RIDE2025 Abstracts

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[11] Katherine Carter (Namibia University of Science and Technology). *Modelling and implementing inclusive assessment practices to enable student success in Namibia.*

Abstract. Research Track: Modelling and implementing inclusive assessment practices to enable student success. Presentation by Dr Katherine Carter, Namibia University of Science and Technology. Sub-theme: Inclusive and accessible education.

Keywords: Inclusive assessment, modelling, implementation, Namibia

Introduction

Namibia is committed to inclusive education but once students commence their studies, they experience barriers that lead some students to drop out (Rickerts, 2023). Assessment may be one of those barriers. Assessments that are disorganised may disadvantage a wide range of students, including remote learners, first-in-family, adult learners, students from different ethnic backgrounds, students from lower socioeconomic classes, and students with carer responsibilities (Balloo et al., 2018). Diverse students already experience barriers before entering higher education. Assessments that are ambiguous serve as another hurdle to cross.

Like most countries, Namibia is witnessing a massification and diversification of higher education. With this, a one-size-fits-all approach to assessment neglects the needs of diverse students. This research explores the modelling and implementation of inclusive assessment practices for participants enrolled in an online Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education. Transformative approaches from the Evans' Assessment Tool (2018) framework were demonstrated in the fifteen-week module Teaching and Learning. A transformative approach recognises the role of both teachers and students in assessment and creates opportunities for student ownership over assessment processes. Influenced by Universal Design for Learning, transformative assessment approaches promote transparency and inclusivity and endeavor to remove discriminatory assessment practices. This is especially appropriate for higher education in Namibia as the legacy of inequalities formed during German Colonialism and rule under South African apartheid is apparent today.

Significance

This study points to the importance of designing assessments from the outset that allow all participants to succeed. It also highlights the significance of modelling such inclusive assessment practices for those enrolled in a qualification such as a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma in Higher Education. Modelling and implementing more equitable assessments may lead to better achievement of learning outcomes which could lead to better retention in Namibian universities and beyond. Finally, participants and their students who engage in inclusive assessments demonstrate agency where their voice is valued, and they have a sense of control over their learning.

Research questions

The study aims to determine to what extent modelling inclusive assessment leads to implementation in participants' teaching. The research questions are:

1. What assessment strategies were demonstrated in the module that participants found inclusive?

2. What inclusive assessment strategies do participants see themselves implementing in their practice?

3. What barriers, if any, prevent the implementation of inclusive assessment in their practice?

Methods and Findings

Sixty-three participants were invited, and eighteen came forward to take part in the focus group sessions in June 2024. Participants identified inclusive assessment practices they plan to introduce in their teaching, including peer review, aligned assessment briefs, rubric co-creation, and the use of exemplars. Barriers may prevent implementation, yet participants seemed willing to try to overcome them.

Theory

Agency is the capacity of participants to lead an active role in their learning. Developing agency requires a shift in mindset and behaviour in the traditional roles of student and teacher. However, structures in place may limit a person's ability to develop agency. A transactional approach to assessment is a structure that may prevent participants from developing autonomy. In a transactional approach, assessments are designed for the participants. They have a passive role where they simply receive the assessment task and possibly, the marking criteria. There is little dialogue over the expectations and requirements. The participant depends on the teacher for feedback (Evans 2018). Participants in this study were accustomed to a transactional approach to assessment during their studies at university and it is likely replicated in their current teaching practice. They may wish to make changes but are embedded in familiar experiences of learning and teaching in higher education. Observing how others teach and assess may provide examples of changes they desire to make. This points to the significance of modelling.

Link to conference and implications

This research aligns with the online and inclusive aspect of the conference, and it has practical implications for universities developing guidelines on inclusive teaching and assessment. Universities embracing more inclusive assessment practices may lead to higher student retention rates, a valuable commodity in today's competitive higher education market.

References

Balloo, K. et al. (2018) 'Transparency Isn't Spoon-Feeding: How a Transformative Approach to the Use of Explicit Assessment Criteria Can Support Student Self-Regulation', Frontiers in Education, 3(69), pp. 1-11.

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Rickerts, B. (2023) Factors influencing student retention at the University of Namibia. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Namibia.

Track: Research
Keywords: Inclusive assessment, Modelling, Implementation, Namibia
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[13] Luke Mawer (University of Leeds). *Teachers' cognitions and practices with flipped classrooms in the UAE.*

Abstract. This study took place in a Higher Education institution in the UAE during a time of pedagogical change from face-to-face teaching to flipped classroom and fully online instruction. Over a period of two years, the practices and cognitions of four teachers involved in this change process were studied through a qualitative case study methodology using interviews and classroom observations. Theoretically, the study draws on teacher cognition research as well as two influential models relevant to technology use in education: TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) and UTAUT (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology). These frameworks offer a conceptual scaffold for comprehending the complex interplay in teachers' work of technology integration, pedagogical strategies, content delivery, and contextual influences.

The findings of this study indicate that teachers' cognitions, institutional processes, and student factors play key roles in the effectiveness of flipped classrooms. Throughout the case study, emphasis is placed on the importance of considering educators' cognitive processes during the implementation of pedagogical innovations. Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and perspectives inform their instructional choices and acceptance of policy. Challenges identified by the participants during the change process included institutional preparedness, student responsiveness, and the need for further professional development. Effective teacher facilitation was found to be key to the successful implementation of flipped classrooms and online teaching, in addition to the need for specifically designed learning materials. Institutional elements are also important influences on the successful implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches.

This study acknowledges that educational change requires more than a policy directive and the incorporation of novel technological tools; it entails a consideration of the nuanced interplay of cognition, context, and communication. The implications for impactful practices in online, distance, blended, hybrid, or hyflex higher education provision include the need for tailored professional development programs, institutional support, strategies to enhance student engagement, and the design of customised learning materials. This study contributes to the broader dialogue on teacher cognition during periods of educational change (especially that which is technology-based) and highlights the significance of teacher agency, contextual appropriateness, and institutional preparedness.

The presentation will focus on the interplay between teacher cognition, institutional processes, and student factors in the successful implementation of flipped classrooms and online teaching. Key takeaways for attendees will include understanding the critical role of teacher cognition, identifying challenges and solutions related to institutional preparedness and student engagement, and about the importance of customised learning materials and effective teacher facilitation. The presentation will engage the audience through interactive polls, Q&A sessions, case study discussions, and group activities, ensuring an informative and interactive experience relevant to the attendees' contexts.

By focusing on teacher cognition and student engagement, the study highlights strategies to enhance student participation and create a supportive learning environment that promotes well-being. While also highlighting the danger that can arise if educators do not feel a sense of belonging towards a pedagogical change they are experiencing. The emphasis on customised learning materials and tailored professional development ensures that educational practices are inclusive and accessible to all students and educators. Moreover, the study's context in the UAE provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing pedagogical innovations in diverse cultural and institutional settings, contributing to the broader dialogue on international and transnational education.

Track: Research
Keywords: Flipped classrooms, Online learning, Teacher cognition, Learning design, Educational reform, Student engagement
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive, TNE

[14] Özlem Yenerer Çakmut (Ozyegin University), Volkan Mengi (Mimar Sinan University), Başak Ozan Ozparlak (Ozan&Ozan Law Office), Muge Cetin (Ozyegin University) and Selim Sarfati (Ozyegin University). *Ensuring Sustainable Online Moot-Court Studies by VR Technologies: A Case Study.*

Abstract. In certain law faculties around the globe, in addition to theoretical courses, practical "Moot Court" studies are integrated into the curriculum. Ozyegin University Faculty of Law is one of the pioneers of moot court studies in Turkey. An identical courtroom both from European and Anglo-Saxon legal systems was built for these studies to give students a "courtroom experience." However, the sustainability of this kind of physical learning practices is fragile during times of crisis like pandemics. Unfortunately, university students from southeastern Turkey, who were necessarily taking online courses during the Covid19 pandemic, experienced another force majeure due to the earthquake in 2023. They lack the advantages of physical learning, including Moot Court studies, for the second time. Although moot court studies continued online, they lacked the sense of being in a courtroom with all necessary physical features like the model courtroom and clothing, like robes. This made us think of alternative distance/online education practices. As academicians of Ozyegin University with diverse backgrounds and disciplines (penalty law, IT law, game design), we prepared a project involving the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) technologies into these "moot court" legal education and submitted to Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkiye (Tubitak), which accepted our project application to be funded for 24 months under the "Innovative Solutions in Social Sciences and Humanities Research" project fund. At the beginning of 2024, we hold the potential to offer students unique and innovative learning experiences (Christou, 2010). The anticipation is that technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) will play a significant role in education in the future (Martín-Gutiérrez et al., 2017). These technologies will enhance the learning process by providing students with interactive and visually rich experiences, making it more engaging and effective. They will enable students to experience abstract concepts like courtroom concretely. Nevertheless, integrating VR or AR technologies into legal education serves for inclusiveness during crises. During Covid19 pandemic in many countries like Turkey, online education was replaced with physical moot court studies. VR and AR technologies, therefore, can serve the inclusiveness of education during times of crisis. Similarly, right after the earthquake happened in southeastern Turkey in 2023, university students in Turkey including Ozyegin University couldn't attend their courses physically, and online education became a reality again. Yet, the students lacked the full benefits of physical moot court experience. This made us, as academicians, think of different and more effective solutions for more effective online and distant education practices. However, before fully becoming applicable, pre-trials and understanding of the student's expectations and reactions must taken into consideration for a student-centric, democratic education design.

In order to establish an VR experience-based survey during the project, our project VR moot course trials are accompanied questionnaires to be filled by the participant students after each distance/online moot court education trial. We applied a two-phased method for our project for voluntary students of the faculty of law. Thus, different platforms and interfaces were engaged to find the best solution for distant moot court education during times of crisis. The project kicked off in the second semester of the academic year 2023/2024, in February 2024, with the voluntary students on the Mozilla platform as a distance education practice without the involvement of VR glasses at this initial phase. Instead, in this initial phase, the physical moot courtroom was first scanned and uploaded to the Mozilla platform, and avatars for the courtroom were created. Students are connected to the virtual courtroom via computers or mobile phone applications. However, not only the advantages but also challenges occur during the project. For example, the virtual courtroom application, which was first created on the Mozilla Hubs platform, was halted after Mozilla announced that it ended support for the Mozilla Hubs platform. This showed us that depending on the technology requires interfaces like goggles and platforms to bring along also the dependency on digital technology companies. For online/distant education to be more sustainable and to provide autonomy to education institutions like universities. Moreover, we will scrutinize students' experiences who have actively participated in physical moot court proceedings, examining the efficacy of virtual trial education conducted through VR goggles.

