Keeping and Getting Students Engaged in Creating a Successful Learning Environment at UNISA

Nndowiseni Anniekie Ravhudzulo

Directorate Curriculum and Learning Development
University of South Africa,
P.O Box 27401, Sunnyside, Pretoria, 0132.

The growing number of students in the last decades brought a change in the field of higher education. With the growing number of students and new technical developing the situation changed. The significant of this research is to identify strategies for keeping and getting students engaged in creating a successful learning at UNISA (University of South Africa). It is intended that a healthy but flexible framework of ideas will be developed, which will provide a basis for work in progress that the Directorate Curriculum and Learning Development (DCLD) within UNISA in assisting academic staff with their multiple responsibilities: designing, developing and revising programmes and learning materials as well as education reform. First of all it is necessary to identify ways to improve pass rates and throughput in undergraduate programmes Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The DCLD sees the role of academics as to conceptualize teaching and learning in terms of creating new spaces for dynamic teaching and learning to improve pass rates and throughput. Although the research has reached its aims, there are some unavoidable limitations. For example, to generalize the results for a larger group, the study should have involved more participants at different levels. Student engagement and learning is enhanced by effective curriculum design, pedagogy, use of technology and assessment strategies.

Keywords: successful learning, teaching and learning, open and distance learning, academics, education consultants, team approach, learning development, design and development.

INTRODUCTION
This is a very interesting moment to reflect on keeping and getting students engaged in creating a successful learning at UNISA as one of the Education Consultants within the DCLD. The university of South Africa was establishment as the of the world's first exclusively distance teaching university in 1946, based in the Pretoria, doing a wonderful job for recruiting large numbers of students, a university not classified by the ethnic or racial group. However, major weaknesses in the UNISA system identified after apartheid was ended included very importantly:

- Low success in terms of completion and throughput rates
- The correspondence nature of programmes in comparison with well-functioning distance education
- Inadequate learner support which is exacerbated by the lack of a co-ordinated regional network of learning centres (SAIDE as cited in Nonyongo 2002 p.128)

The contribution of open and distance learning impacts effectively in the radical transformation of substantial multi-media approach to education delivery which has partly led to the blurring of the division between contact and distance education. The University of South Africa, because of its experience and capacity should be at the forefront of the transformation of the distance education in Africa. ‘Open learning’ has fast become a buzzword in education and training in South Africa, picked up from international educational debate and used in different ways to serve a multitude of purposes.

UNISA’s Responsibility to the Nation
UNISA is one of the 11 mega universities in the world and plays a vital role in bringing higher education to students in South Africa. Unisa is a public institution dedicated to serving all the people of South Africa and to addressing the needs and challenges of South African society. As the leader in South African distance education provision, Unisa has the unique responsibility for addressing these realities together with its staff and its learners. In the words of the Unisa Principal, Prof Barney Pityana (address before Senate, 21 May 2002), the institution has the responsibility At to place the university in the
To meet these needs, Unisa has become a leader in the process of transformation in South Africa. For example, Unisa has led the way in putting into place policies on team-based course development, implementation of outcomes-based education (OBE) at tertiary level, recognition of prior learning, etc. In addition, Unisa actively fosters the principles of open distance learning (ODL). UNISA has a commitment to provide access to many students especially from the majority population who were excluded from the best universities in South Africa, the opportunity offered by distance education was not a real one. UNISA provided the best-documented case of the dangers of developing distance education without adequate learner support (Nonyongo 2002).

