

Utilising Monitoring to Manage Teaching and Learning: A Perspective of the Open Distance Learning Universities

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Abstract: This paper evaluates why monitoring is being under-utilised to manage teaching and learning during the Open Distance Learning (ODL) mode by universities. The paper is both conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. Interviewing techniques and document review were used to collect data from six lecturers involved in the Open Distance Learning mode by universities. Research findings revealed that monitoring could be a nucleus for the enhancement of tuition by universities. Secondly, monitoring could promote students' accountability towards the completion of their studies on record time. Thirdly, monitoring could facilitate remedial teaching for students-at-risk. Fourthly, monitoring could advise on the accommodative assessment types for diverse students. Fifthly, monitoring could enable the restoration of the culture of quality and excellence by students. Lastly, the absence of well-coordinated monitoring during the ODL period, compromises the sustenance of academic standards by universities. The researcher recommends for the embracing of the decolonisation project to restore the centrality of monitoring during the ODL period. This is about transforming to suite conditions of the new normal.

Keywords: Accountability, Assessment, Culture, Monitoring, Quality

1. Introduction

Rabichund & Steyn (2014) regard monitoring to be capable of improving the quality and standards of performance in universities. Monitoring could rid a university of students who neglect their studies. Monitoring could promote student accountability (Jabanyane, 2018). Where tertiary institution students neglect their studies, that constitutes lack of accountability. With monitoring in place, such a challenge could be mitigated. Hence the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) resolution 8 of (2003) is emphatic to educational institutions never to downplay monitoring. Lack of monitoring at universities could lead to the demise of the culture of teaching and learning service. Such a state of affairs could prepare an ODL university for low academic outcomes. The prevalence of monitoring at universities could revive the compromised level of citizen trust in the tertiary education sector. Where such a trust is missing, it could be monitoring that timeously unveils such an information so that corrective measures are taken to restore the trust (Freire, 1990). In the primary and secondary schooling sectors, there is School Improvement Plan (SIP) and School Self-Evaluation (SSE) which those sectors utilise to take their institutions forward. ODL universities could apply similar tools to track the performance of their students. There

are ODL institutions that demonstrate readiness to enforce monitoring as a policy of the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, which but struggle as a result of lack of capacity. There are unfortunately, ODL institutions that perform monitoring for malicious compliance. That way of approaching monitoring may end up not being developmental for universities (Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2009; Kruger, 2010; Olivier, 2012). That is no different to ODL institutions which confine monitoring to the end of the year when it has to be an ongoing exercise. Research points out that, that manner of utilising monitoring at universities, could inhibit their effectiveness. This is the case because monitoring aims at improving practice. The reality is that the performance of monitoring ought not be a burden to any ODL university. However, this is not the case in myriad ODL universities in South Africa, where monitoring is being grudgingly embraced. Literature unveils that where monitoring is rejected, there could be consequences. One of the consequences picked, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic is to have the academic business of universities being inefficacious. This could be conspicuous when ODL universities produce low academic outcomes which are attributable to snubbing monitoring (Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosoge & Ngcobo, 2012; Mathebula, 2013). To sum up, failure by the ODL universities to hold highly the

centrality of monitoring, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic could expose them as being misfit within the current Fourth Industrial Revolution era (Modiba & Ntshangase, 2021).

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is underpinned by the Contextual Intelligence Model (CIM). This is on the basis of the focus and the problem which this paper pursues. The problem is under-utilisation of monitoring to unravel the challenge of neglecting their studies by ODL students. (Levin & Banjies, 2011). The chosen model reasons that every problem occurs in a particular context and that its successful resolution has to consider the context of occurrence. One of the key reasons why this model is being preferred to others, is because of its emphasis on intelligence to recognise changes in students during the Covid-19 pandemic (Lippit, 1989; Kuts, 2011). The application of intelligence in resolving this ODL problem of neglecting academic work, is what the CIM propagates. Dealing with student's-neglect of studies, needs to include an element of contextual awareness. That would assist the problem-solver in being mindful of the entirety of the context (Mncube & Harber, 2009; Sebola & Tonga, 2009). Dealing with the problem of student's lack of accountability towards their studies, it is essential for the researcher to have the historicity of the problem to have a firm grasp of the challenge (Bottery, 2011). The CIM pushes for the sustaining of quality teaching, so that it does not become one of the contributors to student's neglect of own studies (Moloi, 2002; Higgs & Smith, 2010). The selected theoretical perspective for this paper is in complete zinc with monitoring practices to be performed in ODL institutions to encourage students to be sufficiently accountable to their studies and to finish their qualifications on record time. Monitoring is grounded on change diagnosis at universities (Knux & Bramford-Wade, 2013). Where monitoring is practised, an ODL institution could be improvement-minded. A CIM thrives in institutions implementing monitoring where every practice there, is being subjected to reflexive praxis (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Khanare, 2008; Mueller, 2011; Thody, 2011). A CIM, does not regard human beings as technocrats who have to be controlled like objects when constructing data from them. Since lack of accountability by students towards their studies, retards meaningful involvement in the teaching and learning enterprise, it was the chosen theoretical perspective that better explicated the basis for

