



Enhancing Independent Learning In A Transnational Environment

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Introduction

In recent times there has been increased attention and concern for the need to inculcate the concept of independent learning in higher education institutions (HEI) (Abeyrathne and Ekanayake, 2019; Ferris, 2021; Samah et al., 2021). According to Hockings et al. (2018), in the United Kingdom (UK) independent learning has now become a cornerstone in higher education because of the 'massification' of higher education. However, according to Learsk (2008) there are both opportunities and challenges that emerge in a transnational educational setting due to the intercultural engagements. These challenges and opportunities therefore determine the success of a curriculum in the TNE environment. In Ghana for instance, though the educational sector has seen some major reforms since 2004 advocating for a more learner-centred approach to teaching very little changes can be seen with respect to curriculum design and development as well as teaching practises that enhances independent learning (Acheampong, 2017). Enhancing independent learning in a Ghanaian TNE environment is therefore important because it is one of the major proponents of a learner-centred curriculum which provides students with a more interactive and engaging learning environment as compared to the usual Ghanaian teaching environment ultimately ensuring that these students have a access to quality education which is a major reason why some African students opt for TNE in their countries according to Owusu-Agyeman and Amoakohene, (2020). However, the pursuit of a leaner-centred environment in a TNE can present some challenges both for the teacher who might have had their entire educational journey in the Ghanaian context and is used to the transmission style as a learner and teacher which represented my personal challenge and the students who are used to a learning environment which is more teacher-centred therefore have never understood their role in enhancing their own learning experience. This paper aims to explore the factors that can enhance the concept of independent learning in a transnational environment focusing on effective feedback.



Literature Review

Transnational Educational Environment and The African Context.

Within the past thirty (30) years, transnational education (TNE) has grown exponentially. Many Higher Education Institutions (HEI) especially in the UK are now providing their higher educational curriculum to institutions and students across the globe. These TNE therefore ensures that many students in their respective countries are now exposed to diverse learning and teaching philosophies from overseas (Bordogna, 2020). Owusu- Agyeman and Amoakohene, (2020) explains that in Africa TNE have increased due to factors such as the economic gains HEI derive from investing in international education, lack of capacity for local institutions to deliver certain programs, the growing demand for quality education, the commercialization of knowledge that is promoted by international organizations and finally, the demand for global-oriented workforce. Nevertheless, the African context of teaching presents a more transmission style (Pratt, 2002) of teaching as compared to a more learner-centred style of teaching from these UK institutions. On the other hand (Tabula, 2013) explains that creativity, critical thinking, versatility, independent view, innovativeness, tolerance to diverging and problem-solving characteristics expected in a TNE highlighting a major distinction between the pedagogy in the African Teaching Environment and a TNE. For that reason, I must emphasise that some aspects of the TNE teaching practices such as encouraging independent learning through effective feedback will involve much more than what literature from the UK and other schools from overseas say.

Effective Feedback as a means of enhancing independent learning.

Feedback is the process through which learners make sense of information they have received from various sources and then use that information to enhance their work or learning strategies (Carles and Boud, 2018). Feedback can be in the form of oral feedback that occurs generally in class and written feedback of assignments and assessments. Effective feedback should therefore help learners make informed judgement about their inputs and is vital in the sense that learners are challenged to think differently and adopt new perspectives in addressing their work and learning process which will help them in their own independent learning. According to Carles and Boud (2018), student responses to feedback depends on their specific discipline, curricula, and contextual settings as well as their previous experiences and personal characteristics.



For instance, in my teaching environment Lancaster University Ghana (LUG) most of the students that are enrolled on our foundation program are very used to the transmission of style of teaching (Pratt, 2002) where the teacher is at the centre of every activity, knows it all and says it all. Furthermore, the African traditional ways of up bringing makes the elderly person always right with the view that younger ones cannot really express their views on a situation. For this reason, most students do not have the confidence to express themselves in class. I mostly find it very difficult to get my students to respond to questions I ask in class or share their views about a topic being discussed. The ability for me to give students the effective oral feedback they need in class depends largely on their class participation and contribution however this becomes a challenge. Feedback literacy provided withing the transmission style of teaching is very general and lack the ability to provide students with the appropriate information they need to make sound judgements of their work. For these reasons I employ the following strategies as a teacher in a TNE environment to enhance independent learning through effective feedback

Firstly, the best form of teaching style that enhances independent learning is the learner-centred approach to teaching where the student plays an active role in the teaching process. With this type of teaching the students' participation and contribution is vital to the success of teaching. So, for both my foundation and undergraduate classes I provide students with relevant learning materials on every topic in the module. Class presentations, group discussions and peer review sessions are very crucial to my teaching approaches creating the platform for more discussions and deliberations that promotes feedback that can guide independent learning.

Secondly, students need to value feedback, the role it plays in enhancing their independent learning and ultimately help them achieve intended learning outcomes. The role of the module leader in ensuring that students achieve this cannot be ignored especially in the case of my foundation class at LUG. Price, Handley, and Millar (2011), asserts that most students fail to identify other forms of feedback and recognize only the written comments on their work as feedback. In my introductory classes do my best to explain to my students and make them understand that our class sessions will be more of a learner-centred class and for that reason they need to be prepared, feel free and confident to share their views and ideas. There is a 10% of the entire assessment at the end of the module apportioned for class participation which motivates them more.

Carless et al., (2011) argues that when feedback is provided at the end of a module it provides very limited scope for students to apply the insights from the teacher comments to their work. My undergraduate modules have coursework assignments that are submitted



only at the end of the module making it very difficult for me to provide my students with relevant feedback, they need to guide their independent learning as they work on their coursework. For my undergraduate modules, I have structured some of my tutorial sessions as discussion session towards coursework assignments. Students present a draft on their key issues to address in the assessment which I review and provide some feedback to and a quarterly work in progress class presentation towards their final submission. During such presentations both myself and their peers provide some relevant feedback too.

Molley et al., (2013) explains that when learners enjoy a topic or task, they gain some positive emotions about them and will stay more on it and are more willing to take feedback on such task or topic. They also argue that learner preparedness towards a topic can be a motivating factor to whether they will take feedback positively or negatively. In both my foundation and undergraduate classes I do my best to ensure that my students can build interest in the topics we discuss by contextualizing them so they can easily relate to them as well as provide them with very relevant information.

Conclusion

Independent learning has become an important aspect of achieving success of any higher education curriculum. If a learner-centred approach to teaching is now becoming the order of the day even beyond the boundaries of UK higher institutions into their branch campuses, then independent learning has come to stay in these TNE and must therefore be encourage no matter the contextual differences. This paper highlights some challenges to enhancing independent learning in a TNE and the strategies I am adopting at LUG through effective feedback and provides a platform for me to build on in my quest for acquiring the knowledge and skills I need to become a successful teacher in a TNE environment as I continue to pursue some more literature on other factors that enhance independent learning beyond effective feedback.

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