With this application, students will be able to connect to virtual sessions for educational purposes over the internet, regardless of their location, and experience an actual courtroom setting. Now, the second phase of our project will be held with several trials with different students until the end of November 2024. In the second phase, the students can access a virtual courtroom with VR goggles, which were bought with the project budget. We will then analyse the outcomes of both phases in order to determine the optimal application for a sustainable distance/online moot court education with VR tools.

We consider that virtual reality, akin to technologies such as smartphones and the internet, is poised to be extensively utilized in the future (Rosedale, 2017). The application to be utilized is anticipated to instruct students in interactive and effective ways not only on moot court education but also for all the learning experiences in universities wherever physical experience is thought to be indispensable all around the country, and it will be an essential case study in the global nexus. We aim to achieve the first three steps of Wegner's value creation assessment framework: immediate, potential, and applied value (Wegner et al.). Consequently, the results of this project will have policy implications on the impact of VR tools for sustainable online/distant legal education and inclusive online/distant education in universities for all.

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Track: Practice
Keywords: Sustainable online education, Distant education, Virtual Reality in educationM, Moot Court, Inclusive Legal Education
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[20] Ioannis Glinavos (University of Westminster). *Enhancing Engagement through Streaming Avatars and Synchronous AI Assistants in Online Education.*

Abstract. This workshop aims to investigate the use of streaming avatars and synchronous AI assistants as transformative tools for fostering engagement, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging in online education. Streaming avatars offer an innovative and dynamic alternative to traditional video, allowing educators to represent themselves creatively while preserving privacy and circumventing technological limitations. Synchronous AI assistants enable real-time interaction, providing immediate responses to learner inquiries, facilitating discussion, and supporting learners in an adaptive manner. These technologies present significant opportunities for advancing learning outcomes, enhancing student satisfaction, and addressing challenges in digital pedagogy.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Streaming Avatars, AI Assistants, Online Education, Engagement, Inclusivity
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[21] Sung Him Isaac Ng (Faculty of Life Sciences and Medicine, King's College London) and Mandeep Gill Sagoo (Faculty of Life Sciences and Medicine, King's College London). *Transforming Medical Education with qVault.ai: An AI-Powered Personalized Learning Platform.*

Abstract. The evolving landscape of medical education presents persistent challenges, including limited access to personalised learning tools, high costs of study materials, and a lack of resources that align with diverse curricula. qVault addresses these challenges by offering a suite of AI-driven learning tools designed to transform medical education for healthcare professionals and students. The platform's innovative features are designed to meet the evolving needs of digital learning and beyond, contributing to sustainable and equitable education for all.

qVault offers several integrated tools to support diverse learning needs. 'SBAce', the flagship medical question generator, tailors Single Best Answer (SBA) questions to fit any curriculum, challenging students with exam-level difficulty and ensuring deep learning with real-world applicability. 'Lenny', the AI medical tutor, provides concise, accurate explanations of complex medical concepts, leveraging Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) to ensure precision and avoid hallucinations. 'Noteify' and 'CaseCraft' further enhance learning by condensing extensive notes into structured study guides and generating interactive clinical cases to support practical application and clinical reasoning. Additionally, 'OSCE LiVE', currently in development, will simulate Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) with real-time, live conversations to help students refine their clinical skills.

qVault.ai has already gained recognition through presentations at EDULEARN24, the International Federation of Associations of Anatomists (IFAA), King's College London Council meetings, and other panels. The platform was awarded the SEDA Student Partnership Impact Award and has received two rounds of funding from King's Academy. Since its rollout to first-year medical students, initial feedback has been promising, with over half the cohort (>200) registering within the first week.

Ongoing studies are evaluating the platform's impact on academic performance and student engagement through analytics, surveys, and user feedback. qVault utilises advanced evaluation metrics such as facility, discrimination indices, and Item Response Theory (IRT), deriving new feedback frameworks that empower educators with actionable insights while continuously improving manual review processes.

To address feedback on the lack of critical thinking in traditional chatbot designs, qVault is developing 'Reggie,' a new chatbot that guides exploration and independent problem-solving, rather than providing immediate responses. Additionally, research is being conducted on the utility and perception of AI chatbots. With a modular suite of tools, qVault is poised for expansion beyond medical education by offering scalable, accessible, and personalised learning tools that can adapt to broader educational contexts, such as GCSE, A Levels and STEM subjects.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Medical Education, AI, Personalized Learning, Student Engagement, Accessibility
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[22] Ale Armellini (University of Portsmouth), Jovana Radulovic (University of Portsmouth) and Mary Watkins (University of Portsmouth). *Inclusive Education through Alternative Summative Assessments: A Pilot Study.*

Abstract. This presentation introduces a pilot project at the University of Portsmouth, led by Professor Ale Armellini and Dr. Jovana Radulovic, aimed at promoting inclusive and accessible education through alternative summative assessments. The pilot provides students with greater choice in how they are assessed, allowing them to select and co-create assessment instruments that best align with their individual strengths and needs, while ensuring that rigour, alignment and standards remain unaffected. Staff benefit from a safe environment to experiment with innovative and authentic assessment practices, supported by regulatory flexibility.

In this session we will share specific examples of alternative assessments used in the pilot, such as project-based assessments, oral presentations, and digital storytelling. The session will clarify the role of student co-creation in the assessment design process, highlighting safeguards to ensure fairness and consistency. Challenges, such as staff workload and grading consistency, will be addressed alongside the strategies developed to overcome them. Early feedback from students and staff will illustrate the impact of this approach on engagement and success, particularly for students with disabilities and diverse learning needs.

The session will also introduce Portsmouth's assessment matrix, designed to support the development of inclusive, flexible and rigorous assessments by prompting colleagues to think about (re)design, including the way the redesigned assessment tools utilise Generative AI. Attendees will leave with practical takeaways, including actionable steps for implementing flexible assessments and using the matrix in their own contexts. The discussion will also consider scalability and how the matrix can be adapted for broader institutional use, providing a clear pathway for fostering inclusive and innovative assessment practices sector-wide.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Inclusivity, Accessibility, Choice, Engagement, Assessment, Equity
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[26] Gareth Peevers (University of Glasgow), Thomas McMaster (University of Glasgow), Neeraj Bhardwaj (University of Glasgow), Jolly Atit Shah (University of Glasgow Singapore), Sye Loong Keoh (University of Glasgow Singapore) and Cindy Goh (University of Glasgow Singapore). *Supporting a mindset shift to blended learning at the University of Glasgow Singapore.*

Abstract. The University of Glasgow Singapore (UGS) launched in 2011 as the first subsidiary outside of Scotland in the University's 560-year history. In partnership with Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), UGS provides five BEng and BSc joint honours degree programmes delivered to students based in Singapore.

SIT and UGS moved to the new Punggol Campus in 2024-25. The Punggol campus is designed for blended learning, with significantly less capacity for face-to-face teaching. With this transition from fully physical learning to blended learning in the new campus, our teaching staff based in Singapore would be required to redesign their programmes for blended delivery.

Since 2022, the Learning Innovation Support Unit (LISU) in Glasgow has been cultivating a collaborative partnership with academic staff in Singapore, and so LISU agreed to support UGS redesign 30 courses across five programmes for blended learning. Brewer & Movahedazarhouligh (2018) argue that a mindset shift is required from staff and students to realise flipped learnings full potential. LISU's main goal was to support this mindset shift in UGS staff by upskilling them in curriculum and learning design and learning technologies, and by offering consultation and practical support in developing online multimedia learning materials.

SIT have adopted the flipped classroom pedagogy as their default model for blended learning. Students are introduced to online content asynchronously while applied learning is facilitated in live sessions, either online or on campus. SIT's approach is anchored in the three different design approaches for blended learning in higher education proposed by Alammary et al. (2014): low, medium and high impact blend.

This case study will share how LISU approached this project. We will describe the overall development, the needs and scope, the pedagogies that informed our curriculum design, the details of our findings from each stage, what we learned from cross-cultural perspectives, and what we hope to do next. To share practice and experiences, we will also expand upon the challenges that arose.

We will describe how we analysed the requirements and devised a detailed and realistic support plan for academic staff in Singapore with milestones and deliverables.

We will describe how we analysed UGS's applied learning approach to compare it with UofG's blended learning approach, so we could align both approaches.

We aim to reflect critically on the challenges, such as ensuring a consistent course design for both partners that would meet regulations for both UofG and SIT and navigating the varied expectations of the partners involved.

Other challenges covered include:

• Using synchronous and asynchronous communication tools

• Adapting the UofG Course Content Mapping Framework for UGS

• Reviewing and analysing SIT's digital ecosystem and mapping it to the ABC learning types

• Development of a bespoke UGS Resource Hub in SharePoint

• Resource allocation and the challenges of working in different time zones

We will highlight how we were influenced by the definitions in the Jisc Beyond Blend report (2023) when designing two weeks of upskilling sessions on learning design, multimedia production and learning technologies for UGS teaching staff. One week was online, and one week was delivered in person in Singapore. And share our practice and experiences with using synchronous & asynchronous delivery. We gathered feedback from UGS staff after each week of workshops and will share our findings to argue why face-to-face is still important for engagement and collaboration.

Finally, we will describe how the partnership has led to fruitful collaborations, and how we have begun to look at the student perspective as the first redesigned courses have launched. We will finish by outlining how the project will move forward to completion.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Blended Learning, Internationalisation, Transnational, International partners
Sub-theme: TNE

[30] Nicola Brown (Abertay University). *Exploring the Sense of Belonging in Online Postgraduate Students: A Literature Review and Ongoing PhD Research.*

Abstract. Amidst the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016), higher education institutions are increasingly diversifying and launching online programmes, a trend on an upward trajectory globally (Garrett & Simunich, 2023). Sense of belonging is known to be vital for on-campus student success (Thomas, 2012). However, with the development of asynchronous master's level study designed to fit around full-time working professionals, who likely have established support networks, the need for belonging in online learning environments remains critical (Jackson et al., 2010).

