



ISSN: 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Self-Directed Learning In Accounting Education In Polytechnics In Zimbabwe

Herbert Chiheve

Lecturer, Accounting Education, Department Of Applied Education, Midlands State University

Abstract

This study sets out to investigate the extent to which self-directed learning is used to teach Accounting in polytechnics in Zimbabwe. A survey was conducted in three polytechnics that had been purposefully sampled for convenience of access. Questionnaires were used to collect data from students in the sampled polytechnics whilst interviews were conducted on the lecturers. The responses of both the students and lecturers were used to determine the extent to which self-directed learning was used in accounting education in polytechnics. The data collected was subjected to both quantitative and qualitative interpretation analyses. It was found that the method that is mostly used to teach Accounting at polytechnics is the traditional lecture or exposition. It was also found that both lecturers and students agree that self-directed learning is a viable alternative to the usual chalk and talk method in the teaching and learning of Accounting at a polytechnic level as it engenders learning habits which foster lifelong learning. From these findings the study recommended that lecturers should use teaching strategies that encourage students to be self-directed learners. Furthermore, learners lecturers should use appropriate tasks and activities that encourage students to study independently in a self-directed learning approach. For their part students should search for information both collaboratively and individually using the Internet and other learning resources.

Key words: Pedagogy, andragogy, self-directed learning, teacher-centred learning, student-centred learning, lecture method.

1.Introduction

The teaching method mostly used in polytechnics and other institutions of higher learning has been the lecture method. Mandina (2012) points out that teachers use the lecture method because of the quantity of course content to be covered and a lack of resources that could have made other methods possible. There are also arguments of large classes and the fact that the lectures are easy to prepare compared to other methods. Most lecturers are also most familiar with this method, not least because that is the way that they were taught themselves. Noe (2000) argues that Accounting is used in business today as a basic tool for procuring, integrating and disseminating information. Hence lecturers should not just teach for examination success but also to make students lifelong learners and independent thinkers, objectives that cannot be achieved with the use of the lecture method. Parnham (2001) further asserts that a “key aim for those who provide learning must be to make it easier for people to learn”, an argument for self-directed learning. Furthermore, it has been argued that teacher-centred methods, such as the lecture method, are not effective for the purpose of promoting critical thinking or teaching professional values or other desirable learning outcomes (Bligh, 2000).

2.Background To The Study

Polytechnics claim to be forward-looking, modern establishments that provide high quality education in Accounting and to provide a supportive environment for their students. According to the National Report of Zimbabwe by the United Nations Educational, scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) International Bureau of Education (2001), the government of Zimbabwe, through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, is committed to providing, facilitating and regulating tertiary education and training in Accounting. Education and training guarantee a country’s productivity and competitiveness in the global village.

Fisher (1995) opines that the [productivity and competitiveness of a nation is a function of the level of sophistication of its workforce. He exhorts the need to adapt more quickly to change than competitors and emphasises the need to invest in people, the greatest economic resource.

The burden to produce Accounting graduates who are competent rests on lecturing staff and polytechnic administrators who need to implement teaching and learning strategies that are aligned more to andragogy than pedagogy. Andragogy related instructional

methods such as self-directed learning allows learners to be more efficient learners and social beings. Lyman (1997:46) supports self-directed learning because it enables the development of the skill of enquiry.

The purpose of this study was to find out the extent of the use of self-directed learning as a teaching strategy in polytechnics and to find out the reasons for the continued use of pedagogy, if that is the situation that obtains in accounting education in polytechnics.

3.Statement Of The Problem

Many institutions of higher learning in developed countries have embraced andragogy as the most appropriate model of adult learning (Edwards, 1997) because, according to Knowles (1989:34) pedagogy falls short of addressing the learning requirements of adult education and adult learners, who are the students found in polytechnics. This creates the need to find out the situation prevailing in polytechnics in this regard.

4.Main Research Question

To what extent is self-directed learning as an instructional method used in teaching Accounting in polytechnics in Zimbabwe?

5.Related Sub-Questions

- How do polytechnics regard self-directed learning as a teaching method in Accounting in polytechnics?
- What challenges do lecturers in polytechnics face in trying to institute self-directed learning programmes?
- To what extent do lecturers in polytechnics cope with these challenges?
- Between the pedagogic model and andragogy, which is the dominant approach in teaching Accounting in polytechnics?
- How best can lecturers in polytechnics reduce the failure rate in Accounting and enhance students' performance in the work place in commerce and industry?

6.Research Objectives

- To find out the extent to which self-directed learning practised in teaching Accounting in polytechnics?
- To find out if the pedagogic model is still being used to teach Accounting in polytechnics and, if so, the reasons for it.
- To establish how lecturers and administrators cope with the challenges that they face in adopting self-directed learning, if any.