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The Unisa Tuition Policy stipulates that programmes and courses will be taught by means of ODL principles for a team approach to course and programme design, appropriate student support and student-friendly environment. The purpose of this study is focused on the role of the DCLD in facilitating changing perspectives in learners’ responsibility and educator accountability at Unisa. This takes place through keeping and getting student engaged in creating a successful learning in ODL, being one of the core objectives of the academic. An engaged student is a student that is learning. This goal should be first and foremost when preparing to teach a study unit of a module.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
The research problem was stated as: “Should there be any means to improve pass rates and throughput in undergraduate programmes at Unisa?” The study consisted of 515 males and female academics and learners at Unisa. It was hypothesized that keeping and getting students engaged in creating successful learning and student support will be a solution. Survey data was analyzed and the findings supported the literature and hypothesis in that more students viewed student support as a solution to low pass rates and throughput in undergraduate programmes at Unisa. Participants in this study composed of 215 females and 200 males of ages ranging from 17-43 and 125 academics. The design is most appropriately described as the cross-sectional design type.

METHODOLOGY
The form of data collection was self-administered survey. A survey was designed to collect data about improving pass rates and throughput in undergraduate programmes at Unisa. Data was first “cleaned” and checked for any missing data. The survey was then coded using acronyms for each of the demographic and dependent variables. Overall, results supported the hypothesis by demonstrating that the majority of participants viewed student engagement, induction of new academic staff and commitment of academics. The issues of low pass rate and throughput in undergraduate programmes is problematic and need to be looked into and recognized.

The Conceptualization of the Directorate Curriculum and Learning Development (DCLD)
The DCLD has been mandated by the Tuition Policy of Unisa to facilitate transformation by changing perspectives on learners and academic staff responsibility at Unisa. It is role DCLD to ensure that the quality of learning is of a sufficiently high standard, to facilitate deep learning and societal transformation. According to the Unisa Tuition Policy, the design and development of all materials should happen via course terms. The learning quality assurance roles should therefore take place in the course terms and include the following:

- team coordination and training the writers
- assisting with the macro design of all courses and module planning
- assuring that all stakeholders are represented on the team
- assisting with the course outline used as framework for the writing process
- learning quality review of each draft
- negotiating time frames and chasing deadlines of team members
- assuring evaluation strategies are in place and are implemented

The DCLD at Unisa is composed of 33 staff members (HOD, Project Manager, 28 Education Consultants (EC’s) and 4 administration staff) and has four legs, namely, print-base learning development, staff development, research, and online learning. It is the responsibility of the DCLD to see to it that there is a paradigm shift from the traditional way of teaching to outcomes-based education, SAQA, and supporting academics to compile tutorial materials. At Unisa there are six Colleges and the newly established College of Education within CHS led by five College Convenors (CC’s), five Education Consultants representing each College at the Unisa Short Learning Programmes (USLP) and over 6000 courses that need to be reviewed in a running cycle of three to four years by the DCLD. The following are College Convenors:

- College of Human Sciences (CHS)
- College of Education (CE)
- College of Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS)
- College of Law (CLAW).
- College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES).
The DCLD uses a systematic approach to course development that ensures that specific learning goals are accomplished. It is an iterative process that requires ongoing evaluation and feedback. Instructional design is a systematic approach to course development that ensures that specific learning goals are accomplished. It is an iterative process that requires ongoing evaluation and feedback. The role of DCLD may be summed up that is the systematic development of instructional specifications using learning and instructional theory to ensure the quality of instruction. We follow the entire process of analysis of learning needs and goals and the development of a delivery system to meet those needs. It includes development of instructional materials and activities; and tryout and evaluation of all instruction and learner activities.

Why use the Systematic Approach to Course Development?
The greatest objective of curriculum and learning development is to serve the learning needs and success of students through effective presentation of content and fostering of interaction. Accordingly, pedagogy must drive the choice of instructional technology, not the other way around. Additional benefits systematic approach to course development offers are:

- Compared with a human instructor, technology is less adaptive. Once a plan of integration is implemented, it is less likely to change it according to student's reactions. This is why instructional design plays an important role in bridging pedagogy and technology.
- Course contents have to be well organized and strategies for teaching via a chosen medium have to be well thought out. Systematic approach to course development can help educators making the best use of technology; therefore guarantee a successful integration."
- It provides consistency between various courses developed by various academics. The general look and process of content exploration is standardized.

