at GTUC was ineffective and uncoordinated, albeit some strategies were adopted. However, because of the top-down approach that was used, the institutional objectives for implementing BL were far from being achieved. The stage two (qual) phase involving a limited review of the literature on institutional BL strategies, however, yielded interesting findings. For example, these studies were in terms of method deductively designed and set out to test theory rather than develop theory. The weakness in these approaches was that strategies on institutional BL implementations become too generic, and because they are not developed from the lived experiences of the practitioners, a dearth of empirical knowledge to guide institutional transitions is created.

Seven themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews and the outcome of the literature studies. The author believes that the underlying rationale behind these themes can be a useful framework that can provide guidance to university managers to successfully implement BL in any teaching and learning context. The six themes with their corresponding sub-themes, as presented in Table II, relate to the following strategies: Institutional vision and approach, promotion and planning, integrated infrastructure, motivation and encouragement, training and assessment. The discussion that follows is informed by the themes and interview responses, as summarised in Table II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive Strategies</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional vision and approach</td>
<td>Vision, goals and objective-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and promotion</td>
<td>Sensitization and stakeholder engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated infrastructure</td>
<td>Increase investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and support</td>
<td>Adapting LMS to fit user needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and encouragement</td>
<td>Teaching criteria requirements and online teaching certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and evaluation</td>
<td>Periodic review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
<td>Enforced usage</td>
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</table>

Seven themes and sub-themes were identified with respect to various implementation strategies that the management of GTUC had adopted towards the embedding of BL. These strategies gleaned from the analysis are significantly user or stakeholder-focused and targeted at addressing the user or stakeholder needs and anxieties that, hitherto, would create cause for resistance. Indeed, it can be observed that the above themes of strategies that were adopted follow a stepwise implementation process that starts with a defined institutional approach and continues through strategies that apply sanctions to ensure that users or stakeholders utilize the BL system. The foregoing section discusses these themes in seriatim.

A. Institutional Vision and Approach

Korr et al. (2012) emphasize the importance of a well-defined BL approach. As a strategy, Graham et al. (2013) indicate that institutional policies and visions should clearly define what BL is and the purpose BL seeks to achieve. Using the University of Birmingham as a case study of an institution in the early adoption and implementing stage, Graham et al. (2013) outline strategies adopted and recommended for universities like GTUC in a similar category. For example, the University of Birmingham’s definition was to reduce face-to-face time by 50%, and there were also policies to motivate resistant faculty members through incentive systems. A respondent viewed capturing the institutional vision as a strategy and remarked thus, “One of the goals of the University is to become a hub of E-learning in Ghana to make the learning experience easier.”

B. Planning and Promotion

At the core of this is all the strategies needed to drive the implementation process. This involves developing BL plans that ensure they fit with the mission, objectives, and goals of the institutions. The importance of aligning BL initiatives with institutions’ missions cannot be over-emphasized (Niemic & Otte, 2010). Planning team members, according to Graham et al. (2013), should include administrative advocates whose role will be to create awareness, garner management support and also be liaisons that connect the faculty level where BL implementation takes place to the management level where resources and logistics and other policy decisions are made.

What the mission is should be clearly defined to inform the specific promotional strategies to adopt. In doing this, the call for stakeholder engagement and sensitization workshops become very necessary since these provide for ventilating ideas and clarifying objectives as well as breaking and demystifying phobias. Respondents indicated, “We are currently trying to sensitize lecturers and students so that when the time comes for the full implementation of the programme, they will be more receptive”. Another respondent remarked, “I would believe that management, if we want to achieve our aim at least 90%, then the stakeholder’s (students and faculty) engagement is very key.”

Thus, it can be deduced that stakeholder engagement and sensitization workshops with faculty were indeed among the strategies adopted to promote the initiative prior to implementation.

