



## **Instructors' Conceptions of the Efficacy and Motives for Online Instruction in Open and Distance Learning Mode**

**Philipo Lonati Sanga**

*Institute of Adult Education, Dar es Salaam - Tanzania*

**Email:** [philipolonati@gmail.com](mailto:philipolonati@gmail.com)

### ***Abstract***

*This paper employs the Community of Inquiry Theoretical Framework to examine the instructors' conceptions of training efficacy and motives for online instruction in open and distance learning mode at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). Using a hermeneutic phenomenology research design, data were collected from 25 instructors at the Open University of Tanzania through in-depth interviews, which were corroborated with questionnaires. Findings from the study indicated that, generally, continuous professional development significantly impacts how instructors teach in the online environment. Although most participants rated training as an effective strategy for online instruction, the programmes lacked regularity and fell short of more relevant training programmes. More specifically, findings indicated that the training package missed some essential contents required by instructors. A wide range of motives for conducting online training is elaborated. This paper recommends that institutions invest in relevant regular training programs for online instructors and ensure comprehensive training packages.*

**Keywords:** *distance learning, online instruction, online learning, open and distance learning, open learning*

### **Introduction**

Although the growth and expansion of higher education have been a serious concern of the government of Tanzania since its independence in 1961, more efforts have been focused on establishing and promoting conventional campus-based universities. As time has passed since independence, Tanzania recognised campus universities' incompetence in meeting the increasing demand for higher education

(Sanga, 2013) through conventional mode of delivery. It has not been easy to satisfy the country's higher learning needs by building campuses and expanding other related infrastructural facilities. Distance education, via single mode and dual modes, has been seen as one of the many crucial ways to meet this rapidly growing demand for higher education. Distance education offers opportunities to reduce the knowledge gap between nations and counter the effects of the brain drain. Despite the country's efforts to provide distance education, there remains a myriad of challenges to distance education, mainly related to the quality of education and its delivery modes, the reputation of the graduates, and limited resources. Such a context compelled the government of Tanzania to consider establishing various distance education systems, notably the Open University of Tanzania (OUT).

### **The Context of the Open University of Tanzania**

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was established by the Act of Parliament No.17 of 1992, which became operational on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1993 by the publication of Notice No. 55 in the Official Government Gazette as an independent, autonomous, and fully fledged single-mode institution authorised to award its degrees and certificates via distance mode of delivery. The first batch of students was admitted in January 1994 (OUT, 2011). This Act was later repealed and replaced by the University Act No. 7 of 2005. The OUT was reregistered and reaccredited by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) in 2006 (Mbwette& Kazungu, 2011).

By 1990, Tanzania had only two conventional universities: the University of Dar es Salaam and the Sokoine University of Agriculture. The recommendation to establish an open university came as a strategy to increase enrolment in higher education, targeting those who had missed the chance and were now engaged in various life-sustaining activities in both public and private sectors. The university was to deliver its programmes by distance learning approaches, making it unnecessary for learners to reside on campus (OUT, 2018). The target students of OUT included employed staff who could not study in conventional universities due to their career commitments; women who could not leave their families; aspiring people in remote rural areas; school leavers who had the minimum entry requirements but could not be admitted into conventional public universities due to capacity limitation. Others include people with various disabilities; and poor people who had qualifications but could not meet the high tuition fees charged by the conventional universities.

Currently, OUT operates through 27 regional centres spread throughout Tanzania's Mainland and four coordination centres in Zanzibar, Pemba, Kahama and Tunduru.

Each centre serves as a coordination and administrative centre headed by a director. Since its inception, OUT has been using print-based study materials as a dominant course delivery mode, which is the case in most open and distance learning universities in Africa. With the advancements in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), OUT has shifted its course delivery mode from print-based materials to online instruction. From the 2016/2017 academic year, the university declared all undergraduate degree programmes to be taught online, except for a few specified programmes (OUT, 2018). The motives for this declaration were associated with improving the quality of both teaching and learning, increasing the enrolment and active number of students per year, increasing supervised self-learning on the part of students, improving the quality of graduates and reducing the average cost of academic delivery (OUT, 2016).

### **Online Instruction at OUT**

Instructors use Moodle to facilitate course delivery using Learning Management System (LMS) tools such as discussion forums, assignments, chat forums and online lectures through Zoom (OUT, 2021). Teaching and learning activities include recorded online lectures, which are in the form of video, audio, or both, then uploaded and made viewable on Moodle, real-time lectures using video conference on the Zoom Cloud meeting application, online discussion and online assignments, quizzes, chat forums and whiteboards (Lawi, 2021).