An Overview of the Services Offered by the DCLD at UNISA
The effective and efficient design, development and delivery of ODL study materials require an approach in which the process is broken down into a series of well-defined and planned steps. The DCLD acts as a change agent among academic staff, departments, and professional and student support functions throughout the university in order to ensure and foster quality teaching and learning. The DCLD carries the university=s vision, and that of South Africa=s educational and political structures, into the offices, heads and hearts of the academic, professional and support staff of this institution.

In the context of Unisa, an ODL institution, the DCLD has thus a unique opportunity to respond to the call for authentic, high quality, effective learning. In order to provide Unisa with an "enabling environment and leadership through transformative and innovative design, research and development”, the EC’s have the following key performance areas:

- learning development
- staff training and development
- leadership in course teams
- academic citizenship
- administration

The services offered by the DCLD to academic departments relate to print–based learning development, staff development, online learning development, design and development (instructional design), and project team management. During learning material development, the DCLD brings in learners and critical readers to evaluate learning materials. This serves as a way of keeping and getting learners engaged for successful learning. Design and development of teaching and learning materials only means, the style or plan of teaching. It is the blueprint of teaching method. Again, it is a process of improving quality of teaching and learning. It is a process of analyzing what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, conducting tryout and assessing whether learner learn. Instructional design is a systematic approach to course development that ensures that specific teaching and learning points are accomplished.

In the light of the above, it is the aim of this article to touch base on the complex nature of the core business of the four legs of the DCLD and the impact on EC’s; secondly, to discuss the finding from the views of learners and academics; and lastly, to propose certain guidelines for a better understanding of the role of the DCLD. The following is a discussion of services offered by the DCLD:

Print-Based Learning Development
In the teaching and learning process, there has been a shift in emphasis from the academic/lecturer/instructor as the source of knowledge and information to the facilitator of teaching and learning from resources. The resources have typically been selected and adapted not only for their content, but also for the ways in which they support independent study. Learners are supported to a considerable extent in becoming independent learners through the use of various communication systems; the learners’ need for physical facilities and study resources and participation in decision making is also taken into account.
To promote quality assurance, a number of instruments have been introduced and they are in the process of being adapted to the design and development process by (EC’s). These include template, course outline instrument and course evaluation. Courses are designed so as to involve learners actively in their own learning and should allow learners quick access and clear movement through them. Writing is an art and writing for open and distance learning is even more difficult because you need to use certain styles and technique that are so different from traditional writing. The DCLD advice academics that in designing and developing distance learning course materials they have to ensure that writers are aware of learning theories and techniques. In fact, without some sort of training the writer cannot develop course materials for distance education to be able to produce the best quality of teaching and learning materials.

**Staff Development**

Staff development units in higher education institutions need to align training for staff members to the relevant legislation, such as the acts on higher education; skills development; skills levy and employment equity. The utilization of all the opportunities to deliver skills development programmes and establish learnerships would not only benefit the country, the individual and the pre-employed, but also the institutions that have income-driven budgets.

The function of the DCLD staff development is aimed at the staff development needs of academics. The DCLD conducts research as far as possible on the topic in demand and thus addresses the needs of the academic departments. As an example here, the DCLD staff development section organized and facilitated two staff development training sessions after the DCLD was approached by the Department of Applied Accountancy to run a training session for the academic departments. Required skills were articulated as presentation skills for the extensive face-to-face support offered to CTA students (CTA Staff Development Report 2002). A needs analysis was done through interviews with the three staff members including the HOD. The broad needs were identified as follows:

- preparing and presenting lectures of between 4 and 6 hours for between 40 and 400 CTA students, most of whom work in course-related jobs; all of whom have a heavy workload in terms of study material
- dealing effectively with students of different ability levels in the same presentation

From the point of view of the Staff Development Coordinator, the workshop was reasonably successful. The 30 staff members present contributed meaningfully and actively to discussions. The other session took place after the DCLD was approached by the CIMSTE Department to help them with the "ins and outs of distance education." The CIMSTE workshop represents the second pilot in the staff development plan. This workshop was planned and facilitated by the coordinator and facilitators. After the needs analysis had been carried out with the department, it was established that they needed the following support:

- evaluating existing study guides for Maths, Chemistry, Biology and Physics (at certificate level for teacher upgrading) written by outside consultants
- designing and writing the second set of materials for these subjects for the target group, as well as Masters’ level courses currently being developed and run (CIMSTE Staff Development Report 2002).