such strange behaviour and how to overcome the problem, utilising monitoring (Ngidi, 2009; Khumalo, 2011; Lehlaha, 2011; Chikane, 2012).

3. Literature Review

The review of literature indicates that in ODL institutions where students lack accountability for their studies, that needs attention. Reversing this problem requires strengthening monitoring in the tertiary education sector. Literature confirms that neglecting of studies, could be explained in terms of students possessing fettered minds. Ramphela (2011) demonstrates that due to being mentally fettered, the bright future of scores of tertiary students ends up being wasted. Bernstein & McCarthy (2011) aver that academic underperformance due to affording less attention to one's studies, by ODL students deserves to be combatted. Where the problem of snubbing one's studies is early detected, mechanisms could be developed to overcome it. Literature ascribes student's neglect of their studies to the absence of sufficient monitoring in myriad ODL institutions (Fomunyan, 2017; Meador, 2019). At times lack of interest, support and involvement of parents and other educational agencies in the education of students, emerges as another contributing factor (Clarke, 2007; Nxumalo, 2001; Marishane, Botha & Du Plessis, 2011). Coetzee, Van Wyk & Wydeman (2008) lament that parents do care more about students' progress more than students themselves. This is not entirely strange, especially this century. It is slightly becoming an unstoppable trend with the kind of tertiary students, populating ODL institutions. The review of literature confirms that parents are being caught off-guard whenever their children fail to perform due to artificial obstructions such as little devotion to their studies. Jabanyane (2018) stresses that monitoring ascertains a high quality teaching. Quality teaching as motivated by adequate monitoring at ODL institutions needs to mitigate student's neglect of one's studies. Hence the Centre for Development and Enterprise (2015) identifies effective monitors as being a critical factor in determining student achievement. Monitoring at the ODL could reveal the need for the improvement of teaching which could neutralise student's neglect of one's studies. The thesis of monitoring is maintaining a high quality schooling which includes students completing their qualifications on record time. Where monitoring is missing, neglect of studies by students could be aggravated by lecturers who could as well be less dedicated to their

lecturing responsibilities as a result of being as mentally fettered as their students. Hence Maake (2011) remarks that at times, the conduct of myriad lecturers is commensurate to "hunting with the hounds and running with hares". This signifies a paradoxical context within which some lecturers who are anticipated to emancipate students to be totally devoted to their studies, are as mentally un-liberated as students entrusted to them (Southey, 2012). The fact of the matter is that lecturer-emancipation, is closely tied to student-liberation. Literature review explicitly divulges that students in many tertiary institutions are not able to be mentally free to stop neglecting their studies, because they are under the tutelage of lecturers who are as mentally fettered as them (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Roos & Smith, 1994; Clarke, 2007). Logically, it takes the liberated to liberate another of course not ruling out the likelihood of mutual liberation. Neglecting one's studies by the current ODL students is an invitation to intensify monitoring to support students to change for the better (Kutsyuruba, Walker & Noonan, 2011). In ODL institutions, monitoring meets diverse challenges one of which is overflowing students in the lecture halls which could meddle with its implementation. Literature review concludes that a good indicator of a particular ODL institution not supporting monitoring could be the perpetual production of low academic outcomes by that ODL university (Modiba & Ntshangase, 2021).

4. Objectives and the Research Question

This paper evaluates why monitoring is being under-utilised to manage teaching and learning during the ODL mode by universities. The second objective relates to devising means to eradicate lack of accountability to one's studies by students. On the basis of that, the research question guiding this paper is: *what shall it take to transform the ODL students under the Covid-19 pandemic to embrace a virtue of accountability and hard work in their studies?* Incessant neglect of one's studies by ODL students could increase the number of ODL students who do not complete their qualifications on record time (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Equal Education, 2018; Meador, 2019).