This presentation reviews existing literature on the sense of belonging among online students and introduces my ongoing PhD research that tests established theories of belonging, traditionally applied to undergraduate and on-campus students, within this unique student population.

Understanding the role of belonging in the success of online postgraduate students is crucial for institutions aiming to support student retention and academic success (Morris, 2021). Morris (2021) explores the intricate relationship between belonging, mental health, and overall wellbeing among postgraduates, highlighting how feelings of belonging positively impact learning experiences and academic community integration. These findings align with broader literature emphasising the need for a supportive and engaging online learning environment to promote student success (Walsh et al., 2020).

This review highlights the current literature that underscores the importance of fostering a sense of belonging in online postgraduate students to enhance their wellbeing and academic success. However notes that this is challenging amongst the asynchronous student population and understanding this phenomenon is essential for higher education institutions to learn how to best support this student population, thereby improving student retention and success.

By bridging the gap between existing literature and ongoing research, this presentation aims to provide insights into the unique needs of online postgraduate students and offer practical recommendations for higher education institutions to foster a supportive and engaging online learning environment.

Track: Research
Keywords: Asynchronous, Postgraduate, Block Delivery, Sense of Belonging, Success, Student Retention, Online Learning, Online Distance Learning
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive, TNE

[31] Martin Ward (University of Leeds), Ayako Yoshino (University of Leeds) and Eve Smith (University of Leeds). *Joining the dots: moving towards a coherent institutional approach to COIL.*

Abstract. Joining the dots: moving towards a coherent institutional approach to COIL

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is a pedagogic methodology in which a teaching unit, such as a module, part-module, or project, is taught jointly by two or more institutions in different countries, allowing students to work collaboratively across the two institutions via online platforms. Recognising the benefits for students and institutions as identified by the broad field of literature on COIL (such as Rubin, 2017; King de Ramirez, 2021; Naicker, 2021), the COIL research group at the University of Leeds, an institution which had previously not devoted resources to scaling up COIL, set out by surveying the institutional landscape to identify existing COIL practice at the institution. While the benefits of COIL are extensively documented in the literature, the barriers are often addressed only in passing or as ancillary points, rather than being the primary focus of dedicated studies. One notable exception is Prior and Jager (2022), who indicated that research-intensive universities in particular face challenges, but also tend to have unique potential, when it comes to scaling up COIL.

The researchers' initial enquiries identified that small pockets of COIL already existed within the institution, but these had come into existence through the individual and isolated innovations of a small number of academics. Practitioners were not connected to one another and there was no way to share practice. The presenters determined to identify why this was and what would it take to harness the university's academic and technological assets to scale up COIL at the institution.

With this in mind, the researchers set out to conduct empirical studies, in order to provide a research base to support the scaling-up of COIL at the institution. The first round was a staff facing questionnaire and focus groups, on perceived barriers to COIL within the institution. This was followed by a further round of questionnaires and focus groups to collect student views on the potential impact and value of COIL.

This empirical research identified a generally receptive student attitude towards COIL and internationalisation, and also identified key concerns felt by academics. Importantly, a key concern was around the lack of supportive infrastructure and resources or administrative support for implementing COIL. One salient point is that digital infrastructure and instructor confidence and familiarity were, in a post-pandemic world, no longer seen by respondents as a significant barrier. Against this backdrop, the researchers organised and implemented the first institutional level COIL Showcase to begin to bring this community together and stimulate further innovation within the university's academic community for the development of new COIL modules and part-modules. Now with the support of senior leadership at the institution, work is ongoing to develop the resources and mechanisms to scale up COIL at the institution. Digital support mechanisms and platforms continue to be examined for suitability.

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Track: Research
Keywords: collaborative online international learning COIL, barriers, student voice, institutional support
Sub-theme: TNE

[32] Theodora Philcox (Open University) and Elouise Huxor (Open University). *Combating isolation one postcard at a time.*

Abstract. Recognising the impact of isolation in distance learning, (Edward, C and Hardy, L, 2024), module leaders on the Open University's first level undergraduate design module developed a quick but impactful method by which tutors could maintain weekly contact with their students.

The Postcard Project was initially run as a limited pilot scheme, but due to its success, has now been rolled out to all students on the module. The module leaders created 31 individual visually engaging digital postcards, highlighting key learning points for each study week and advertising any forthcoming module wide lectures. Importantly, these were then sent out to students by their personal tutors with a friendly encouraging message week by week.

The aim of the project was two-fold. Retention has been a problem on this module which recruits from a broad spectrum of degree pathways. We hoped that regular contact with students would encourage students to seek support from their tutor before making a decision to withdraw. We were also aware, particularly post pandemic, that distance learning students crave a sense of belonging, and receiving what appeared to be a personal communication from their tutor, offered a stronger sense of being cared for.

The contact was considered as equally, if not more, important than the content of the postcards. While the bite-sized visual information that each postcard shared provided useful prompts for both tutors and students, the updates also helped tutors who work at a distance, feel connected and reminded them of what students were studying each week.

The audience will learn more about how the project has been implemented and see examples of the postcards that form the basis of the project. The project was, and is, significant, as it has increased retention by up to 8% and average assignment grade scores by up to 7.5%. It has generated heart-warming responses from both students and tutors confirming its benefit.

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[33] Thinh Huynh (Deakin University) and Chie Adachi (Queen Mary University of London). *Perceptions of Stakeholders on Blended Learning in the Australian Higher Education Context.*

Abstract. Blended learning (BL) has been a contested concept in higher education (HE) with no universally accepted definition, creating debates among researchers and practitioners alike. Current literature highlights diverse conceptualisations of BL, characterised by approaches such as inclusive, qualitative, quantitative, and others, reflecting the complexity of its application and perception. This study investigates how various stakeholders within the Australian HE context perceive and define BL, specifically examining the perspectives of Vietnamese international students (VISs), teaching staff, and university educational leaders. Through a qualitative methodology that includes in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, this research unpacks the narratives of these groups to identify patterns in BL perceptions. Findings reveal a prevalent view among VISs and teaching staff who perceive BL through an inclusive approach, seeing it as a broad and loosely defined concept. The choice to focus on VISs as the population for this study stems from their unique positioning within the Australian HE context. More specifically, VISs constitute one of the largest international student cohorts in Australia and bring distinct cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences that shape their engagement with BL. Additionally, the author's background as a VIS studying in Australia provides valuable cultural insights, enabling a deeper understanding of specific factors influencing how VISs navigate and respond to BL environments. While the results may not be directly generalisable to all groups of international students, focusing on VISs provides valuable insights that can serve as a foundation for understanding other cohorts facing similar challenges. Thus, while the study is context-specific, the findings offer transferable implications that can be adapted to other situations. Notably, in this study, Australian university leaders introduce a novel perspective, positioning BL as a strategic combination between online and F2F affordances to maximise student outcomes which consequently provides greater autonomy for teaching staff. Exploring perceptions from various stakeholders is not intended to prescribe a singular comprehensive definition but rather to provide more clarity on and contribute to the current debate on BL and its implementation at HE institutions. The nuanced stakeholders' perceptions can help HEIs move beyond entrenched misconception positioning BL as being physical first, online as a complement or supplement, a notion that university educational leaders have been confronting. By foregrounding VISs' experiences and insights from different stakeholders' perspectives, the study encourages teaching staff and educational leaders to consider how the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students shape their engagement with BL, thereby promoting more tailored and student-centred approaches to this mode of learning at HEIs.

[34] Adam Richardson (University of Leeds). *What I wish I'd known: Transforming Staff Induction Through Educator Experience.*

Abstract. The transition to designing, developing and teaching online is a challenging shift for all educators, and the growth of online education has brought this challenge into sharp focus. The transition to becoming a proficient online educator is one that requires academics to critically analyse their preconceptions about education, reflect on their professional practices and often transform their ways of working. As the existing literature shows, this transition can be disorientating for teachers and forces colleagues to confront how and what it means to be a teacher raising questions around their authority, control and respect (Dhillia, 2017). They have to reconsider not just what they know about teaching, but also how they create, outline and curate learning. More recent studies have explored the emotional impact for staff transitioning to teaching online (Taylor et al, 2022; Naylor and Nyanjom, 2021). All this emphasises the need to offer colleagues the training and reassurance to design, develop and deliver online learning to enable the long-term sustainable growth of online education.

This presentation delivers the results of an institutionally-fundedinstitutionally funded research project into induction for online academic practice at the University of Leeds. Like many institutions across the globe, the University of Leeds has ambitious strategic objectives to grow its portfolio of online education. Through understanding the lived experience of academic and professional services staff working on online education, the research aimed to inform the development of an induction programme for academic colleagues new to working online and to support the continuing professional development of those delivering online. The research questions for this work were:

• What are the experiences of academic staff designing, developingdeveloping, and teaching fully online education at Leeds?

• How can the identification of these experiences be used to inform the development of an experiential induction programme?

• How can the identification of these experiences be used to support continuing professional development for staff?

To answers these questions, a mixed methods research approach was adopted. Academic staff were surveyed on their experiences of design, development and teaching. This was followed by a series of interviews to explore the common themes that emerged. Alongside this, learning designers who work with academics to develop online modules were surveyed to understand their experiences and views on an educator's journey in online education. Taken together, these insights offer a holistic view of staff confidence, competence and experience of designing, developing and delivering online education.

Through surveying and interviewing academic staff and learning designers involved in online education, a holistic view of staff confidence, competence and experience of designing, developing and delivering online education was uncovered.

The results of this research enabled identification of how academics viewed their own confidence and confidence before and after their first online modules were created and taught, and compare that with the experiences of learning designers who supported them through this. It identifieds the barriers, common themes, and gaps in skills and knowledge in areas such as course design, assessment writing and pedagogy. These findings inform the development of an institutional induction programme for academic colleagues new to working online, support continuing professional development, and help both academic and professional service staff empathise more with one another, enabling a stronger working partnership.

The aim of this session, linked to the 'engagement, well-being and belonging' theme of this conference, enables an understanding of the lived experience of academic staff and learning designers in their shared endeavour of developing online education. By bringing together data from academic and professional service staff, it offers a unique insight into the practical and emotional challenges colleagues face in designing, developing and teaching online education. Existing literature speaks to the emotional and professional challenges colleagues have face in the transition to online education; this research solidifies often anecdotal evidence about the experiences of colleagues enabling us not only to support staff to sustainably enable the development of stronger quality online courses, but also to support the wellbeing and belonging of colleagues through understanding their experiences.