The use of the brief and focused needs analysis has proved to be crucial for effective work-shopping, as was seen with the CTA workshop. The needs analysis takes the form of an informal discussion including focused questions and then noting the responses. The DCLD is also actively involved in the induction process of all new staff by introducing them to the Unisa system and related aspects of providing ODL. Academic departments are encouraged to contact the DCLD to provide training for all new staff members.

**Online Learning Development**

According to Heydenrych (2002:3), on 7 December 2002 the Executive Committee approved the full online delivery of IOP377-J Human Capacity Development as a pilot project requiring feedback on the success of full online delivery. IOP377-J (Human Capacity Development, Department of Industrial Psychology, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences was selected for this pilot delivery owing to its expected ability to attract a different audience.) In addition, the new learning experience for adult learners was aimed at empowering and engaging the learner (learner-centeredness). The online learning community (OLC) promised to be appropriate environment with communication enabled by Internet communication technologies.

The Cluster for Online Learning Environments (COLE) at the BLD is in its infancy, as it has only been actively involved in the research, development and production of online learning for a year. During this period strong working relationships have been formed with Corporate Communication, Computer Services and Information Technologies, as well as members of the executive committee of the Transitional Unisa Web Structure (COLE annual report 2002:3).

The Online Learning Developer (Systems integration/Research) conducted a research on
“automated assessment” and argued that as student numbers and lecturer workloads increase, traditional methods of assessment make it difficult to undertake effective assessment and provide students with in-depth, relevant, specific and speedy feedback. In the paper presented by Dr Govender, on 25 April 2003, he discusses the rationale for developing computer-based assessment and then analyses pertinent issues such as types of computer automated assessment (CAA) and the advantages of adopting CAA within the higher education sector.

He maintains that there are no easy quick-fix solutions, but a systemic approach should be adopted to ensure quality every step of the way. This will entail the level of quality in terms of administration, student support, academic engagement with students, the DCLD, etc. Checks and balances must be built into the teaching and learning situation at every level and there must be respect and regard for all the entities within the system. It should be emphasized that every entity within the system should be accorded equal status in terms of their functioning.

Online Student Services
According to Hughes (2004), distance learners are looking for online services that are easy to use and available at their convenience. Hughes suggested that we should focus our efforts on meeting the needs of the learner; not on what is easy to deliver. Knowing the learner and the learner’s needs is critical. Information that should be available for students includes assessments, educational counseling, administrative process such as registration, technical support, study skills assistance, career counseling, library services, students’ rights and responsibilities, and governance. In order to maximize participation in student government, all meetings should be available in electronic format in an effort to engage distance learners (Hughes 2004).

Engaging students as early as possible and keeping them engaged is the key. In order to engage the student, educators must be adequately prepared with the techniques and strategies needed to teach effective online courses. (Serwatka 2005). Online is not just moving traditional coursework to the internet (Diaz and Bontenbal 2001; Serwatka 2005).

Ways to Engage Students
• Critical thinking is more engaging than listening: Knowledge is only superficially transmitted by telling someone something. Students (and audiences) are engaged when you create learning environments that require them to apply their own analysis and evaluation to constructing meaning. Make it partial assembly required.
• Assign responsibility for learning to the student: students are not engaged with technology because it puts them in charge of information they access, store, analyze and share. It gives them something they rarely get study materials
• Remember, the essence of teaching is creating learning experiences that provoke reflection: Students who are simply asked to follow instruction have nothing to reflect upon. Students who are offered the opportunity to explore their own approaches and share them with their peers are well on their way to life-long learning.