7.Delimitation

This study was carried out at three polytechnic colleges in the southern and western districts of Zimbabwe. It was confined to the extent of the use of self-directed learning as an instructional method in teaching Accounting at polytechnics at national and higher national diploma levels.

8.Research Methodology

The study used the descriptive survey research design because such a design attempts to describe and interpret what exists in the form of conditions, processes, trends, effects, attitudes and beliefs (Tuckman, 1984). It entails a study of a limited number of cases with a view of drawing up conclusions that cover the generality of the group under review (Chiromo, 2006). Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect the data. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques were used to analyse and interpret the data.

9.Population

The target population was made up of lecturers and students at polytechnics. Because a study involving all the polytechnics in Zimbabwe would not have been feasible the researcher restricted himself to three polytechnics that were purposively sampled for convenience in terms of proximity.

10.Sample And Sampling Procedure

The head of the Accounting Department of each of the three polytechnics was selected by virtue of the office that s/he occupied. Seventeen (17) lecturers of Accounting were included in the sample on the same basis. Stratified random sampling techniques were employed to choose forty (40) Accounting students so as to include students from each of the three polytechnics and to achieve gender balance.

11.Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was sought and the respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study if they so wished. They were also assured that the information that they provided would be used for academic purposes only and would be treated with strict confidentiality.

12.Data Analysis Techniques

Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to analyse and interpret the data. Numbers (that is quantitative data) and meanings (that is qualitative data) are related to give a clearer picture than would be the case if a single method were used (Dey, 1993).

13. Discussion Of Findings

Data collected from interviews regarding preferred practice from lecturers' point of view showed that lecturers support self-directed learning in Accounting although they indicated that students still needed guidance from lecturers, who must maintain a classroom presence. Thus, although lecturers favour the idea of students working on their own, they insist that the tasks should be managed by the lecturers.

These findings correlate with cited by Abraham (2007) who found that, if a blended learning approach is adopted, it can improve the students' academic performance. Abraham (ibid) also found that on-line learning of Accounting in a self-directed learning environment provides a multi-faceted, student focused approach that allows learners the flexibility to employ on-line resources to support their individual learning styles.

Self-directed learning by students, using their own style of learning, boosted their confidence and self motivation to gain the utmost benefit from their learning. This is in agreement with Garrison's (1997) model which incorporates the aspects of motivation, responsibility and control.

Learners still found some traditional methods useful and think that self-directed learning should be used in tandem with such traditional methods.

The findings reveal that currently the lecture method is the most used method to teach Accounting in polytechnics. Most polytechnics lack adequate computers and internet facilities because of financial constraints. Furthermore, lack of ample library facilities means that the for the time being the use of self-directed learning on its own is not possible, however much it may be desired.

14. Conclusions

Although polytechnic students prefer to study and search for Accounting information on their own they still need guidance from their lecturers. Hence the way forward is to blend self-directed learning with some traditional methods. Currently it is not possible to exclusively use self-directed learning strategies because of constraints such as inadequate computer resources and lack of internet connectivity.

15. Recommendations

Accounting lecturers in polytechnics should demonstrate initiative and use teaching styles that encourage students to be self-directed learners in Accounting. They should prepare learning tasks that challenge students to be self-directed learners and develop lifelong learning habits.

Appropriate funding should be found to equip polytechnics with adequate computer facilities and internet connectivity.

Accounting students should be encouraged to search for information both collaboratively and on their own

16. References

1. Bligh, D. A. (1998). What's the use of lectures?, 5th ed. Intellect: Exeter.
2. Borg, W. R. & Gall, M. D. (1989). Educational Research: a Guide for Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation Proposal in Education. Routledge: London.
3. Brockett, R. And Hiemstra, R. (1991). Self-Direction in Adult Education. Routledge: London
4. Brookfield, S. D. (1984). Self-directed Learning: a Critical Paradigm. Adult Education Quarterly 35, pp 57-71.
5. Chiromo, A. S. (2006). Research Methods and Statistics: a Handbook for Students. Midlands State University: Gweru.
6. Knowles, M S. (1975). Self-directed Learning: a Guide for Learners and Teachers. Association Press: New York.
7. Meriam, S. B. & Carafella, R. S. (1999). Learning in Adulthood: a Comprehensive Guide, 2nd ed. Jessy Bass: San Francisco.
8. Noe, N. (2000). Teaching Accounting. www.ca?businessed.org/docs/Acct I p 8-23.doc
9. Parnham, J. (2002). Reflective Teaching: Effective and Evidence-informed Professional Practice. Continuum: London.
10. Sanicevic, D. (1999). Adult Education: From Practice to Theory-Building. Peter Long: New York.