5. Research Design

This is a qualitative case study. The problem which this paper pursues, is under-utilisation of

monitoring to unravel the challenge of neglecting their studies by the bulk of the OD students, necessitated the design of this paper (Higgs & Smith, 2006). Furthermore, the objective of this paper which is to evaluate why monitoring is being under-utilised to manage teaching and learning during the ODL mode by Universities, necessitated that this paper follows a qualitative research paradigm as against the quantitative one. The choice of the qualitative methodology was orchestrated by the paper being undergirded by the CIM (Kutz, 2111). The researcher saw a need to create a synergy between the qualitative research approach and the CIM. The combination of the two illuminated issues of neglecting one's studies and utilisation of monitoring in ODL institutions to mitigate the problem. The researcher applied the theoretical perspective to evaluate the relationship between neglecting one's studies and monitoring which aims at easing that problem (Lehlaha, 2011). The researcher applied the mentioned theoretical framework, to evaluate how low academic outcomes in ODL institutions could be curbed with students neglect their studies. Amalgamating the CIM and the qualitative research approach, aimed at maximising the comprehension of the pursued problem and to determine its eradication (Ramrathan, 2017). Combination led to in-depth insight about the problem in order to operate from an informed position and to ultimately minimise failure to complete qualifications on record time by students. Out of the population of 26 universities in South Africa, 2 that are Historically Disadvantaged in Limpopo Province, were conveniently sampled. In each of the universities, 6 lecturers became research participants. Interviewing technique and document review were utilised to generate data for this paper. Altogether, a total of 12 research participants were interviewed regarding the utilisation of monitoring to stop ODL students from demonstrating lack of accountability to their studies. Interviewing responses were audiotaped and later-on transcribed. Relevant documents containing requisite information were accessed and perused. The validity and reliability of data were ascertained when being analysed through the thematic content analysis and the constant comparative methods. Both the interviewing technique and the document review were helpful in terms of accessing information germane to lack of accountability for their studies by the ODL students (Babbie, 1992; Mouton, 1996; Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Creswell, 2010; Meador, 2018).

6. Results and Discussion

Findings arrived at in this paper answer the research question guiding the paper and are in relation to the under-utilisation of monitoring to manage tuition under the ODL mode by universities. Responses of 12 research participants were evaluated in relation to neglecting one's studies by ODL students and how monitoring could reverse that. The 12 research participants interviewed are being referred to as Lecturer 1A up to 1F of University A, and Lecturer 2A up to 2F of University B. Differentiation of research participants were in terms of either University A whose research participants were distinguishable as Lecturer 1A up to Lecturer 1F and University B whose research participants were distinguishable as Lecturer 2A up to Lecturer 2F. The researcher sampled those research participants for interviewing in the area of lack of accountability to their studies by the ODL students and how monitoring could be applied to mitigate that challenge (Macupe, 2015; Nair, 2015; Tshingilane, 2015; Botha, 2017). The Contextual Intelligence Model in partnership with the qualitative research paradigm were instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to emerge with these findings. Each of the finding is discussed in detail below:

6.1 Monitoring as a Nucleus of Teaching and Learning

Behaviour modification is necessary for students who display lack of accountability for their studies. That is possible where monitoring is allowed a space to guide tuition in ODL institutions (Nair, 2015). Lecturer 1D of University A asserts that *"it is through monitoring that ourselves as lecturers are able to be up to date about students who are genuinely struggling as universities are applying an ODL mode of content delivery owing to health protocols that prevent the usual face-to-face contact between lecturers and students in the lecture halls"*. Lecturer 2C of University B submits that *"the Open Distance Learning mode currently in use by universities is not as bad as it looks, as long as it is being allowed to be implemented with appropriately planned monitoring which will reveal students that show commitment to their studies and those who are in the main totally neglecting their studies"*. Lecturer 2A of University B reminds that *"in times of desperations and crisis like the present one where as lecturers, we are not able to be with our students in the lecture halls as usual, through proper application of monitoring, we can be*

able to detect how much should we revise our manner of content delivery to students so that our teaching and learning under the pandemic is wholly being guided by constant monitoring for the benefit of students". Responses of research participants are emphatic that yes, monitoring could serve as a nucleus of every tuition subject to it being well planned and applied with conviction (Ngoepe, 2021).