Online instruction requires competent online instructors who have undergone training in teaching in an online environment. Literature indicates that as online study modes continue to expand, there is increasing cognisance of the need for competent online instructors. Developing institutional competence for online instruction requires a careful approach to training online instructors and a workload investment in staff training and development (Gregory & Lodge, 2015). The ability to effectively communicate, manage technology, and deliver and assess content becomes especially important in intensive online environments, where there is less time to familiarise oneself with new tools and the operating environments (Roddy et al., 2017). The monitoring of student progress, identification, and follow-up of related issues are also critical duties for instructors to minimise the possibility of student detachment from the learning process. In order to best support student learning, retention and degree completion online, instructors should be equipped with skills related to course management, instruction, instructional design and student engagement in the online setting (Andrews & Hu, 2021). According to Vang et al. (2020), online instructors begin online teaching with little or no specific

training. Further, there is little evidence regarding instructors' effectiveness in executing their online instruction roles.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

Based on the preceding background, this paper is an explanatory case study that examines the instructors' conceptions of the efficacy and motives for online instruction. More specifically, the paper: Examines the instructors' conceptions of the efficacy of online instruction and analyses the instructors' perceived motives for online instruction.

## **Community of Inquiry Theoretical Framework**

The Community of Inquiry framework (Figure 1) supports guided inquiry by identifying teaching activities. It provides guidance based on theory and practice, content, and processes for blended learning (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018). In keeping with the original three presences of the Community of Inquiry framework—*social presence*, *cognitive presence* and *teaching presence*, blended learning creates opportunities for self-reflection, active cognitive processing, interaction and peer teaching. In addition, expert guidance from teachers at the right time encourages engagement and shared application activities, highlighting the importance of creating communities of inquiry in the classroom, whether face-to-face, online or blended.

Accurate framework measurement allows for a more detailed examination of cognitive presence. This is important, as none of the presences stands alone. Cognitive presence emerges from four distinct but overlapping components of practical inquiry: triggering events, exploration, integration and resolution. Establishing deep and meaningful learning requires activity in all four components. However, Akyol and Garrison (2011) report evidence that cognitive presence requires a balance among cognitive, social and teaching presence. Direct instruction and facilitation of cognitive activity, beyond just explaining content, are vital roles for teachers using this framework. Rather than 'teacher presence,' teaching presence is so named to allow for a teaching function for teachers and students in a Community of Inquiry framework. While the teacher, or instructor, plays a leadership role, teaching presence allows for and fosters peer teaching among students. Recent studies clarify the importance of teaching presence in generating satisfying student learning experiences.

In addition to these three presences, emotional presence has been suggested (Stenbom et al., 2016). Emotional presence is defined as the outward expression of

emotion, affect, and feeling by individuals and among individuals in a community of inquiry as they relate to and interact with the learning technology, course content, students and instructor. Exploratory factor analysis suggests emotional presence may stand alone as a separate element in this framework.



*Figure 1: The Community of Inquiry Framework*

Adopted from Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018); Garrison et al. (2000).

### **The Concept of Online Instruction**

Most higher education institutions consider online education as part of their strategic growth to maximise learning opportunities and reach more students. Nonetheless, the transition from face-to-face or traditional distance education to a virtual environment necessitates new ways of teaching (Redmond, 2011). Instructors must change their pedagogical approaches from face-to-face or traditional distance education to online teaching. This requires instructors' knowledge and skills to facilitate teaching in an online environment. Online teaching uses the internet to provide instructional materials and facilitate interactions between teachers and students and, in some cases, among students. Online teaching can be entirely online, with all instructions taking place through the internet, or online elements can be combined with face-to-face distance

education in what is known as blended learning (Oliver & Stalling, 2014). Thus, online instruction takes place partially or entirely over the Internet.

The literature identifies two online teaching types: synchronous and asynchronous modes (Amiti, 2020; Kipling et al., 2023). Teaching in a synchronous environment takes place via an electronic mode, a live mode that includes voice, video, or text chat rooms. Further, it allows teacher-student and student-student interaction in real-time. Synchronous communication technology includes Google Meet, Skype, Adobe Connect, Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex and Zoom (Wang et al., 2022). Synchronous mode involves tools such as live charts, audio and video conferencing, data and application sharing, shared whiteboard, virtual hand rising, joint view of multimedia presentations, and online slide shows to approximate face-to-face teaching strategies such as delivering lectures and holding meetings with groups of students. Both synchronous and asynchronous modes are essential in online instruction delivery to students and instructors. For instructors, teaching can be done anytime and anywhere (Amiti, 2020).