C. Integrated Infrastructure

BL is touted as pervasive (Porter et al., 2014) as its adoption affects all facets of the institutional structure. That being the case, organizational strategies need to be in place such that the impact of the innovation is positively impacted and felt across all the structures of the institution. Therefore, to do this, an integrated infrastructure system that addresses various stakeholders' needs is required. Universities will have
to adopt very innovative strategies to ensure that this is achieved. For public universities facing cash flow challenges because of reduced government funding for higher education, one way to ensure that the infrastructure required for BL is available and maintained is to go into partnerships with other universities. A respondent succinctly remarked, “We should invest into what we call a kind of integrated university internet network to make that bandwidth and stuff much cheaper and faster for students to have access to some of these things.”

D. Training and Support

Staff training should be essential in any BL program as faculty do not come in handy with the necessary training or skills for online course instruction (VanderDerlinden, 2014). Mackeogh and Fox (2009) suggest that flexible support structures and mechanisms are essential for a successful BL program. As observed from the interview, respondents indicated that the institution had prioritized and made training a key component in its roll-out strategy. A respondent expressed this as “that lecturers need to go through the training required of someone qualified to teach online.”— what was done included the setting up of a new Centre for Online Learning and Teaching and the recruitment of instructional technologist to design and provide training for faculty on teaching with a mix of online and face to face methods. The strategy of recruiting an instructional technologist is vital as studies show that teachers and academic schools need support as and when they want it (Zhao & Song, 2021).

Most importantly, faculty were provided with certification, which became a requisite to qualifying to teach in the blended mode. The significance of this strategy stems from a previous study (Awidi & Cooper, 2015), which indicates that investing in staff training and competencies addresses faculty anxieties and gives them the confidence and competence to use technology to teach.

E. Motivation and Encouragement

Faculty need to be encouraged to move away from their traditional comfort zones to adopt BL. To do this, institutions need to adopt new approaches akin to a carrot-and-stick approach. This can be done through inducements in the form of rewards, promotions, or compensations for workloads. These and other motivational strategies can be adopted to sustain and motivate their interest. According to one respondent, “Most of the lecturers are interested, but they feel that some form of motivation is needed to get them fully on board.” Siddique et al. (2011) studied the effect of academic leadership on faculty adoption decision-making. They concluded that institutional managers ought to provide the necessary institutional needs to motivate faculty to teach in BL mode (Martin, 2010; Siddique et al., 2011).

F. Assessment and Evaluation

Studies have shown that the future of HEIs is in mixing the two modes (Botts et al., 2009; Porter et al., 2016). To achieve this, administrators of institutions implementing BL should routinize the assessment and evaluation of BL evaluation to measure achievements against targets and to provide feedback and feedforward to inform reviews in a meaningful and timely manner. Assessment and evaluations should be focused on the faculty’s online teaching presence as well as students’ learning experiences relative to learning outcomes as indicators. Similarly, the reduction of contact time should be evaluated against whether it has contributed towards increased student enrolment (Graham et al., 2013) and overall effectiveness in terms of academic financing. A respondent expressed their view: “We are hoping that lecturers will realize the benefit of going online and will adopt it, but then that does not seem to be the case. It looks like we might have to review the approach.”

G. Applying Sanctions

The literature suggests that BL programs are mainly implemented under conditions of non-compulsion, where the individual faculty members exercise control of what instructional methods to use in teaching. Graham et al. (2013) suggest that BL initiatives are instigated by enthusiastic faculty who are early adopters at the faculty level. In the current instance, GTUC’s BL initiative was motivated by both internal and external drivers (Alhabeeb & Rowley, 2017; Porter et al., 2016). Thus, considering the findings of Porter et al. (2016), there is a need for GTUC to balance these pressures within the general context of the university and stakeholder interests. Nonetheless, the study found the current BL implementation project is failing largely due to the resistance of faculty. The literature indicates that many faculty are reluctant to adopt BL, given the freedom they have in choosing their instructional methods (Ocak, 2011). Thus, mechanisms to apply sanctions ought to be developed. For example, a respondent remarked thus, “When Vision 2021 is implemented, it will become mandatory for lecturers to comply and teach, post materials online and failure in this regard will attract sanctions.” Sanctions do not necessarily have to be punitive but can involve delaying promotions or requiring student evaluations on BL feedback as requirements for promotions or the basis for assigning, of course, teaching loads.

V. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The outcome of the study presents practical, policy and theoretical implications. The constructs from the derived strategic themes are grouped into three categories in Table III and discussed in more detail relative to the literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Practical implications</th>
<th>Policy implications</th>
<th>Theoretical implications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training and support</td>
<td>Institutional vision and approach</td>
<td>Motivation and encouragement</td>
<td>Assessment and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Planning and promotion sanctions</td>
<td>Motivation and encouragement</td>
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A. Theoretical Implications

Grounded on the theoretical foundation of motivation theories (Gautreau, 2016; Gawel, 1997; Pereira & Figueiredo, 2010), the findings provide useful insights to management to incorporate assessments and evaluation into BL when considering implementation strategies. Then again, assessment and evaluation of BL programs over time brings to the fore gaps that need to be addressed to propose interventions that will stimulate faculty motivation and encourage uptake of BL for teaching and learning.
B. Practical Implications

Practically, the findings underscore the need for managers of universities to commit resources to BL projects. In this regard, the call for strategies that would enable universities to create innovative ways to find resources to commit to the development of an integrated infrastructure is imperative. Integrating infrastructure should include both the physical infrastructure that provides for lecture theatres, the IT infrastructure that should deal with dedicated support centres needed to support BL programs, providing resources for fast and reliable internet connectivity, bandwidth both on campus and off campus and incentives for students’ internet usage. Again, training and support strategies should be implemented to cater for stakeholders’ needs. The idea is that training support centres would deal with the technology anxieties of stakeholders and win them over by providing timely assistance as they navigate through the novelty of BL.

C. Policy Implications

On the policy front, strategies that incorporate an encompassing institutional vision that is developed through broad consultation with all relevant stakeholders are essentially the best strategy if BL is to be adopted and implemented campus-wide. Furthermore, policies should make provision for strategies that clearly articulate mechanisms that would plan and promote BL in the institution. These are achievable through interventions that encourage and motivate faculty members to take up BL, such as giving incentives to faculty members. For example, institutionalizing BL as requirements that count towards promotions, reduction in faculty course workloads, and providing dedicated learning support centres to assist faculty members with course design and online instruction assistance.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The paper provides insights into a public university’s strategy towards transitioning into a fully-fledged BL institution. It prescribes a useful framework that can be adopted to overcome barriers that often characterize the BL implementation process. The framework has been developed to assist institutional managers in implementing successful BL programs. The significant contribution to the literature is the fact that, indeed, this institution breaks away from the literature that suggests that BL initiatives be implemented under conditions that do not compel faculty to use the combination of both instructional methods. It is argued that given this freedom, the scalability of BL from pilot programs to achieving institutional-wide embedding would remain difficult. Indeed, for many faculties, the desire to hold on to the power play of instructor and student is an ever-ending goal. For institutions to fully maximize the full potential of blended learning, this study recommends providing adequate training, support, and infrastructure and, above all, a compulsory adoption of BL as the instructional mode for teaching and learning.

The study concludes by suggesting that further studies be carried out on BL in mandatory settings. It would be interesting to know what the perspective of faculty and students would be on this, especially when the current study reports that sanctions as a strategy should be applied to recalcitrant faculty members who fail to adopt BL for teaching and learning. However, further studies are needed to test the effectiveness of these strategies and report empirical outcomes. In this way, HEIs will be enriched with outcomes that can be used to engage stakeholders towards successful BL implementations. It is envisaged that the proposed framework will be applied to BL projects, and as they get tested and refined, they will be modelled into an institutional strategy model that can be adopted and applied to case-specific universities bearing context in mind.

APPENDIX

A. The Interview Guide

1) What is your institution’s definition of blended learning?
2) Are there any policies driving BL implementation? Describe the processes that led to the development of the policies.
3) Is there a clearly defined rationale or objective for adopting BL by your university?
4) Is the rationale unambiguous and clearly understood by all stakeholders?
5) What factors are influencing management to shift from face-to-face delivery to BL?
6) What implementation plans or strategies are adopted in the roll-out of the BL program?
7) Describe the processes involved in arriving at the implementation.
8) Are there feedback mechanisms to check or evaluate the successes or failures of the implementation?

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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