
The e-tutor in the New Normal. An analysis of the changing roles and challenges of tutoring in an ODeL environment during and Post COVID-19 pandemic.

A seminar paper presented

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Objectives of the SADC- CDE Seminar series

- To provide ODeL practitioners opportunities to interact with each other.
- Encourage research and scholarship with seminars resulting into publishable papers and/or books.
- Champion ODeL as a mode of delivery.
- Expose and share expert knowledge.
- Promote Innovation, research and publication.

Order of presentation

- Title of the paper
- Structure of the paper
- Background to the paper
- Key questions
- The conceptual framework
- The methodology of the paper
- Key emerging arguments
- The re-imagination of E-tutoring in higher education

International perspectives of the E-tutor in higher education

- Changes in world economic systems responsible for changes in higher education.
- Neoliberal practices adopted by universities affecting how universities are led and governed.
- University leadership within institutions responding differently depending on their individual situation, vision, mandates & purpose
- The emergence of **Odel institutions** Vs *non-traditional ODeL* institutions .

Cont'ed

- How Odel institutions carry out their *core business of teaching learning & research* is different from (conventional) non-traditional ODeL institutions: in terms of institutional strategy, mission, vision, purpose which must be accepted and recognized which non-traditional ODeL institutions /face-to face institutions struggle to work.
- But changes (pandemic) in higher education are forcing the conventional hand, mind , strategy to thrive or perish.
- Each individual ODeL institution has its own unique institutional staffing strategies that balance between university staff that are onsite and those who are offsite

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- Most of these actions/ steps of leadership and management are guided by the nature of university governance adopted by each university council leading and guiding the universities .
- The understanding of this narrative is important in the re-imagination of the role ,and status of these actors in the different university mechanisms, levels, processes and positions where there are being deployed by the ODeL universities to make these universities work .
- There is increased use of E-Tutors as the new migrant workers in universities. These workers have played key roles in teaching and learning across several institutions they are deployed.

African perspectives on the role of E-Tutors in Higher education

- Within the African higher education landscape, what is happening in Odel institutions regarding the roles and status of E-tutors is basically a duplication of what is happening across the different Odel international universities.
- Odel universities are copying how the international Odel universities execute their core business.
- This has continued to raise protesting, contesting, contradictory key *issues of ownership, indigenisation, colonisation, decolonisation* often championed by affected stakeholders like academic staff and university students at different levels.

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- How part-time e-tutors/facilitators/independent contactors/ adjunct are handled internationally is no different with the African higher education Odel institutions.
- The nature of their academic work is precarious.
- within this region part-time e-tutors are often postgraduate university students and career individuals in different industries who are looking how best to balance their additional income.
- This raises key institutional governance questions of how to enhance their role and status/ work pedagogically, professional identities , academic recognition, mobilization, within the conflicting unique institutional situations.

SADC regional perspectives on the role of E-tutors in higher education

- There is no SADC higher education protocol to handle these category of university staff. It is left in the jurisdiction of each ODeL institution.
- The precarious nature of their academic work and life is characterized by the following conditions:
 - They are temporary university workers.
 - They are at the mercy of Heads of department and senior academics who contract them.
 - They have no say in the leadership and management of their institutions.
 - The journey to become senior academics within the universities they serve is not clear.

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- The nature of their work is invisible.
- They receive Less to marginal recognition from universities .
- The reward to academic work is marginal.
- They are affordable and disposable without much labor legislation. That explains why universities prefer more academic tutors than full time academic staff.
- They are often not represented in most university structure
- In some cases, the process of becoming an e-tutor is subjective.

The case of Botswana Open University

E-Tutors are not any different from other e-tutors in other universities internationally in Africa, and regionally. The precariousness nature of their academic work and life is characterized by the following conditions:

- They are temporary university workers.
- They have marginal say in university leadership and governance.
- The journey to becoming senior academic is complicated.
- They receive marginal recognition
- Their reward to academic work is often marginal.
- A typical e-tutor at BOU is a contract worker, retired academic, an expert with a career in industry, government, parastatal organisation, or an institution of higher learning.

These raise several issues of social knowledge, labor justice within the competing frameworks of university leadership with competing institutional contextualities and realities.