Track: Research
Keywords: Online education, Induction, Institutional change, Staff experience
Sub-theme: Well-being

[35] Borja Ruiz de Arbulo (Boston University). *Bridging Language Learning and Intercultural Competence with Digital Empathy in Higher Education.*

Abstract. This presentation will explore the impact of integrating real-time, web-based conversations into university-level Spanish courses in the United States. This approach connects students with native speakers abroad, fostering not only language proficiency but also empathy and intercultural competence.

The session will outline the pedagogical framework behind this initiative, grounded in research on foreign language instruction and intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2010). The presenter will discuss how structured, meaningful dialogues—supported by guided reflection exercises before and after each session—promote deeper cultural awareness and mutual understanding. Attendees will gain insight into how these online exchanges enhance interpersonal fluency, encourage self-reflection, and support students' overall well-being by creating a sense of belonging beyond the classroom.

This session will also highlight implementation strategies, including best practices for integrating these virtual interactions into existing curricula, as well as logistical considerations such as platform selection, student preparation, and assessment methods. Drawing from student feedback, reflective journals, and pre- and post-program surveys, the speaker will share key findings on linguistic and cultural development, along with common challenges and opportunities for improvement.

This approach aligns with current hybrid and flexible learning models, making it highly relevant in today's globalized education landscape. Attendees will leave with concrete, actionable steps for adapting and replicating this initiative in their own language courses. The session will include a 10-minute Q&A, allowing for discussion and exchange of ideas.

This presentation will be conducted in English and aligns with conference subthemes, including Engagement, Well-being and Belonging, as well as Internationalization and Transnational Education.

Track: Practice

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Language Education, Remote Learning, Higher Education, Spanish Instruction, Experiential Learning
Sub-theme: Well-being, TNE

[36] Annie Bryan (Coventry University) and Natacha Harding (University of Winchester). *"How's it going to land?": Exploring sensitive topics in online educational practices.*

Abstract. As more institutions move to online, hybrid and distance delivery, how our students engage with materials and learning, particularly around sensitive topic areas, becomes a key pedagogical discussion. As Higher Education practitioners, we are acutely aware of the need to support our students' wellbeing, in all its forms. Delivering engaging teaching focusing on sensitive topic areas, when the materials may be accessed remotely or without an educator being in the virtual space, poses a specific challenge. This challenge is perhaps most tangible within disciplines such as criminology, policing, forensics, psychology and healthcare- yet is potentially of relevance in almost all subject areas.

Much has been written on how to collaboratively work with students in a physical space around sensitive topics (Heath et al., 2017; Klein, 2017). As part of this discourse, there has been an emphasis on the use of content and trigger warnings (Dalton, 2020; George and Hovey, 2020; Jones et al., 2020). Indeed, Cebula et al., (2022) explored the experience of students when learning about potentially sensitive topics and the need to move beyond trigger warnings. Further discussion around engagement with sensitive topics in online, distance or hybrid environments emerged from Covid-19 pandemic teaching practices (Price et al., 2024). Additionally, the sector wide shift to different delivery modes has generated a range of discussion concerning practices in sensitive topic teaching (Downes et al., 2022).

The specific questions and challenges we need to pose to ourselves as practitioners for delivery in this space will be the focus of this workshop. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss with colleagues a range of issues around engaging with sensitive topics online, in response to the prompts provided by the facilitators. Furthermore, participants will be encouraged to share their experiences, insights, concerns, and questions in relation to this theme within a supportive environment.

The facilitators will, in turn, share their own experiences of teaching- and supporting learning- around sensitive topics. They will also explore the scope for institutional policies and/or initiatives to be developed and implemented to support staff with the challenges that this presents (see Harding 2023), again drawing on insights from their respective institutions. For example, the authors collaborated to deliver a recent workshop within Coventry University Group's Community of Practice for Inclusive Curriculum to explore issues around teaching sensitive topics. As a practice-based workshop, the overall aim is for participants to learn about approaches that they can employ to effectively promote wellbeing and resilience when working with sensitive topics in online environments- for themselves, their colleagues, and their students.

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[39] Colette Gordon (University of the Witwatersrand). *Social Reading, Social Justice? Annotation as Transformative Pedagogy.*

Abstract. This paper considers the transformative value of a unique social reading pedagogy (Gordon 2023) developed at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg for teaching English Literature, first as residential classroom pedagogy, then as emergency remote teaching, and now as blended learning. In a context of successive and overlapping local and global 'disruptions' (which include the Covid-19 global pandemic and South Africa's energy crisis), the need for educational access and educational transformation highlighted in the #Feesmustfall protests remains critical (Ntombana, Gwala and Sibanda, 2023). The intervention I present, taking students from expecting notes to 'noting expectations', developed over the last four years as a social annotation pedagogy, shows signs of being effective and scalable across disciplines, enhancing student access and engagement in the university, and democratising learning. But here I look closely and critically across these four years of teaching and make an argument for (re)defining success in terms of transformation. What are the conditions that allow expectation noting to transform a learning group and individuals' place within it? What does it mean when the pedagogy appears 'successful', but is unable to effect such a shift? I also discuss the implications of open web annotation, open pedagogy, and open research for universities in the Global South, the importance of building relevant capacity and networks, opportunities, and challenges faced.

[40] Lauren Mottle (University of Leeds). *"Feeling My Presence Is Needed": Fostering Belonging in Fully Online Learning Contexts.*

Abstract. This presentation explores how postgraduate distance learning students across six fully online Master's programmes at the University of Leeds (UK) value and locate a sense of belonging in the context of their academic studies. It argues that online students' sense of belonging is most enhanced when their contributions have visible value in moving learning forward.

The question of how universities can create a sense of belonging for their students is a central point of discussion at institutions across the UK. Understandably, most of these efforts centre around students studying on campus. Where existing research does tackle online learning spaces, it often focuses on the emergency shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and how educators fostered belonging in those unprecedented times. However, we are yet to thoroughly explore students' experiences of belonging in the context of learning opportunities intentionally designed for fully online study.

In response to this gap in the research landscape, I conducted a research project that specifically sought to understand how fully online, postgraduate learners define belonging in online learning spaces, what opportunities and barriers exist to creating a sense of belonging, and how might those inform the design and delivery of fully online postgraduate modules and programmes. To explore these questions, students could participate by completing an online survey, as well as share their experience through taking part in a Listening Room - a fairly new research method that provides unique opportunities to hear the genuine student voice (Heron 2009).

The Listening Room methodology asks pairs of participants to have a participant-led recorded discussion, guided by a series of prompts, but without the researcher present. Using this approach provides a unique opportunity for students to reflect about experiences of belonging and hear the genuine student voice, which can be particularly difficult in online learning spaces. Because the Listening Room methodology requires students to speak in pairs, monologuing was utilised as an alternative methodology to allow for the inclusion of participants who may not have established friendship connections on their course to contribute data to the research project.

Reflections from students revealed understandings and definitions of belonging both transcend learning spaces and have elements distinctive to the experience of learning online. In particular, students shared how these were shaped by the unique experiences of postgraduate online learners, many of whom are often balancing studying along full-time work and family commitments.

Specifically, this paper argues that fully online learners feel a sense of belonging when they feel like their virtual presence makes a valuable contribution to the learning experience as a whole. While this sense of "mattering" is not a new consideration in the context of belonging, it takes on importance nuances when considering online learning spaces as distance learners seek connection with peers and staff without the avenues for creating a sense of belonging that physical campus spaces offer. These findings have implications for both learning design and the delivery of that learning by module leaders. This presentation will conclude with some initial recommendations for ways we might further foster a sense of belonging for fully online learners.

Track: Research
Keywords: Belonging, postgraduate, online learning, digital education
Sub-theme: Well-being

[41] J Simon Rofe (CODE), Margaret Korosec (CODE), Sumudu Attygalle (University of London Student Fellow), Nick Gretton (University of Leicester & CODE) and Chie Adachi (QMUL & CODE). *"Let's discuss: Cultural and Social Dimensions in Digital Education".*

Abstract. "Let's discuss: Cultural and Social Dimensions in Digital Education"

Our presentation offers the opportunity to critically engage in contemporary discourse on Digital Education with a focus on Cultural and Social Dimension.

We engage with the JISC Report Beyond Blended Six Pillars (2023) – 'to support people in curriculum and learning design in HE Institutions' - and critiques of it, not least whether 'blended' is the appropriate term (Mosely).

An output of our CODE project, the presentation brings together five scholar-practitioners with their own cultural heritages who are engaged in the practice of Digital Education.

As an active participatory methodology addressing both those physically present and digital contributors, we aim to reality test our initial findings with a view to drawing on wider RIDE communities' cultural experiences of Digital Education. A preliminary response to our RIDE colleagues engagement with our research will be shared in real time on the day, and incorporated into the ongoing work of the project. This includes 1) a peer-reviewed paper that we will look to publish in the course of 2025, 2) alongside further presentation at our respective institutions, and 3) other relevant audiences.

As such our endeavours will facilitate a baton being passed - in anticipation of it being returned as we complete the lap - allowing for further review and knowing that another lap is ahead of us.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Cultural Turn, Digital Education, Blended Learning, Digital Transformation, Societal and Cultural concerns, Accessibility and digital equity
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive, TNE

[42] Carrie Timlin (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg). *Kafka is My Boyfriend: Online Reading Communities and the Literary Classroom.*

Abstract. Social media is host to organic, informal and, moreover, inclusive and accessible educational spaces, turning personal spaces and devices into sites of learning where literature is read, discussed, and analysed. Large sections of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have been transformed into BookTok, BookTube and Bookstagram with authors like Kafka taking on celebrity crush status. In contrast, the formal English literary classroom where an interest in exploring literature should be commonplace, has become a place in which students, privileging grades over reading, often turn to AI to sidestep the benchmark of assessment in the humanities - the essay. GPTs, along with online study guides, paraphrasing tools and essay mills have effectively replaced the text. Drawing on an overview of current social media trends in reading, this paper explores how, as Bookfluencers and #booklovers have grasped, the online space, while not without its problems, places a diverse community of readers with and without backgrounds in literary studies on equal footing. In Literary studies the emphasis is not on reading and discussion but on essays that assess the quality of a student's reading.