Asynchronous mode provides students with readily available materials in the form of audio/video lectures, handouts, articles and PowerPoint presentations. Studies in asynchronous mode are provided through Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Blackboard, Moodle, WebCT and Desire2Learn. The asynchronous mode involves tools such as e-mail, threaded discussion, news groups, bulletin boards and file attachments (Amiti, 2020; Kipling et al., 2023; Ni She et al., 2019). Asynchronous communication tools have the limitation of lacking immediacy, spontaneity and visual cues. Online instructors can simultaneously reflect upon their instructional techniques and curricular design by providing frequent, timely, and constructive feedback on students' assignments and interactive communicative features such as discussion boards. Consequently, increased reflective thinking may lead to greater instructor engagement in teaching and learning, professional success and academic curiosity (Bohan & Perrotta, 2020). However, the growth of online teaching has not been without challenges; for instance, online teaching has been constantly criticised for its apparent lack of quality control; it has also been said that online learning deprives students of some of the benefits of being in a classroom such as physical teacher-student interaction. Other challenges are unreliable internet connection, costs associated with purchasing the mobile devices and bandwidth, instructors' lack of appropriate skills for teaching online and unreliable electricity supply. Also, there is a lack of motivation among instructors to innovate and support the development and teaching of online courses. Lack of

motivation poses a potential barrier to teaching, as many instructors who teach traditional classes may not be interested in teaching online (Kebritchiet al., 2017).

### **The Rationale for Training Online Instructors**

Teaching online differs from teaching face-to-face in classrooms, where instructors observe learners' reactions in real-time, offer immediate clarifications on complex topics, personally get to know learners and communicate face-to-face. This is completely different online, where instructors must manage the environment, guide learners, and deliver content (Adnan et al., 2017). For some instructors, when they change the teaching place, they feel that their identities are under threat. Many instructors see their professional identity as tied to their past face-to-face teaching, where they had a high level of expertise. Redefining professional identity and teaching practices takes time. Without training, many instructors try replicating the existing course design and pedagogical practices when moving from face-to-face to online teaching (Redmond, 2011). Instructors face challenges in three phases of online education: design, delivery, and follow-up. In the design phase, instructors must consider how students learn and what to include, ensuring the class materials are exciting and engaging. Some suggested resources are media, lecture notes, and other sources that can add to the class materials.

One challenge with delivery is that many instructors cannot translate the materials into the online medium. The follow-up phase involves storing the information, accessing it later, and disseminating materials. In addition to the misunderstanding about transferring materials from one medium to another, instructors may feel a disconnection between the curriculum and design team's design and the actual delivery of class content (Kebritch et al., 2017). Instructors should be provided with capacity-building opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and innovative teaching and assessment methods that can increase student engagement and attention to online classes (Leng et al., 2020). Training and orientation programmes about online learning, including lessons on online teaching and learning tools and strategies, need to be offered regularly so that students, instructors and staff can have the opportunity to advance their knowledge and understanding of the different aspects and nuances of online teaching (Heng & Sol, 2020).

### **Methodology**

The efficacy of training and motives for online instruction were examined by instructors teaching courses online. Thus, a hermeneutic phenomenology design was used because the study aimed to engage research participants in expressing

their teaching experiences online. Literature confirms that hermeneutic phenomenology is suitable for understanding the context of people's 'lived experiences and the meanings of their experiences' (Alase, 2017). It also captures participant's narrative accounts, reflecting how they interpret and express their experiences through in-depth interviews. Twenty-five (25) instructors who have been more actively involved in online teaching for at least ten years were purposefully selected and interviewed. A questionnaire was administered to 25 instructors to corroborate their interview responses. This study employed Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). IPA provided the best opportunity to understand the innermost deliberations of research participants 'lived experiences'. Smith and Nizza (2022) advocate that IPA researchers focus on the lived experiences of individuals and how they make sense of them within the context of their personal and social worlds, with a particular emphasis on personal sense-making. However, IPA is also guided by hermeneutics, a theory that acknowledges the subjectivity of interpretation. This means IPA researchers seek to relay intimate details of people's experiences and acknowledge that their experiences and biases may impact their interpretations. Hence, the research method goes beyond just summarising what people express rather it tries to discern what the experience is like from that person's unique perspective (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Efficacy of Training Programme Content for Online Instructors**