The key question

Within the new changes happening across all institutions in higher education, we see the universities embracing the new normal characterized by massification of E-tutors as part of the new normal. In addition, we know within the various Odel institutions, these university E-tutors/ workers are key actors in the implementation of the core business of teaching, learning and research. The question therefore is: *how can universities improve the role and status of their E-tutors in spite of the competing institutional demands and expectations within the universities?*

Conceptual framework

- This paper uses the concept of **roles, e-tutor professional identities and communities of practice** to understand the work of e-tutors in higher education learning and teaching.
- Berge's (1995) widely used classification of the conditions necessary for successful on-line instruction which he categorized into four areas: pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical.
- This categorization as well shows that the e-tutor has a large range of roles (e.g. social, technical, didactical, discipline expert) each with the need to develop different types of competencies such as pedagogical, technical, communicational, interpersonal skills.

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- **The e-tutor** as someone who interacts directly with learners to support their learning process when they are separated from the tutor in time and place for some or all these direct interactions.
- Lentell (2003) notes, “Each student presents particular challenges and thus the tutor- student dialogue has to focus on different things accordingly – for instance understanding the course, lack of appropriate skills required to demonstrate understanding, lack of presentational skills, etc.” (p. 67).
- Bezuidenhout, and Adèle, (2015) report on the 40 perceived roles of an e-tutor while, [Baumann](#), [Shelley](#), [Murphy](#), and [White](#)(2008) describe the tutor’s role from a student support perspective.

Tasks of an e-tutor cont.....

- Lentell and O'Rourke, "... tutoring as a professional activity has been carried out largely **unseen and unanalysed**, certainly in comparison with the attention given to course hard and software: '...tutoring tends to be **the less visible element** of ODL, but is no less essential than good materials and effective administration (Lentell and O'Rourke. 2004)
- YET
- '...[the tutors'] feedback forms a crucial link between course designers and student learning outcomes and, because of the model of student learning that underpins **UKOU** course design and student support, feedback aims to build a relationship and a sense of contact between the student and the tutor.' (Tait, 2004, p. 99)

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- According to Berge's (1995) **The Central Roles we see as linked to interaction between the e-tutor and the learners are:**
 - **content facilitator:** as subject expert.
 - **metacognition facilitator:** supports reflection on learning activities study skills development.
 - **process facilitator:** supports learners' learning strategies, time management
 - **advisor/counsellor:** pastoral support, doorway to institutional/local support systems.
 - **assessor (formative and summative):** feedback on task achievement and performance, assignment development, examiner.
 - **technologist:** support with technologies and tools for learning.
 - **resource provider:** locates, develops and produces resources.

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As Lentell (2003) argues,- Tutors need to have knowledge and a broad conceptual understanding of their field. They have to be effective listeners and communicators, to be a coach, facilitator, mentor, supporter and resource. They have to listen, to shape, to give feedback, to motivate, to direct, to appreciate – broadly to be developmental and problem solving.”(p. 74).

Their peripheral roles include

- **manager/administrator:** the management of the course keeping records, checking the enrollments
- **designer:** to design the course or course module.
- **co-learner:** walking with the learner participants and learning alongside them.
- **researcher:** a reflective practitioner and action researcher. experience.

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- We should also note the work of critical pedagogues by Freire (1970), Apple (1995), hooks (1994), Giroux (2011), Palmer (2007) and Nussbaum (1997).
- These scholars write of education as liberation and teachers as guides to help students develop critical consciousness of their own socio-cultural contexts and how they might connect knowledge to power and freedom.
- Being a good e-tutor involves integrating conflicting subjectivities, dealing with emotions positively, understanding that discourses can create ideological learning spaces, and accepting that a sense of teacher-self is not only discursive but also embodied.

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- Palmer (2007) stressed the importance of a teacher knowing him or herself, in addition to students. He sees teaching as a spiritual endeavor deeply connected to social justice and change. Teaching is about motivating students to excel in their chosen careers while also becoming aware of cultural and social inequalities and how to reverse them.
- Teacher identity can be defined as a sense of teacher self that results from a productive combination of key personal and professional subjectivities, identity positions or beliefs (Alsup, 2006)

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- The framework for understanding teacher professional identity development as used by Beijaard et al's (2004)
- The notions of professional identity as an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences (Kerby, 1991)
- The notions of professional identity implying both person and context.
- Teacher's professional identity consisting of sub-identities that more or less harmonize," and "Agency is an important element of professional identity" (p. 122-123).

What is the 'new normal' during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Pandemic impact on education at all levels had institutions and educators experience a rapid transition from f2f to remote learning “emergency reMote learning” Bozkurt and Shama (2020)
- Xin Xie, Keng Siau & Fiona Fui-Hoon Nah (2020) perceive Online education as the key to the new normal as experienced in the education sector
- Define OE as “a type of educational instruction that is delivered via the internet to students via their computers, smartphones or mobile devices...”