For those struggling, AI generated work can present as a way to level the playing field. I propose that a possible solution to the decline of reading in the literary classroom is to harness the affordances of informal educational spaces. Unlike the formulaic academic essay, social annotation tools like Hypothes.is make reading visible to teachers and students, centre the text, and can be used to cultivate communities of inquiry in inclusive and accessible educational spaces. These communities can exist exclusively within courses, or as part of wider global conversations emulating inclusivity and freedom of expression on social media platforms while sustaining the integrity of the discipline.

Track: Research
Keywords: Pedagogy, Social Media, AI, Literary Studies, Reading
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive, TNE

[48] Fawad Khaleel (Edinburgh Napier University), Patrick Harte (Edinburgh Napier University), Alija Avdukic (University of Dundee) and Matthew Bonnett (Edinburgh Napier University). *Exploring Models for Developing Online Learning in Higher Education: Integrating Institutional Resource Commitment with Strategic Pedagogical Planning.*

Abstract. The development of online distance learning offering provisions in UK HEIs has accelerated in response to current politico-socio-economic environment, the unsustainable TNE model based on flying faculty and the recent decrease in the number of international students. Currently, UK HEIs are using different and diverse models for creating and enhancing their online distance learning provisions.

In session the participants will learn about the different models used by UK HEIs and examine their impact on pedagogical development, institutional resource, and time commitment. This session is based on our study which uses interviews (n=25) with senior academic and managerial staff that have had or are working on developing and/or growing online provision for their HEIs.

We draw on the lived experiences of our participants and thematically analyse the data. Our findings showcase the models and strategies currently used in UK HEIs, the content creation processes of each model, along with their advantages and disadvantages. This session will provide participants with the foundational framework for aligning institutional resource commitment with strategic pedagogical development. This session will be helpful for HEIs that are planning to develop online distance learning provisions.

Track: Research
Keywords: developing online learning, Institutional Resource Commitment, Strategic Pedagogical Planning
Sub-theme: TNE

[49] Anna Armstrong (University of London). *Connecting practitioners: How to cultivate a digital education community with a reading group.*

Abstract. This interactive session shares practice from the University of London Worldwide's Digital Education Reading Group, an initiative designed to foster a community of practice among digital education professionals.

Since its inception in early 2020, the group has developed into a unique forum for colleagues to explore current research and issues in digital education, to reflect on diverse perspectives and build connections across departments. Colleagues from a wide range of roles meet to discuss topics as varied as the ethics of generative AI, international students' digital experience in their home countries, gamification, and short-form video.

In this session, you will have the opportunity to share ideas and explore strategies to develop or enhance similar communities in your own context. By examining practical aspects like topic selection, accessibility of resources, and inclusive participation, you will gain actionable strategies for fostering informal learning networks that support engagement and belonging.

Drawing on feedback, we'll discuss the impact of the reading group, including how it encourages professional growth and collegiality across roles. You will also have the opportunity to reflect on potential challenges and solutions for implementing similar initiatives in your institution, making this session highly applicable and transferable. This interactive approach will provide practical takeaways for fostering a sense of community and shared learning among education professionals.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Community of practice, Professional development, Informal Learning, Peer support, Lifelong learning, Cross-disciplinary collaboration, Digital education community
Sub-theme: Well-being

[52] Mike Bennett (King's College London) and Sam Smidt (King's College London). *Transformative online education in Africa: co-design, contextualisation and capacity building.*

Abstract. The rise of online and blended learning could have a transformative impact on reaching disadvantaged young people across the African continent, increasing access to tertiary education and employment (Munyao, 2023). On the other hand, without addressing the systemic barriers within online education, young people will continue to be hindered from realising their full potential (Kennedy & Laurillard, 2024). It is in this context that the Afe Babalola Centre for Transnational Education at King's College London carried out a major needs assessment in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, as the critical first step in a project to develop transnational education programmes for up to one million young Africans.

This presentation will, for the first time, set out the priorities that have emerged from the needs assessment. It will discuss the findings of an interpretive and thematic analysis of qualitative, semi-structured workshops, involving over 600 participants, comprising young people, employers, community leaders and school teachers. The research approach, grounded in contextualised data collection and participatory methods, ensured a nuanced understanding of local needs, barriers and opportunities.

The insights have the potential to guide universities to rethink their online pedagogies and curriculum to deliver transitionary education. The presenters will share transferable lessons, including innovative strategies for designing equitable, high quality and scalable online learning frameworks. They will argue that it is only through co-design, contextualisation, and capacity building that the power of digital education can be fully realised on the continent. Finally, the presenters will discuss a new teaching and learning programme, set to launch in September 2025. Through a co-design approach, the Centre has begun its journey towards teachers being able to own, develop and localise online learning through a common framework to safeguard equity, quality and efficiency.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Transnational, Africa, Teaching, Learning, Online
Sub-theme: TNE

[55] Ammar Bahadur Singh (Indepedent). *Being, Doing, and Becoming as Competent Learners in Digital Learning Environments: A Cultural-Historical Perspective on Higher Education.*

Abstract. Being, Doing, and Becoming as Competent Learners in Digital Learning Environments: A Cultural-Historical Perspective on Higher Education

Abstract

This study examines the complex processes of being, doing, and becoming competent learners within digital learning environments in higher education. As universities increasingly adopt online and blended learning methodologies, it becomes essential to understand how students navigate, engage with, and develop within these virtual spaces. The research aims to elucidate the dynamics of learner identity formation, engagement in digital learning activities, and the development of competencies vital for success in online educational contexts.

Grounded in cultural-historical theory, primarily informed by Vygotsky's work and its contemporary interpretations, this study conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process influenced by cultural tools and historical contexts. This theoretical framework facilitates an examination of how digital platforms and tools mediate learning experiences and how the historical evolution of educational technologies informs current practices in higher education.

The methodology integrates a comprehensive literature review with an in-depth analysis of online teaching and learning interactions. The literature review synthesizes recent research on digital pedagogy, online learning communities, and the cultivation of digital competencies in higher education. The empirical component consists of an analysis of online learning sessions across various disciplines and higher education institutions. These sessions are analyzed employing thematic analysis, with a focus on patterns of interaction, tool utilization, and the expression of learning competencies.

Findings demonstrate a nuanced interplay between being, doing, and becoming in digital learning environments. 'Being' is characterized by students' digital presence and identity formation within virtual contexts, shaped by platform affordances and peer interactions. 'Doing' encompasses a spectrum of digitally mediated activities, ranging from collaborative projects to individual assignments, underscoring the significance of digital literacy and tool proficiency. 'Becoming' emerges as a transformative process wherein students acquire not only subject-specific knowledge but also critical thinking skills, digital competencies, and a sense of agency in their educational journey.

Key themes identified include:

The significant role of digital tools in mediating learning experiences and shaping learner identities

The importance of social interaction and collaborative knowledge construction in online contexts

The development of self-regulation and metacognitive skills as critical components of digital competence

The challenges and opportunities presented by the asynchronous nature of many digital learning activities

The evolution of teacher-student relationships in virtual environments

These findings have significant implications for digital education within higher education. They highlight the necessity for pedagogical approaches that deliberately cultivate the development of digital competencies alongside subject-specific knowledge. The research indicates that effective digital learning environments should be structured to facilitate not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the comprehensive development of learners' identities and capabilities.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of establishing online spaces that promote meaningful social interaction and collaborative learning. It also underscores the requirement for educators to be proficient in facilitating these processes within digital environments, thus indicating critical implications for teacher training and professional development.

In conclusion, this research enhances our understanding of how students navigate the intricate processes of being, doing, and becoming within digital learning environments. By applying a cultural-historical perspective to this contemporary educational context, the study provides valuable insights for the design and implementation of effective digital learning strategies in higher education. These findings pave the way for future research into the long-term impacts of digital learning on student development and success in an increasingly digital world.

Digital Learning Environments, Cultural-Historical Theory, Learner Competence, Higher Education, Online Pedagogy

Track: Research
Keywords: Digital learning environment, Agency, Higher education, Online pedagogy
Sub-theme: Well-being

[56] Leah Olubunmi Oni (National Open University of Nigeria). *Bridging Educational Gaps Through Technology: National Open University of   Nigeria's Role in Transnational Education.*

Abstract. Transnational education (TNE) has emerged as a pivotal element in widening access to higher education, especially in regions with constrained traditional educational resources. This paper, titled "Bridging Educational Gaps Through Technology: National Open University of Nigeria's Role in Transnational Education," explores the innovative integration of technology by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to enhance cross-border learning. NOUN's digital strategies have set a precedent in creating flexible, accessible education for students across Africa and beyond, exemplifying how technology can transcend geographical and socioeconomic barriers. This study investigates NOUN's e-learning frameworks, online course delivery systems, and digital support networks that empower learners to participate in higher education from remote and under-resourced areas. The research underscores NOUN's capacity to mitigate common challenges such as infrastructure limitations, high costs, and lack of inclusivity, showcasing the university's significant impact on reducing the educational gap between developing and developed regions. Through evidence-informed analysis, this paper demonstrates NOUN's innovative approaches and their measurable impact on learners, supported by data on student outcomes and engagement levels. The findings reveal the transferability of NOUN's strategies, presenting actionable insights for other educational institutions aiming to develop or enhance their own digital TNE programs. This paper not only highlights the successes but also critically examines obstacles such as the digital divide and maintaining quality assurance, offering practical solutions for sustaining effective cross-border education. Ultimately, this research provides a clear and impactful example of how technology-driven TNE can foster inclusive and lifelong learning, positioning NOUN as a model for leveraging innovation to bridge educational gaps globally.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Transnational Education (TNE), Digital Learning Platforms, Educational Accessibility, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Innovation in Higher Education
Sub-theme: TNE

[60] Oscar Mwaanga (University of London ISM programme) and Georgi Ivanov (University of London Worldwide ISM programme). *Title: Humanising AI-Augmented Pedagogy in Higher Education: A Case Study of the PGC ISM Programme.*

Abstract. This paper investigates a human-centred pedagogical approach within the University of London's Postgraduate Certificate in International Sports Management (PGC ISM) programme, amid the growing integration of AI in higher education. Drawing on a comprehensive evaluation of AI integration in UoL's Law programmes, we explore the benefits and challenges of AI in education, focusing on its critical limitations in facilitating complex, relational learning experiences. Although AI chatbots can deliver timely, efficient feedback, students report the technology's limitations in interpreting nuanced queries and providing empathetic support, underscoring the unique role of human educators in fostering meaningful learning.