The study on the efficacy of training and motives for online teaching may necessitate understanding the relevance of training content for online instructors in the first place. To this end, instructors were asked to rate *Yes* or *No* against the items regarding contents that were covered during training programmes for instructors. The 'Yes' responses are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1*****Programme Content for Training Online Instructors***

<b>Item</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Developing suitable materials for online learners	11%
Uploading lecture notes, links, recorded lectures, assignments and quizzes in Moodle	98%
Conducting discussion on forums	96%
Setting quizzes for online learners	100%
Recording lectures	0%
Principles of online teaching	11%
Grading assignments and giving feedback to students	100%
Strategies for student feedback	98%
Strategies for student interaction	67%
Teaching in real-time online lectures using Zoom	96%
Conducting oral examinations in an online environment	88%
Creating Zoom link for online lectures	50%

The findings above revealed that training conducted at the Open University of Tanzania included how to: grade assignments and give feedback to students; set quizzes for online learners and; upload lecture notes, links, recorded lectures, assignments, and quizzes in Moodle. Other items include strategies for student feedback; conducting discussions on the forum; teaching in real-time online lectures using zoom; and conducting oral examinations in an online environment. Complementing the questionnaire findings, data from instructors' interviews revealed that some of the contents uploaded in Moodle missed important parts, as pointed out by one instructor:

Although we have adopted online teaching and that lecture notes should be uploaded to Moodle following the principles of ODL materials, we still have a gap regarding how to write ODL materials. Some instructors have just uploaded books without study guides. When online teaching was introduced at OUT, I was on study leave, but when I was back, I was just given a course to teach without any training, and it was such a tough time for me.... I contacted the faculty technician, who assisted me with some technical issues. I still face challenges marking online assignments and posting issues on the web page.

The instructor's responses above suggest that no training for instructors on developing ODL materials has been offered. Also, regular training is lacking to raise students' and instructors' awareness of online teaching and learning. This lack

of relevant and regular training for instructors and students who were teaching and learning in an online environment, respectively, had a bearing on the implementation of teaching through online mode. For instance, the understanding of what would be expected of instructors implementing online teaching was low, thus negatively affecting student learning. Andrews and Hu (2021) reported that there is also a lack of common standards for the format and content of professional training for online instructors. Training activities for online instructors often include workshops, one-to-one training, short sessions, and one-time training. Professional training should support online instructors in developing technology skills and learning about pedagogy and andragogy for effective instruction.

### **Motives for Conducting Online Instruction**

#### ***Online instruction as a mechanism for flexibility and convenience in teaching and learning***

Instructors expressed that online teaching allowed them to teach wherever they were. Further, online teaching provides an opportunity to meet students worldwide. Many instructors valued this ubiquitous environment, as one of them candidly revealed:

I enjoy teaching via online mode; I can travel and still have a session irrespective of where I am. I can be at home but run a session. This can be done any time when uploading study materials and replying to students' webmail. I can be a father, husband, student and lecturer while teaching. For example, I travelled for training to Mwanza, but in the evening, I had a Zoom session. The lesson was successfully taught while I was in the hotel, and I managed to see students from Arusha, Bukoba, Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Mtwara and Zanzibar.

From the excerpt above, most interviewees shared their positive experiences about the many advantages of online teaching in terms of flexibility, convenience, freedom, and learner diversity. This implies that online instruction at the Open University of Tanzania allows instructors to conduct lessons from anywhere and anytime. Also, it allows students to study anywhere and at any time. Similarly, Naidu (2017) alludes that, in flexible learning, the learning and teaching process is increasingly freed from the limitations of the time, place, and pace of study. It is convenient since it allows one to study anywhere provided that they have internet. That said, online courses are available anytime, making it flexible to both students

and instructors. However, these advantages should not disregard the importance of being self-disciplined within higher education standards and expectations.