- Tutorship has implemented majority of the roles as talked about above:
- Delivery through Blended education
- Learning Management System such as MOODLE, Blackboard have provided a platform for the online courses, communication with the online students
- MOOCS- Massive Open Online Courses have allowed unlimited participation and open access via the internet
- Online educational services, include virtual tutoring and webinars via video conferencing tools

The “bright and dull”side of the new normal

- Two sides of a coin is eminent in online education
- Tutors, education sector have experienced advanced Information technology to implement OE to a large extent
- Advantages include flexibility, Information accessibility, global outreach, equity, innovation
- BUT there is still a downside to these: **digital inequality** and limited access to technology is still a reality and continues to be so.

BOU'S response to digitalisation

Digitalisation at BOU has always been reflected on its strategic intent which in part states that “By 2023 BOU will be an innovative Open University recognised for its technology-enhanced programmes...” (BOU, 2018)

- **E-Tutor model**
- Consideration of Tutor roles and responsibilities with the advent new normal spelt a change or impact on the Part-time Tutor management at BOU. This altered the expectations of the BOU Tutor, which impacted on their management.

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E-Tutor model

- Consideration of Tutor roles and responsibilities with the advent new normal spelt a change or impact on the Part-Tutor management at BOU. This altered the expectations of the BOU Tutor, which impacted on their management
- In addition, BOU has developed a **Tutor Management Strategy**, with an acknowledgement of the critical role of the Part-time Tutor in enhancing student learning
- **STELTASS**- Provides a compelling catalyst for the “emergency remote learning” ushered into the teaching and learning environment by the CODID-19 pandemic

Emerging key conceptual assumptions

- These concepts drawn will be used within social justice critical perspective to critically examine the new roles and status of E-tutors within Odel institution. Under this organizing framework we will present the following arguments:
- The E-tutors have a great deal of useful skills, abilities, knowledge's, networks of learning, influence, relationships and power they bring the university[other staff members, student and others university stakeholders that are deployed or recruited.

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- Secondly, as part of the new normal, how universities can utilize this wealth of knowledge is dependent on the nature of university governance within the institution.
- Thirdly, in the new normal we expect new ways of how these e-tutors teach, learn, and interact.
- Interconnectivity demands new ways of working, teaching, learning, in relation to the fluid changing institutional contexts in the new e-universities.
- Lastly, the **new e-universities** will have to adopt new ways to work with these e-tutors, e-students, e-university infrastructures.

Methodology of the paper

- Qualitative study.
- The ongoing case study of e-tutors /part-time tutors at Botswana open university.
- Their lived experiences of being &becoming tutors at the university .
- The Botswana Open university institutional documents made available on tutor developments.

Emerging key arguments of the paper

- Increased massification has forced institutions to embrace new technologies to enhance, accommodate the huge numbers.
- The ***struggles, resistances and contestations*** of migrations and **integration** of new technologies by institutions. At the level of institutions, staff students.
- The changing identities of the nature of the new classrooms and lecture halls.
- The changing nature of new lecturers in these classrooms, lecture halls and laboratories. NEW e-tutors/ facilitators.

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- The changing nature of how e-tutors teach.
- The new changing nature of how students learn and interact with their new e-tutors.
- The changing nature of the new institutional identities. in terms of character, vision, strategy and the new nature institutional responsiveness.
- Changing roles of how the new universities are posing to interact with new students, staff.
- more connectivity, more blending.

Re-imagination of E-tutoring in higher education

- **Re-imagination as the Implications and possibilities for Improved E-tutor Practice**
- The Reliance more on E-tutors than Lecturers. The *Struggles And Successes*.
- The increased drive towards professionalisation of e-tutors- from students, towards more qualified academic staff.
- An increase in global recruitment of cross categories of academics as e-tutors e.g. Aging, industry-based professionals who don't need to go to the university premises.

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- Increased access of E-tutors to university beyond national borders.
- Re-alignment of promotion of E-tutors into the university professorate.
- Unionisation of E-tutors across borderless universities
- Struggles on integration and response by universities, staff and new students.
- E-Tutors as co-teaching staff – partnerships in teaching across institutional boundaries.

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- E-Tutors as emerging key knowledge administrators.
- E-tutors as emerging student caregivers.
- E-tutors as emerging student research supervisors.
- E-tutors as emerging key stakeholders in the university.
- E-tutors as agents of institutional change.
- E-Tutors as stakeholder mediators between the university student and the university.
- E-tutors as course designers.
- E-tutors as emerging leaders and managers in global e-classrooms

Thank you
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