Student engagement is important in any class, but it takes on greater significance in the online learning environment where students are not only isolated from their instructor and fellow students, but must be disciplined enough to ward off distractions and other commitments that compete for their time.

Research and Development
Research at the DCLD contributes to education provision that not only responds to but also shapes the changing circumstances of our society. The DCLD research activities promote scholarship in the field of ODL and related topics, pursue issues of institutional and national interest, build professional capacity and reflexive practice, enrich tuition and foster a culture of collaborative knowledge creation and sharing. Current collaborative research initiatives include the following:
• investigating the implications of the team approach to learning design in the Department of Mercantile Law
• developing guidelines for course development and writing for the Department of Industrial Psychology
• conducting a feasibility study into the use of radio at Unisa
• looking at the systemic conditions required for a more effective semester-based mode of tuition
• preparing various joint research articles and conference presentations based on lecturers’ interactions with the DCLD, such as the video-conferencing experiences in the departments of English and Advanced Nursing Science

According to the Research Development Coordinator (2008), the following were the challenges facing the DCLD regarding changing perspectives in student responsibility and educator accountability at Unisa:
• From a reward perspective, lecturers are rewarded for research that is discipline based. Time spent on improving learning and teaching practice is seldom recognised. There are also no incentives for lecturers to attend training programmes related to ODL or OBE. Lecturers may readily choose to focus on developing their academic image through discipline-oriented publications
rather than see the development of their teaching competence as a priority. Thus, creating the best learning opportunities is not directly promoted under the current institutional conditions.

- The fact that the DCLD cannot enforce the implementation of the Tuition Policy poses another challenge for our role in influencing educator accountability. We advise and make recommendations without any guarantee that our advice will necessarily be heeded. Some modules have never been referred to the BLD for review.
- The institution does not make explicit the relationship between student responsibility and educator accountability. Unisa has no formal practice of inviting students to challenge the extent to which the institution and the learning programmes live up to expectations and the standards set. Students receive no generic guidelines of what is expected of them as distance learners, just piecemeal information pertaining to modules that a student has enrolled for is distributed via tutorial letters.

**Project Team Management**

The materials and presentation of the course as a whole should excite, engage and reward the learner. Courses should be designed so as to involve learners actively in their own learning and should allow learners quick access and clear movement through them. The DCLD Project Team Manager argues that ODL demands the inclusion of many more aspects into learning design than just compiling a study guide containing factual information only. He further indicated that ODL warrants the involvement of all the different support departments in the university. This includes aspects such as learning development, editorial, production, assignments, examinations, student support, graphic support, library services, dispatch, etc.

**Data Collection Strategies**

Data was collected by means of focus group interviews supported by (Folch-Lyon & Frost 1981; Kingy, Tiedje & Friedman 1990; Kruger 1994; Kvale 1996), which according to Shurink, Shurink & Poggenpoel (in De Vos 1998) can be described as “a purposive discussion of a specific topic or related topics taking place between individuals with a similar background and common interests”.

The role of the researcher was that of a “research instrument” with no preconceived notions or expectations (Du Toit 1997; De Vos 1998). Two researchers participated in the research, referred to as the moderator and the observer (De Vos 1998), one being the facilitator of the discussion and the other taking field notes in order to accomplish triangulation (Krefting 1991; Vocell & Asher 1995).

One open-ended research question was put to the respondents (educators and students) to gather information on the topic:

**Academics:** What are your views on the role of the DCLD regarding learning material development to improve pass rate and throughput at Unisa?

