E-learning and ICT in higher education institutional strategies: Drawing lessons from Europe and optimizing e-infrastructure in Africa

The potential for ICT, digitalization and connectivity to transform teaching and learning in the higher education sector has received refreshed policy attention in recent years. While there have been evolving pockets of interesting practice with regards to distance education and to some extent, bel ended learning approaches, this has often been compartmentalized in higher education institutions (HEIs) with distinct sub-units or centres catering to lifelong/adult learners and 'non-traditional' learners, at least in many Western higher education systems. However, the advent of the MOOC, a fast evolving concept and practice, has arguably moved ICT and e-learning into the mainstream, where it is increasingly considered as crucial to teaching and learning and research strategies. In Europe, for example, the fascination with MOOCs, coupled with an acute pressure to cut costs, diversify funding, and reach a changing student demographic, has resulted in HEI strategies and structures explicitly targeted at optimising ICT.

This paper, in referencing recent European literature, will cite trends in the institutional 'streamlining of ICT and digitalization on the teaching and learning agenda. It will touch upon the EU policy landscape and the real and anticipated impact of ICT and digitalization on the institutional architecture and pedagogical approaches. European developments will then be compared to the African higher education landscape, where the potential of ICT to deliver higher education to a massifying student population has since a long time been envisaged, but hardly realized due to bandwidth and connectivity concerns. With the latter issue largely fading (thanks to investments such as WACREN and Ubuntu Network), African HEIs must now focus on strategies for optimizing the ICT infrastructure that is becoming a reality, and channeling it towards enhancing learning and teaching. The new born virtual University of Cote d'Ivoire will serve as case study.

The presentation will address the following issues:

HEIs playing catch up with regards to ICT

- Pockets of practice but lack of mainstreaming in traditional HEIs

MOOCs as a conversation starter

- Motivations to develop MOOCs (visibility, cost-cutting, experimentation···)
- MOOCs being utilized for blended learning
- MOOCs stimulating a discussion on recognition of e-learning

Development of institutional strategies for teaching and learning

- EUA e-learning survey (2014)/ Trends Report (2015)
- Institutional structures for ICT streamlining and development
- Faculty training and staff development regarding ICT

Developments in Africa

- The e-learning agenda: Current examples and realities
- The case of the Virtual University of Cote d'Ivoire
- Obstacles: ICT infrastructure, bandwidth, lack of integrated HE development and ICT policies, etc
- Opportunities
- Recommendations for HEIs regarding strategy development for teaching and learning and ICT

Summary

The presentation relates to Sub-Theme 3 in that it highlights strategies related to planning, monitoring, and further development of e-infrastructure and ICT so that they reach their intended purpose(s) in the higher education sector in Africa, using the new virtual University of Cote d'Ivoire as a case study.

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