### *Online instruction as an opportunity for real-time online lectures*

The Open University of Tanzania offers real-time online lectures like any conventional university for all courses using video conferences based on the Zoom cloud meeting application. Students are encouraged to observe the provided teaching timetable and join the online classes to interact with lecturers and fellow students. The lectures started from 1430 to 1915 hours (all times are +3 UTC). The Zoom joining links were accessed on their Moodle accounts. There was a one-hour lecture for each knowledge area (KI-K6) every month from December to May each year. However, there was another schedule that started from April to September. Typically, each knowledge area comprises more than two topics of the course syllabus. One course instructor reflected:

I teach via Zoom class and share slides on the screen where students can take notes, ask questions, and chat on the web page. It is like traditional classroom training, only that it is done with the aid of the Internet, and students from countries like Ghana, Senegal, and Namibia have been able to participate virtually. This is not possible when using print-based materials.

Thus, zoom classes are employed to enhance the synchronous mode of teaching and learning. A synchronous learning environment includes real-time sharing of knowledge and learning and immediate access to the instructor for asking questions and receiving answers. Teaching through Zoom minimized students' isolation and allowed them to attend the classroom irrespective of their location. This is supported by Amiti (2020), that in an online teaching environment, the teacher and the students meet online on a specific online platform for teaching and communicating about a lesson. Direct interaction with teachers and students in real-time is much like a traditional face-to-face classroom, somewhat better, as the distance is no longer a barrier and by connectivity via the internet, no time is wasted in travelling.

Instant feedback and answers can help students resolve any problem they encounter in learning. Facial expressions and tones of voice can aid them in having the human feel a broader spectrum and lead to global interaction without much cost. These findings concur with the ideas from the Theory of Connectivism, where learning occurs when knowledge is shared, stored, and manipulated to create new

knowledge (Siemens, 2008). However, this type of environment requires a fixed meeting date and time, which contradicts the promise of learning *anytime, anywhere* that principles of traditional distance education promote. Some of the challenges inherent in real-time online lectures can be the need for the availability of students at a given time and the necessary availability of a good bandwidth and internet. Participants can feel frustrated and thwarted due to technical problems. Also, the challenge of a fixed timetable disrupts the principle of flexibility in ODL, which forces all instructors and students to be present during live sessions. In these circumstances, teaching an online live session is flexible regarding place but not time. Lack of flexibility in terms of time affects students' decision to enroll at the Open University of Tanzania as it is not the same as traditional distance education, which is flexible both in time and place.

### ***Online instruction for the acquisition of individual access to materials and information***

Most instructors conceptualized online instruction as improving teaching and learning by enhancing the accessibility of materials and information in Moodle. Instructors recalled that one of their roles is to develop materials and upload them in Moodle, which students can access anytime and anywhere. They also added that they record lectures and upload them to Moodle. An instructor narrated:

Online instruction is like face-to-face teaching, but the difference is that it is done with the aid of the Internet, and there is improvement in teaching compared to traditional distance education. In traditional distance education, materials are developed and distributed to learners via regional centres, which usually take a long time to reach students. With online teaching, a student can access materials in Moodle at any time from any place. I upload lecture notes, PPTs, reference books, and course outlines with online teaching. Also, students can access course information at any time and from any place provided they have paid tuition fees for the first instalment and students' direct costs.

Therefore, Moodle has improved students' access to materials such that they can download materials, save them on their devices, and read them at their convenience. Students can use smartphones, iPads, and computers wherever they are. Online teaching helps to access a wide variety of current and available online resources. Further, the web is used for individual access to learning materials and information. Similarly, Manea et al. (2021) add that online instruction through Moodle helps

instructors create and save teaching materials easily and use it as a collaborative online platform for instructors and students to learn together.

Moreover, Moodle helps students view information on the webpage regarding assignments, quizzes, discussion forums, timetables for Zoom lectures, and calendars. It also provides access to Zoom link information. Online teaching helps to simplify the accessibility of materials and information; learners must pay the first instalment of tuition fees with all its direct costs in order to access the materials and other information. This affects the implementation of online teaching because all students who have not paid tuition fees cannot start accessing information and learning. Gonzalez (2010) proposed that instructors conceptualise online instruction by focusing on the provision of information, which included two conceptions of e-learning as a medium to provide information and as a medium for occasional communication.

### ***Online instruction for the promotion of individual assessment***

Most interviewees considered online instruction to improve teaching and learning through online assignments called tutor-marked assignments (TAM) and quizzes known as computer-marked assignments (CMA). Like any other type of assessment, online assessment is used primarily to measure cognitive abilities, demonstrating what has been learned after a particular educational event, such as the end of an instructional unit or chapter. At the moment, at the Open University of Tanzania, online assignments are used for formative assessment to determine if learning is happening, to what extent, and if changes need to be made. On-going feedback needs to be given as soon as possible after the task is completed to improve teaching and learning for both students and instructors. Course instructors prepare online assignments for each knowledge area marked either online on Moodle or offline by the instructor.