**Students:** What are your views in creating an opportunity for learning successful to complete your studies?

A context was created in which the respondents could speak freely and openly. This was realised by the following techniques: clarification, paraphrasing, summarising, probing and minimal verbal as well as non-verbal responses. During interviews bracketing (putting preconceived ideas aside) was done. The research continued for four focus group interviews until definite patterns or themes become evident and the information became saturated (De Vos 1998; Morse 1994). Field notes maintained by (Wilson 1998) were kept by the research assistant during the interviews.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

All the interviews were recorded by means of an audiotape and then meticulously transcribed while a simple coding system was used to identify topics or recurring themes. The transcribed focus group data were analysed by using the constant comparative method of data analysis as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The following steps were implemented: After repeatedly reading the transcriptions in order to form a holistic understanding, the main ideas that emerged from the data were written down in a process of discovery to be used in the provisionally identified categories. Next, units of meaning were identified and indicated on the data source. The units were then compared to the provisional categories to see whether they fitted in any of them.

This process was repeated with all the data. Where there were no provisionally identified categories to match units of meaning, new categories were developed. The emerging categories were then further refined by writing rules of inclusion to convey the meaning of the data contained under a category. In the continuing process of data analysis, a shift was made from placing units of meaning into stand-alone categories, to identifying patterns and relationships between patterns.
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
The following main constituents or themes recurred in the focus group interviews.

Findings Pertaining to the Learners
The appeal for more learner support was evident. It is obviously an issue of great importance for the students. The following is an example of a contradictory response:

Difficulty I have about materials is that they are not rich with examples and exercise. They gave few simple examples and on challenging chapters they even do the same.

The student’s response shows dissatisfaction with the quantity as well as the quality of examples and exercises in course material.

The following comments refer to the relevance, usefulness, and contextualisation of the materials:

There is hardly anything interesting from our study materials. It is very European and not contemporary. It also does not give me a chance to relate my cultural and socio-economic condition with my study material. My well being as an African is compromised.

[I would like] a course that adheres to the contemporary societal needs and inspiration of modern learners. Course materials that are products of a democratic consultation and input from students. A course which is user-friendly in terms of content and language. In conclusion, a course material that is very much challenging and very accessible.

A major complaint was that the materials did not offer enough guidance. The following responses are a reflection:

I sometimes find it difficult to understand because you’ll find that the materials are not easily understandable. I should think it would be fruitful if they arrange classes as frequently as they can if not full-time tutoring… you find a study guide as it is and then you start reading it on your own. No one is going to advise you on how to go through that guide.

Guidance for the students means, for example, "classes", “advice”, “group discussion”, “someone to clarify”, “guidance from lecturers and other source”. There is an indication that the material is insufficiently scaffolded; in the words of one student, “you find the guide as it is” – that is, without any form of support (e.g. guidelines, examples, illustrations and language support).

These comments seem to reflect a desire for a much more flexible set of learning opportunities designed to meet the needs of the learners. The majority of students were positive about their course materials, although some were contradictory or negative. Research into learners and their needs is a high priority in the organization, and is used to inform all aspects of policy.

Learner information is used to design programmes, courses, materials, learner support and counselling services that are flexible and learner centered. Supplementary materials and learner support are provided according to the needs of learners in relation to language and learning experience. If learners are to adapt to the special requirements of guided self-study, they require various forms of support, for example, satisfactory access to tutors and facilitators, opportunity to interact with other learners and access to the necessary facilities. However, responses to the interview questions give a clear indication that the type of learner support desired by students is a greater degree of contact with their tutors and lecturers.

Findings Pertaining to the Academics
Generally, the most important reason why the academics’ perspective may be negative is that they often feel obliged to implement policies about which they often do not have a clear understanding of the demands of changes they must implement and often lack adequate time to prepare for the implementation.

The majority of the academics indicated that they lack confidence in their own abilities to use myUnisa and to put their courses online. Moreover, their perspectives are also influenced by past experience using the same study guides for three to five years without revision and lack of the contribution that students can make to the delivery of courses, particularly to facilitate peer group discussion.

However, the challenges facing many of the Unisa faculties are that there is a lot of work to be done regarding the revision of courses, and meeting deadlines for scheduling with limited staff. Interviews, participatory observations and literature review on changing perspectives on student responsibility and educator accountability at Unisa show that there are numerous variables that may influence these perspectives.