In response, the PGC ISM programme incorporates an Ubuntu-inspired pedagogy, which emphasises interconnectedness, empathy, and collective development, to address aspects of learning that AI cannot yet support: adaptive human insight, ethical discernment, and socio-emotional guidance essential for inspiring and nurturing learners. This paper presents Ubuntu-based interventions within the PGC ISM programme, providing a rationale for these humanising approaches. The findings advocate for AI as a complementary tool within a pedagogical framework that preserves the essential elements of Ubuntu, ensuring that education remains deeply human at its core even in AI-augmented environments. The results highlight a balanced approach where AI supports scalability, while human educators fulfil the irreplaceable role of imparting holistic, relational learning experiences in higher education.

[61] Sally Parsley (None currently - previously WHO Academy 2021-2024 & LSHTM 2004-2020.).
Getting started with gamification: One learning designer's experience.

Abstract. Gamification is the use of game elements, for example, points, badges, levels or narratives, in other purposeful experiences (Devers & Gurung 2015). It is increasingly been seen as a useful learning approach (Saleem et al. 2021) with benefits for engagement and outcomes in adult learning (e.g. Gentry et al. 2019, van Gaalen et al. 2020).

However, researchers also note gaps in the research into educational gamification, including:

- infrequent use of gamification design frameworks, such as 6D or Octalysis (Khaldi et al, 2013, Mora et al. 2015)

- limited consideration of cultural or organizational influences (Guhl 2017, Khaled 2011)

- weakness of evidence on impact (Gentry et al. 2019, van Gaalen et al. 2020)

This presentation will reflect on a practical experience of integrating gamification elements into the design of online, lifelong learning courses for a new international health institute. The courses were competency-aligned, self-directed and free to access to health professionals from any country.

The talk will review the approach taken, lessons learned and suggest possible ways forward in the three areas highlighted above: integrating quality by design and gamification frameworks, potential of co-production and research informed approaches to improve design for inclusion and suggestions on strategies to assess impact for large numbers of diverse learners.

There will be time for the audience to ask questions and discuss their own experience and expertise on implementing gamification in education.

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Track: Practice
Keywords: digital gamification, international education, health professions, lifelong learning, design frameworks, impact assessment, diversity and inclusion
Sub-theme: Inclusive, TNE

[62] Lyndsey Carmichael (University of Exeter). *Towards Inclusive Research: Reflections on Pilot-Phase Methods with International Distance Learners.*

Abstract. This lightning talk offers some insights gained from a pilot study as part of a larger doctoral study exploring the experiences of international postgraduate students engaged in distance learning with UK universities.

With a committed effort at enhancing inclusivity, the researcher incorporated non-traditional collection methods, including a voice recording tool and only qualitative questions within an online survey. However, the pilot revealed that while intended to give options to participants and support inclusivity, the voice tool was underutilised, indicating potential barriers related to student-identified preferences and potentially technology. Through this experience, the researcher used reflective approaches and made adaptations to ensure accessibility and meaningful engagement, including refining survey language and removing what appeared to be an overwhelming number of options. These reflections emphasise the importance of flexible, culturally and language responsive methodologies in capturing the complex, lived experiences of a diverse, international cohort.

From this lightning talk, the audience will gain insights into the challenges and adaptations encountered when implementing inclusive research methodologies when working with international participants. Additonally, it demonstrates the importance of flexibility in designing research for a global, digitally-connected cohort. As well as contributing to the discourse on methodological practices that empower inclusive, accessible, and adaptive research approaches, aligning with the RIDE 2025 theme of "Empowering and Sustaining Change" within international and transnational education.

Track: Research
Keywords: Inclusive Methodologies, Distance Learning, International Students, Reflective Practice, Adaptive Research Approaches
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive

[65] Leonard Anigbo (Enugu State University of Science and Technology) and Innocent Okwuchukwu (Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani, Enugu). *Harnessing AI and IoT for Experiential Learning in Distance Learning Centres in Nigerian Universities.*

Abstract. Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) has the potential to revolutionize experiential learning in distance learning centres, particularly in Nigerian universities. By enhancing interactivity, personalizing learning experiences, and automating administrative processes, these technologies address key challenges in distance education, such as limited engagement, inadequate infrastructure, and inconsistent learning outcomes. This paper explores the transformative impact of AI and IoT on distance learning, focusing on their applications in content delivery, virtual labs, intelligent tutoring systems, and real-time learner analytics. It highlights case studies from global and local implementations while identifying the unique challenges faced by Nigerian universities, including funding limitations, infrastructural gaps, and policy constraints. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining interviews with educational technology experts, surveys of students and educators, and an analysis of existing AI and IoT frameworks in distance education. The findings reveal that harnessing AI and IoT not only enhances experiential learning but also improves accessibility and equity in education. Aligning with the theme of "Empowering and Sustaining Change," this paper proposes actionable strategies for integrating AI and IoT in Nigerian universities' distance learning centres, including capacity-building, strategic partnerships, and scalable technology adoption models. These insights aim to guide policymakers, educators, and technologists in building sustainable and impactful distance learning ecosystems

Track: Research
Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Experiential Learning, Distance Learning, Distance Learning Centres
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[69] Akinola Michael Aruwaji (Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa), Olubusayo Victor Fakuade (Kampala International University, Kampala, Uganda) and Ola Olaleye Arulogun (Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria). *Inclusivity and Sustainability in Digital and Hybrid Education: A Systematic Review.*

Abstract. Digital education has facilitated the rapid integration of online, blended and hybrid approaches, transforming teaching and learning methodologies in higher education globally. This paper seeks to explore how Digital and Hybrid (D&H) educational practices in higher education can enhance inclusivity, sustain student and educator engagement, promote well-being and advance environmental sustainability? to address this question, the study investigates the impact of inclusivity and sustainability on D&H educational frameworks and pedagogies.

Descriptive and meta-analysis research designs were employed in this study. Key databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), ScienceDirect, PubMed, ProQuest Education Database, and JSTOR were selected due to their interdisciplinary contributions, which significantly enrich educational literature. Data collection for this study involved conducting keyword searches across recent studies published from 2010 to 2024, the process includes screening abstracts, reviewing full texts and performing thematic evaluation to identify key concepts and substantial findings. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework was employed as a sampling technique involving inclusion and exclusion criteria to define the sample size. Moreover, the theoretical framework of this study is grounded on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) theory and Sustainability Pedagogy theory to guide the basis for analysing and interpreting the research question

The conceptualised construct variables are categorised as follows: independent variables include inclusivity, sustainability, pedagogy, and well-being; the dependent variable is hybrid and digital education practices; and the moderating variables encompass technological factors, institutional factors, and demographic factors. Content analysis was used to contextualise the constructs and themes of the research objective, while meta-analysis, employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was conducted to test the hypotheses in this study

The findings of this study reveal that a significant challenge in digital and hybrid education is limited access to technological resources and reliable internet connectivity, especially in rural and low-income regions. The study concluded that enhancing technological infrastructure can enable digital education to reduce travel emissions and paper consumption significantly. Additionally, embedding sustainability education within the curriculum is essential to addressing digital fatigue by promoting balanced screen time and providing mental health support for the well-being of both learners and educators.

Track: Research
Keywords: Digital Education, Inclusivity and Sustainability, PRISMA, PLS-SEM
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive

[73] Jennie Golding (UCL Institute of Education). *Leading online international collaborative doctoral supervision development: challenges and some solutions .*

Abstract. UKCGE offers recognition of experienced doctoral supervisors on the basis of a systematic and scholarly reflective account across ten areas of supervision, together with references from a colleague and from a former doctoral student. That ten-area structure formed the content spine for research design of a series of online collaborative workshops for experienced doctoral supervisors originating in UCL IOE. On the initiative of a south African 'critical friend', that then transferred to a southern African (South Africa - Namibia – Zambia) context, in a UCL-southern African semi-formal collaboration 'SAUSC'. In both cases the 'carrot' for participation was preparation for UKCGE recognition.

The SAUSC leadership, with CODE TRA financial support, then further developed workshops and pedagogical approaches for leadership by southern African academics now UKCGE-accredited, (with background support from the presenter), with the aim of widening participation. They achieved participants from ten sub-Saharan countries and 12 HEIs, needing then to work with different and wider cultural, and more challenging digital technology access, contexts. The development is reported in Golding (2024 a,b). In one of two related research studies we asked, 'How did the online collaborative peer leadership skills and knowledge of these African facilitators develop through this experience? How did they ensure that the curriculum and pedagogical approach remained evidence based, adapted to the context and to participants' needs? How did they develop and maintain engagement and active cognitive engagement? How did they establish and maintain a sense of belonging and ensure the workshops remained inclusive and empowering? And what would they do differently if leading another such set of workshops?

We used audio-recorded researcher peer interviews to probe these issues, then analysed transcriptions of interviews using a grounded approach. In this presentation we outline the findings and their implications for practice, embedding those findings in the leadership literature; we identify key features of collaborative online workshop leadership which seem to vary by culture or context.

We have argued elsewhere (Golding, 2024a) that the underlying model offers sustainable, affordable and transferable approaches to doctoral supervision development, and therefore has significant potential; the focus work also identifies some of the variables and differential processes that might be needed.

Track: Research
Keywords: doctoral supervision, collaborative workshops, supervision recognition, online pedagogy, cognitive engagement, inclusion
Sub-theme: TNE

[75] Dr Ahmet Durgungoz (University of London) and Dr Maylyn Tan (Singapore Institute of Management). *Evaluating AI Literacy Microlearning Activities for Students and Staff in Higher Education: Impact and Framework Development.*

Abstract. The increasing integration of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) technologies in educational settings underlines the need to develop effective AI literacy skills among students and staff. This study addresses the current limitations in understanding how targeted microlearning interventions can enhance student and staff AI literacy.

This study has three aims: (1) to investigate the impact of microlearning activities on AI literacy development, (2) to assess the effectiveness of various AI interaction scenarios, and (3) to construct a framework for designing future AI literacy resources. We employed a mixed-methods approach, utilising a validated survey to conduct pre and post-tests and the interview method to evaluate staff and students' AI literacy, ethical understanding, and practical competencies.