In TMA, a student attempts two essay questions, each carrying 15%, making up 30%. However, the researcher experienced that when teaching through tutor-marked assignments where an instructor needs to grade and put comments, they realised that cheating through copying work of one another and plagiarism were the major problems reported by all instructors. Instructors preferred pencil and paper tests. One instructor provided an experience by reporting that:

We teach through an online assignment, which helps students to read and consult various literature, but students are just copying materials on the internet as it is without paraphrasing or citing the sources; if I subject their

works to Turnitin software, all students will fail or be discontinued from studies. Three students uploaded work of the same content. I decided to mark only one work, and I did not submit marks to the head of the department.... I was waiting for one among them to come to ask for the missing marks and ask them who the owner of the work is, but I have waited for this reaction for a year in vain. I prefer pencil and paper tests.

The transcript above suggests that cheating and plagiarism were significant problems reported by instructors who disliked the use of online assignments. This finding does not concur with the findings of Balen (2015) in South Africa, who found that instructors' perception was that online assessment is better than pencil and paper assessment. This implies that instructors accepted the online teaching mode. The variations may be due to the good ICT infrastructures; it can also be added that in any innovation, there are early adopters who are the first group of people who accept innovation and can work within the technological arena.

Instructors also reported quiz that staff from the Faculty of Business Management used both TMA and CMA to assess their students. Two staff from the Faculty of Education used CMA only to assess their students, and one instructor from the Faculty of Science, Technology and Environment Studies reported that he used CMA to assess students. CMAs consist of objective questions such as multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions. The Directorate of Examinations Syndicate (DES) allows the department to decide the modality of assessing students to use CMA or TMA. Three instructors preferred quizzes because they are easy to mark for large classes. One instructor explained:

I am in a course with 2000 students, and marking two questions and providing constructive comments is becoming very difficult. It consumes time, so I opted for CMA, which is automatically marked by a computer. However, the issue of using quizzes in assessing students in our environment is questionable, particularly when controlling cheating. A group can discuss the quiz and provide answers, so a lecturer can mark a quiz that a particular student has not done.

Based on the transcript above, marking students' online assignments needs more time. Thus, instructors with many students do not prefer using TMA; they prefer using CMA, which is automatically marked by computer, but precautions have to be taken on plagiarism and cheating. Balen (2015) found that all the lecturers were optimistic about the advantages in terms of less marking time (65%) and a reduced marking load (88.3%). Although online formative assessment can help all students,

it produces predominantly good results with low achievers by focusing on specific glitches in their work and providing them with a clear comprehension of the mistakes and how to correct them (Balen, 2015). Technology allows the lecturers to monitor learners continuously regarding reading, participation in discussion forums, and even the time spent on virtual learning platforms. Digital technology makes it possible to monitor how long students devote to readings and videos, where they get electronic resources, and how quickly they master key concepts.

### ***Online instruction for the promotion of collaborative learning***

Online discussion is a collaborative tool to facilitate communication and knowledge construction. Students can view content and contribute to an online discussion anytime or anywhere on their gadgets, such as laptops/tablets/smartphones with an internet connection or offline using the OUT mobile App. While online discussion intends to promote collaborative learning, instructors award marks depending on the participation of each individual. The marks awarded are needed for official use, including forming part of students' continuous assessments and determining the final grade for some courses or programmes. Instructors reported that with the presence of online discussion, teaching is improved since students have an opportunity to share their views and read comments from their colleagues as reported by one instructor:

The online discussion allows students to share their views on the topic by saying what they understand. Sometimes, the discussion becomes very hot, but it can be done live through WhatsApp subject groups, subject telegram groups, and Moodle, where we can have a topic, and students can contribute at their convenience. However, online discussion is rarely used. As far as I can remember, I conducted online discussions in Moodle while introducing the course and very few students participated.