When we talk about teaching discourse, we mean that we should write our study material in such a way that the learners who are studying the course are constantly being taken into consideration. This is a challenging task, since the needs of the target group have to be reconciled with the demands of the subject field. Learners are our audience. Learners need to have access to the content information that they are supposed to be learning; they also need to be introduced to key questions, concepts and issues in...
the field of study. The challenge is to provide access for learners without distorting the subject.

It is in the light of this that certain guidelines and recommendations will be made. These being that:

- making content relevant for students starts with simple things such as developing concept maps to show how the things you are teaching are interrelated; looking for real-world applications of the concept and procedures you are teaching; talking to other teachers to find ways of integrating knowledge across course boundaries; and continually asking yourself “why do I want students to learn these things?”

- instructional activities should be arranged so that students have appropriate opportunities to engage in meaningful learning as opposed to rote learning.

- academics should ensure that learners know what important outcomes they are required to achieve and how the quality of their performance will be judged. They will need to ask the following questions:

  What is really important in this module?, What are the fundamental concepts that students must understand in order to make this module or unit work?, In this module, what learning activities will encourage students to think beyond simple recall?, Is the knowledge presented to students treated as contentious, questionable, open to challenge and changeable?, Does the assessment task encourage students to think, and does it allow them to reveal the depth of their understanding?, Why do I want students to achieve the outcomes of this module?, What special learning support is provided for students who need it?

Do the assessment techniques allow students to demonstrate their understanding in ways that best suit their thinking styles?, Do the assessment techniques allow students to demonstrate their understanding in ways that best suit their thinking styles?

We can make text accessible in several ways: acknowledging learners’ prior learning and experience through advance organizers, using interactive text and activities, providing pre-tests and post-tests to help them gain a realistic picture of their own learning, using various types of presentation to reach learners with different learning styles, opening up access to the text by using glossaries and margin comments and notes. Through negotiation and guidance, learners can be encouraged to assume responsibility for their learning. This will often involve the use of teaching strategies such as individual research projects that students design. For the academic to be successful in keeping and engaging students the following should be considered:

- Avoid using activities that just take up time with busy work but do not lend any support to the unit. Each unit will have many activity opportunities, take advantage of those opportunities that are going to engage the students and enhance learning.

- It is important to review content outlines so that you can use the content outlines to brainstorm ideas that will result in coming up with activities that will motivate the students to learn. Challenging the students will motivate them and stir their curiosity about the subject.

- Quality and quantity combined will make a huge difference in the learning outcomes. The key is to use variety and to make sure that the variety is all geared toward the same learning goal.

- Remember, motivation takes all shapes and forms, but it is far quicker to catch flies with honey than it is to catch them with vinegar.

CONCLUSION

When looking at this scenario, the role of the DCLD at Unisa (as a leader in distance education), in spite of some negative viewpoints regarding learning materials development, student support, it is evident from responses educators and students made during the focus group interviews that there are some concerns about the quality of ODL they are receiving. This article attempted to describe the challenges that the DCLD faces in the implementation of tutoring system and the implementation of the tuition policy. What has transpired is that all of these techniques are aimed at creating opportunities for getting and keeping learners to understand and learn successfully. Writing for learners means writing in such a way that effective learning is promoted by the text and not lowering the standard. In conclusion, the large number of courses at Unisa share the following characteristics:

- content driven
- very little reflection and metacognition
- not always contextually relevant
- do not encourage critical and independent reflection and do not empower the learner to critically reflect on the "what" and the "how" of learning
- do not constitute a learning experience characterised by dialogue, research and application to authentic real-life scenarios
- student engagement is seen as an add on and is not embedded in the design of the learning experience.
This research needs to be taken further in terms of action research so as to come with the empirical evidence to support the above.

REFERENCES


JOHNSON, N A. 1994. The perspective, persuasive power of perceptions. The Albert a journal of Educational Research,(Author: Is this the correct name of the journal?) XL(4):475-497