The proposed microlearning activities are based on UNESCO's AI competency framework and include ten activities ranging from "AI as a Study Buddy" and "AI as an Examiner" to "AI Hallucination" to address the cognitive and ethical complexities of AI interaction. The study's evaluation protocol provides a structured method for understanding the unique challenges and learning patterns of distance education students.

As our data collection is ongoing, this paper presents an interim analysis that invites scholarly discussion on the microlearning activity for AI literacy education. The proposed framework represents an initial step towards creating adaptive learning strategies that prepare students and staff to effectively engage with AI technologies for their studies and work-related tasks.

Track: Research
Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI), AI Literacy, AI in Education, Microlearning Interventions
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[77] Shane Robert Dunne (Queen Mary University of London), Enzo Olivieri Cortes (Queen Mary University of London), Pedro Elston (Queen Mary University of London), Lesley Howell (Queen Mary University of London) and Chie Adachi (CODE Fellow and Queen Mary University of London).
Empowering Skill-Based Education in Chemistry and Medicine through Virtual Reality.

Abstract. Virtual Reality (VR) offers transformative opportunities to enhance skill-based education, particularly in disciplines requiring hands-on practical experience, such as chemistry and medicine. By providing immersive, interactive learning environments, VR empowers students to develop practical skills, confidence, and engagement in a safe and controlled setting. It mitigates traditional barriers such as physical inaccessibility, health and safety risks, and ethical constraints, aligning with contemporary educational goals for inclusivity and accessibility.[1]

This project explores the integration of VR into first-year curricula at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) for the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and the Faculty of Physical and Chemical Sciences. In the medical curriculum, VR has been utilized to simulate Observed Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE), offering students the opportunity to rehearse clinical skills in realistic scenarios. Similarly, bespoke laboratory simulations within the chemistry curriculum mimic real-world assessed experiments, enabling students to gain hands-on practice using the Meta Quest 3 VR headsets and Edify VR platform. These interventions align with the educational potential of VR to enhance student engagement by fostering active, constructivist learning, enabling authentic and empathetic experiences, encouraging creativity, and concretely visualising abstract concepts.[2]

Preliminary findings, collected via pre- and post-implementation surveys featuring Likert-scale and open-ended questions, highlight significant improvements in student engagement, perceived satisfaction, and skill acquisition. Thematic and content analyses, which will be finalized in early 2025, will further elucidate the impact of VR on assessment outcomes and long-term educational gains, such as course progression and completion rates.

This presentation will provide insights into designing and implementing VR for skill-based education, with an emphasis on its implications for curriculum development, inclusivity, and future work readiness. Attendees will gain practical strategies for leveraging VR to enhance experiential learning, ensuring students are well-prepared for real-world challenges.

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[85] Jane Secker (City St George's, University of London), Chris Morrison (Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford) and Amanda Wakaruk (University of Alberta). *Tackling Copyright Anxiety to support online learning .*

Abstract. As online and blended learning has increasingly become the norm, this workshop shares findings from a recent research study into 'copyright anxiety' in higher education, undertaken at City St George's University of London, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford and the University of Alberta in Canada. The research surveyed over 500 members of staff in higher education in the UK and Canada to explore whether copyright law and its interpretation 'chills' innovative teaching and research practices.

Our research tested a survey instrument known as the Copyright Anxiety Scale (Wakaruk et al, 2021) and conducted 7 focus groups with 32 staff working in higher education in the UK and Canada. Almost 20 years ago Hobbs et al (2007) reported on the pedagogical costs of "copyright confusion" meaning teaching materials were less effective and there could be the perpetuation of misinformation. Our findings reveal concerns about copyright continue to impact on teaching and learning, research activities and the services that libraries can offer. Almost 60% of UK respondents and 52% of Canadians, reported they worry they do not know enough about copyright and 25% say they have abandoned projects of avoided activities because of copyright issues. We will discuss the impact that copyright has on teaching and learning activities in higher education.

The workshop presenters have been running regular webinars since the pandemic to support the higher education community and try to ensure copyright is not a barrier to online learning. They also co-Chair the Association for Learning Technology's Copyright and Online Learning special interest group and have developed several educational games (Secker and Morrison, 2022) to teach about copyright in a way that addresses some of the anxiety.

In this workshop, they will discuss some of the reasons for copyright anxiety and what institutions and the higher education community can do to build greater levels of understanding about copyright so that it does not unduly restrict online learning. They will also consider the specific challenges that copyright presents to transnational education.

It will be an interactive session where staff can share their own concerns about copyright and we can discuss some possible solutions.

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Track: Practice
Keywords: Copyright, Online Learning, international law, higher education
Sub-theme: TNE

[87] Olivia de Paeztron (King's College London), Ruby Cornish (King's College London), Lindsey Fulker (King's College London), Michael Kay (King's College London) and Rosie Lynch (King's College London). *Leadership in online learning design: lessons from the career of Leonie Sloman.*

Abstract. In this presentation, we aim to honour and celebrate the work of Leonie Sloman, Head of Learning Design at King's Digital, and a driving force behind establishing and sustaining the high-quality approach to online education at King's College London .

The Learning Design team that Leonie built is a key driver of pedagogical quality underpinning King's Digital online programmes, which have enrolled over 8,000 students from 153 countries on wholly-online programmes to date. At the heart of Leonie's approach to learning design was a commitment to evidence-based practice and engagement with research on online learning and pedagogy, which she embedded into the team's practices as King's explored and expanded its provision of online programmes. Leonie developed a comprehensive framework for workshops and design processes that laid a solid foundation for fostering collaboration between the learning design team and academic colleagues, designing inclusive and accessible online education, and promoting both online students' and staff's wellbeing.

Under Leonie's leadership, the team has grown from a small group of six learning designers to a team of 18. Pioneering in the professional services setting, her belief in the value of research-led design has left a strong mark on the department and online education at King's, empowering learning designers with pedagogical theory and sustainable processes to support long-term success.

Leonie passed away in December 2024, and the culture of evidence-based practice, reflective practice-sharing and bridge-building that she established within King's deserves even wider recognition. Colleagues from the learning design team – some old-hands, some newer arrivals – are committed to upholding the ethos that she established, and will share several core principles for designing and evaluating engaging, effective, and efficient online education, as well as providing an opportunity for the broader online education community to celebrate her legacy .

Track: Practice
Keywords: leadership, learning design, online education, organizational development
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive

[88] Nick Fisher (Queen Mary, University of London) and Maryam Malekigorji (Queen Mary University of London). *Digitalisation of small group learning to improve engagement – the student view.*

Abstract. In 2023, Queen Mary Medical School introduced team-based learning (TBL) into selected modules on the undergraduate MBBS programme. TBL is a form of small group learning in large classes, originally delivered in business schools [1] that flips the classroom learning model with an asynchronous pre-learning phased followed by synchronous in-class assessment and group work on real-life scenarios [2]. TBL is currently gaining currency in undergraduate medical education in the UK and abroad, driven by a number of educational benefits including increased student engagement and the facilitation of deeper learning and critical thinking [3].

At the same time, digital technologies are gaining a foothold in undergraduate teaching and assessment [4] providing detailed insight into student participation and outcomes. Having initially launched the TBL pilot utilising a combination of analogue and digital tools including paper based scratch cards, our Medical School deployed LAMS (Learning Activity Management System), a digital platform that supports TBL delivery and assessment. The LAMS platform provides educators with tools to focus teaching in areas of student need, measure levels of engagement and enhance the student experience of the TBL process.

Despite the proliferation of digital technologies in undergraduate medical education, there is limited evidence on the impact of the transition from traditional teaching methods to digital platforms on medical students and how the change can be managed. The aim of this presentation is to explore the question "What is the impact of digitalisation on levels of student engagement in TBL sessions?" Attendees will gain insights into students' perceptions of the transition to a digital TBL platform and how this impacted engagement, the lessons learned by the TBL working group, and the strategies implemented to support students throughout this process.

In this study, we analysed data collected through a survey delivered at two points via a Microsoft Form: the first point was after a TBL session without LAMS and the second after a TBL session incorporating LAMS. The same questions were posed in both surveys, with over 80 students responding to each. The surveys included a mixture of Likert scale and open-ended questions. Analysis revealed positive feedback from students for both approaches; however, key differences emerged in specific areas, including what students liked most about the TBL sessions and suggestions for improvement.

Future work will focus on addressing the key differences identified in student feedback, exploring long-term impacts on learning outcomes, and developing additional strategies to support students in adapting to digital learning environments.

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Track: Practice
Keywords: Digitalisation, Small group learning, Engagement, Students
Sub-theme: Well-being

[89] Nick Fisher (Queen Mary, University of London). *Widening participation in medicine through a blended learning programme.*

Abstract. In 2023, the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at Queen Mary University of London launched a blended learning graduate-entry medical degree, partly funded by NHS England. This project is at the cutting edge of medical education, the first of its kind in the UK. Drivers for the programme include shortages in healthcare staff in the NHS [1] and an NHS commitment to widen access to healthcare education and promote diversity and inclusion [2]. Numbers of medical school places will be expanded yearly [3] and blended learning can increase student numbers from those communities that might have difficulty accessing medical education. In addition, NHS England has identified that blended learning can potentially improve learning outcomes and student engagement and promote the growth of a digitally literate workforce [4].

An initial presentation was made in RIDE 2024 which included the interim results of a CODE evaluation of the blended degree. This session will present a summary of the final findings of the evaluation. It will include student feedback on their experiences gained from questionnaires and focus groups, as well as lessons that have been learned by the Learning Innovation Team at QMUL, who designed the learning content.

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Track: Practice
Keywords: Blended learning, Inclusive education, Undergraduate medicine, Widening participation
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[91] Inés Gil-Jaurena (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)), Sergio López-Ronda (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)) and Aitor López-González (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)). *Experience with renewable assignments in a distance education Master's course.*

Abstract. We present an experience with renewable assignments in a distance education course in a teacher training Master's degree programme. Renewable assignments –unlike disposable assignments– are 'assignments which both support an individual student's learning and result in new or improved open educational resources that provide a lasting benefit to the broader community of learners' (Wiley & Hilton, 2018). This is aligned with open educational practices (OEP) that include, among others, active participation and production of knowledge by students (Paskevicius, 2017).