6.2 Monitoring Promotes Student Accountability

From early childhood, pupils need to be taught accountability for their studies to prepare them to be accountable students at the tertiary sector (Macupe, 2015). On that aspect, Lecturer 1F of University A asserts that *"where ODL students who are expected to be exemplary to the primary and the secondary scholars, in terms of displaying a high level devotion to their studies, under the Covid-19 pandemic, and instead display signs of neglecting their studies, through intensive and extensive monitoring of such students, they are likely to change for the better and begin to take their studies more seriously"*. Lecturer 2D of University B maintains that *"colleagues from the ODL institutions who have not yet started rethinking the usage of monitoring to track truant ODL students, have not yet realised the irreplaceable value of monitoring in transforming negligent ODL students into a real and accountable tertiary students despite the experienced Covid-19 inconveniences"*. Lecturer 1E of University A remarks that *"the central role of monitoring given that we deal with highly unpredictable ODL students, is evident for every University lecturer of note to observe"*. Responses of the research participants concur that where student accountability was lacking, close monitoring of the affected students could become very helpful and transformative (Freire, 1990; Yukl, 2006; Tshingilane, 2015).

6.3 Monitoring Enables Remedial Teaching

The significance of monitoring is that it uncovers students deserving remedial teaching to be on par with others (Botha, 2017). Lecturer 2F from University B narrates that *"in view of how much today's tertiary students are spoilt, it is placing an extra burden on the tertiary institution lecturers to identify students qualifying for remedial teaching so that they are helped to perform like the rest and one of the ways to execute such a task with success is to strengthen monitoring in one's dealing with these ODL students"*. Lecturer 1E from University A reasons that *"the generation of the*

present day ODL students, requires to be handled with care and they equally need to be persuaded to accept monitoring since it helps them more than they realize". Lecturer 1D of University A shares that "monitoring ought not be sacrificed at the ODL institutions, despite being resisted by students because as of now, it serves as a reliable tool with regard to how remedial teaching has to be carried out with struggling ODL students". These three research participants are advising how tactful ODL institutions have to be, to cope with the nature of students who without adequate monitoring, end up taking long to complete their qualifications on record time due to the absence of remedial teaching (Meyer, 2008; Kutsyuruba, Walker & Noonan, 2011).

6.4 Monitoring Leads to Appropriate Assessments

The uniqueness of every student necessitates that any form of assessment conducted be adaptive to students (Jabanyane, 2018). Lecturer 1D of University A advises that "workload inequality characterising and defining the majority of ODL institutions, could be behind the unsuccessful enforcement of monitoring to guide how assessments have to be diversified to be accommodative of every ODL student". Lecturer 2F of University B reassures that "in case those tasked to perform monitoring, are not having unbearable teaching load, they could do justice to monitoring through ascertaining that it provides a direction on forms of assessments that are sensitive to the plight of the majority of the ODL students". Lecturer 2F of University B remarks that "experienced lectures are aware that today's teaching and learning ought not be divorced from the manner of assessment which under the current Covid-19 pandemic has to consider the context of each of the ODL student". Evidently, the manner of assessment in an ODL institution, has to be influenced by how monitoring of tuition is being conducted (Bottery, 2011; Mngxitama, 2013).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

A research question guiding this paper has been answered. Even the objectives of the paper have been achieved. As displayed in the discussion of findings of this paper, both the review of literature and the theoretical framework played a critical role in talking to the findings of this paper. In addition, interviewing technique and document review together with the theoretical perspective, provided the better context within which the entire paper had to be located and

comprehend. ODL students were exposed by findings to be lacking accountability for their studies and to be requiring adequate monitoring to eradicate the problem. The conclusion arrived at in this paper, is in the context of the under-utilisation of monitoring by ODL institutions and neglect of studies by ODL students. The paper therefore recommends the following. The basis of these recommendations is the discussed findings which are as follows: There is a need for the ODL institutions to be supported to regard monitoring to be the nucleus of teaching and learning practice. This will enable tuitions to be informed by their monitoring results.

- There is a need to ascertain that monitoring is being performed appropriately to promote accountability on the part of the ODL students. Such a practice could minimise neglect of studies by students.
- There is a need to ascertain that the process of monitoring as conducted in the ODL institutions contributes to remedial teaching as extended to the struggling ODL students.
- Finally, there is need for ODL institutions to embrace decolonisation project to enable those institutions to apply monitoring to among others decide upon the relevant assessment modes for diverse students, to retain the culture of quality and excellence and to restore the better coordination of monitoring processes across the ODL institutions.

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