As mentioned above, online discussion helps students share ideas, but it is rarely used at the Open University of Tanzania. Additionally, students are not allowed to initiate the discussion in Moodle except in WhatsApp groups. This finding implies that although OUT has decided to use online discussion for teaching, it is rarely used among instructors and students. Also, because online discussion is not marked, instructors are reluctant to use it, and students rarely participate in it. Literature suggests that, in peer-led discussions, most students feel more motivated when the forum owner acknowledges their postings. Woods and Bliss (2016) added that many students feel discouraged after they find that others have already posted similar ideas to what they wanted to post. In these cases, it could be helpful for

instructors to employ a feature of the course management system in which the students cannot see their colleagues' posts before they answer the initial discussion question. However, this study found that sometimes students would see what others have posted and still think differently. The posts of fellow students and instructors may add important information, such as more contextual examples or clarifications. This is similar to what Payne et al. (2022) advocate: As higher education shifts to online, decision-makers must acknowledge the importance of relationship-building between students and instructors. Relationships among students, on the one hand, and between students and instructors, on the other hand, are crucial in cultivating collaborative learning and life in general.

### ***Online instruction for stimulation of innovation***

Instructors revealed that teaching through online mode is a kind of innovation that the institution has adopted to cope with the global demands where most conventional and open and distance learning institutions are embracing online instruction as a strategy to expand access to learning opportunities. Instructors exposed that innovations must follow all stages of any innovation in the institution; some innovations may fail while others succeed. The innovations that succeed are allocated enough funds for training and capacity building of employees, sufficient funds for resources and preparation of policy that support the new invention and raise awareness of staff. One instructor illustrated:

Online teaching is a kind of innovation the institution has adopted to improve teaching and learning at OUT. Usually, any institution changes to cope with the market demand, and nowadays, people possess smartphones that can be used for academic purposes such as sharing materials, conducting discussions, viewing recorded lectures, doing assignments, and saving lecture notes.

Online instruction is an innovation in which there are different people with different levels to adopt it, and the institution should be aware of this so that it does not regard people as hesitators but rather as late adopters. Also, the institution should invest enough funds in innovations, such as training and buying enough equipment to facilitate the innovation. According to Rogers (2003), innovators are venturesome people interested in technical aspects and risk-takers. Early Adopters are respected and considered change agents with the most significant degree of opinion about new ideas. They examine the innovation and its benefits, are willing to try it out and provide help and advice to other adopters. The early majority are deliberate and more concerned with professionalism. They are willing to adopt the

innovation once the majorities in society have adopted it. The late majority is sceptical, believes less in new ideas, and always makes sure that people are ready to solve their problems before adoption. Laggards are most likely to stick to the old and traditional ways. They are very critical towards adopting new ideas, and the innovation is accepted only if it becomes traditional. By understanding this, institutions need to be aware that sometimes, it is not that people hesitate to instruct online. However, they are either simply laggards or a group of the late majority. Similarly, people adopt the innovation based on its relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability (Penjor & Zander, 2016).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

To create awareness and enhance pedagogical skills, higher learning institutions should make necessary arrangements to provide their instructors with the required professional development training opportunities such as team training, mentoring, seminars, field trips, tours, and e-learning. Instructors mentioned that training through Zoom and face-to-face modes were the only approaches employed to train instructors at the Open University of Tanzania. Nevertheless, training through these approaches was either not conducted frequently or missing some crucial content, such as how to create short video clips for introduction and develop materials suitable for online students. Such content must equip instructors with appropriate online instruction knowledge and skills. The repercussion of inadequate training may be revealed through instructors' negative attitudes towards online instruction and low participation of instructors in Moodle activities. Additionally, some instructors failed even to attend the real-time lectures.

Internet access and the associated costs, coupled with other issues such as available time and spaces for online study, propinquity and accessibility of technological support, and digital literacy, are among the critical factors that impact the online instructor's experience (Payne et al., 2022). Instructors' confidence and experience also influence the ease of online instruction. Older and cheaper technology, intermittent internet infrastructure, and time and space constraints can lead to struggles and compromises, such as the inability to facilitate synchronous discussions. It is thus imperative for higher learning institutions to ensure online instructors' access to reliable and affordable internet so that they can execute their responsibilities whenever and wherever they are.

While the recommendation for higher learning institutions to conduct regular training of online instructors is accentuated, it is significant to underscore the need to focus on contents related to issues such as pedagogical skills of teaching through

online mode, principles of online instruction, online assessment and evaluation, classroom management, and teaching and learning theories. It is also sensible to consider awarding certificates to instructors who successfully attend such relevant training programmes to demonstrate appreciation for their efforts and dedication. Finally, the study points out the need to consider reviewing the existing examination regulations in order to take care of the online teaching and learning contexts.

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