In 2024-2025, in an online Master course titled 'Socio-community intervention: rationale and contexts' and taught in the first semester (October-February) with 47 students enrolled, we have converted our traditional or disposable assignments into renewable assignments. Specifically, we have promoted the creation of a collaborative glossary –using the 'glossary' resource in the Moodle platform– and a collaborative map about community development projects –using Google Maps–. Both were made publicly available in the online course. To encourage participation, contributions to these collaborative activities are given a small percentage of the final score.

Our purposes are to promote students' engagement with the course content, to increase the social presence in the course –as understood in the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison, 2009)–, and to facilitate students' agency in the learning process as content producers.

In February 2025 we will evaluate these aspects by means of a questionnaire, and we will assess students' production and contributions to the collaborative glossary and map. This information will help us to analyse the pros and cons of this innovative practice and refine its future implementation and sustainability, in this or other courses we teach.

The audience will learn about the concept and implications of renewable assignments as an innovative open educational practice from the designer's perspective, as well as the students' perceptions. Questions and open discussion are welcome.

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Track: Practice
Keywords: renewable assignments, engagement, collaborative learning, open educational practice, distance education
Sub-theme: Well-being

[94] Daksha Patel (Uol CODE Fellow), Larisa Grice (UoLW Senior learning designer), Deenadayalan Amirthaa (Uol Student fellow) and Shaheer Imran (Uol Student Fellow). *Evaluating Peer review practices in online degree modules and MOOCs .*

Abstract. Student peer review has gained value across in person teaching programmes, where the process of observation and collaboration is navigated seamlessly. The benefits listed include enhanced high order thinking, learning efficiency, critical and reflective thinking, development of social and collaborative skills. The embedded active learning strengths of peer exchange in an assignment is largely linked with the process of interchange whilst giving and receiving feedback.

In an online distance learning environment, despite the risks of disconnection from learning content, learning environment and student isolation, peer review is implemented for its interactive learning potential. Across University of London online modules and MOOCs, peer review is being applied widely and aimed at facilitating several aspects of engagement which have been outlined in the online engagement framework for higher education developed by Redmond et al. (2018). Our project focus was to describe the range of activities and practices, appraise the models of delivery, patterns of participation and assess it overall for the perceived value and challenges to student learning and engagements such as social, emotional, cognitive, and collaborative

The methodology used in the evaluation included:

• Identifying a range of modules and MOOCs from the UoL portfolio, where peer review is being used, including summative assignments and formative learning activities.

• Developing and implementing a suitable evaluation tool based on the community of inquiry. Using this theoretical framework approach, we assessed the triangulation between the learning design, cognitive experiences of learners to sustain reflection and their social engagement in communications and collaboration of through the peer review learning activity.

• Alongside these we documented the technological confines of learning platforms to fully support peer review activities.

In our RIDE presentation, we intend to discuss the strengths and limitations of our evaluation approach and the preliminary findings of the educational experiences, challenges and models of peer review activity delivery and feedback from 8 courses, including MOOCs using AI, as a "peer review alternative" to provide timely feedback on summative submission

Provision of effective peer review in an online distance learning environment is closely balanced with constructing clear navigational pathways, managing expectations, timelines, providing unambiguous instructions for reviewing submissions (rubrics) and evaluation criteria. Courses across UoL offer a range of flexibilities and opportunities for practice and receiving automated feedback, but the acceptance and engagement with peer review interactions remains limited by learners. Our intention in this presentation is to initiate critical appraisal and dialogue about peer review designs as a suitable online learning approach in distance learning and extend the discussion about the role of AI in peer review.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Peer Review, Feedback, Rubric evaluations, Ai feedback
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[96] Aneeza Pervez (University of Nottingham) and Alice Doherty (University of Nottingham). *Belonging at Distance: Postgraduate Psychology Distance Learning Students' Experiences of Success, Support, and Community .*

Abstract. The rapid expansion of distance learning has reshaped higher education, presenting unique opportunities and challenges for postgraduate students. We know that student belonging plays an important part in student success (e.g. Blake et al. 2022), but what do these concepts mean to distance learning students seeking flexibility to balance their desire for career progression and personal growth, with their work, and life commitments?

Our Distance Learning MSc Psychology Conversion (by DL) at the University of Nottingham is a relatively new (<5 years old) PSRB-accredited programme. In this lightning talk, we will discuss the steps that we have taken to engage the student's voices and explore these questions with students using data we collected via semi-structured interviews (number of participants?) and thematic analysis to explore our student motivations, strategies for success, the challenges they faced, and the role of support systems in fostering a sense of community.

We will describe what we have learned about how these factors influence students' academic journeys and their definitions of success and explore the tensions and solutions that students report experiencing as they navigate their distance learning journey. In the discussion,n we will explore the implications of these findings and how they are helping to build inclusion and belonging in our context. We will encourage other attendees to reflect on how our findings apply in theirs.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Student belonging, Distance learning, Academic success, Educational inclusion
Sub-theme: Well-being

[98] Alison Sturrock (UCL medical school), Lisa Gould (UCL medical school), Megan Vaughan (UCL medical school), Kerry Calvo (UCL medical school) and Shane Carmichael (UCL medical school). *Fostering Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration in Masters-Level Health Professional Education.*

Abstract. This workshop aims to underscore the significance of multi-disciplinary collaboration in health professional education, aligning with the NHS Long Term Plan and the Darzi Report 2024(1). It will explore inclusive educational strategies, diversified assessments, and enhanced online accessibility, all within a multi-disciplinary context(2,3).

Objectives of workshop:

1. Highlight the importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration in health professional education and collate

examples of "What works Well".

2. As a group consider how we can enhance online accessibility for diverse health professional students.

3. Share best practise for our teams methods for diversifying authentic assessments in a multi-disciplinary

context, and discuss.

Agenda:

1. Introduction

Welcome and outline workshop objectives.

Share student feedback on the multi-disciplinary nature of the course, linking to UCL Medical School's

strategic goal of building capacity and diversity in postgraduate education.

Use Mentimeter to gather participants' views on multi-disciplinary work in higher education.

2. Enhancing Online Accessibility

Demonstration of tools and techniques for making online content accessible to diverse health professionals.

Discussion on how technological advancements might shape future online provisions.

3. Diversifying Authentic Assessments

Presentation on the importance of authentic assessments and their diversification for multi-disciplinary groups.

Activity: Participants brainstorm and share ideas for authentic assessments in pairs.

4. Q&A and Wrap-Up

Open floor for questions and answers.

Feedback session where initial thoughts and new knowledge generated during the workshop are presented.

Significance of workshop:

This workshop is crucial as it addresses the growing need for collaborative practice in healthcare, preparing students for real-world challenges. By fostering multi-disciplinary collaboration, we enhance the quality of healthcare education and practice, ultimately benefiting patient care and outcomes

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2024)

Track: Practice
Keywords: inclusive educational strategies, diversified assessments, enhanced online accessibility, multi-disciplinary context
Sub-theme: Well-being, Inclusive

[99] Tabetha Newman (Timmus Research Limited), Elizabeth Newall (Jisc) and Sarah Knight (Jisc). *International students' digital experiences and expectations: converting lived experiences to sector advice.*

Abstract. Jisc is currently in its third year of studying the digital experiences of international and transnational education (TNE) students studying with UK higher education institutions. This research involves Jisc working in partnership with 25+ UK higher education providers, our shared aim being to support the provision of equitable learning experiences and identify where additional understanding and support benefits both international students and the staff who teach and support them.

To date, our research has shown that challenges faced by international students do not only relate to access to technology and infrastructure, but also to the digital and cultural expectations that UK HE providers place on the use of digital in teaching and learning.

The first phase of our research reviewed issues and perspectives from UK HE providers, policymakers, and both academic and grey literature. Phase two focused on direct consultation with international students studying at 14 UK HE providers. We collected survey data from 2,067 international students and focus group data from 150 students via ten on-site visits. In the subsequent report we identified and described the cultural and digital shocks experienced by many international students who travel to study in the UK, and provided recommendations on how HE providers could better manage expectations and improve the student experience.

A key finding from the second report was that digital experiences - often shaped by home country civil digital infrastructure - greatly influences international students' expectations regarding how and when digital technologies will be used both during their learning and in wider living. Between-country differences can create issues and anxiety when students travel to the UK to study. These findings were published in a briefing paper and subsequent journal article that focused on profiling four countries: China, India, Pakistan, and Nigeria. This was developed in collaboration with the Portulans Institute and Saïd Business School (University of Oxford) and brought together our student voice data with their country-level Network Readiness Index (NRI) data.

To date we have also published a guide on how to facilitate holistic conversations with international students, a checklist for providing an equitable and inclusive digital experience, and a summary of examples of improved practice by universities in response to our research findings.

In 2024/25 we moved our research focus to transnational education and are currently working with 20+ providers to better understand the digital experiences of TNE students and the staff who teach and support them. Students are based in 10+ countries including China, Singapore, Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka. Following the success of our previous methodology, we are repeating our use of carefully designed and anonymous online surveys in parallel with running focus groups (the latter often held remotely).

This presentation will summarise findings to date, including recommendations for how UK higher education providers can better understand international and TNE students' digital expectations and improve their digital experiences in the context of pre-arrival, onboarding, on-course learning and wider cultural understanding and integration. Recommendations are relevant to the contexts of fully online, distance, blended, hybrid and hyflex provision.

During the presentation we will provide examples of how this research has empowered providers to change practice to improve international students' digital experience. We will also share some of the findings from the current TNE research, due to be completed in 2025. We will end with prompts that generate discussion around key findings and issues we have identified that seek solutions.

Links to key references:

All reports, briefing papers and podcasts available from Jisc ISDX research page: https://www.jisc.ac.uk/innovation/projects/researching-international-students-digital-experience

Differences not deficits: civil digital infrastructure impact on international students' experience. Newman T, Gulliver M, Newall E, Knight S, Escalona Reynoso R, Antal S, Chaduneli, M (in press) Proceedings of the Association for Learning Technology Annual Conference in Manchester, UK

Track: Research
Keywords: international, transnational, digital experience, digital shock, digital ecologies
Sub-theme: TNE

[101] Folashade Afolabi (Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos) and Femi Olajuyigbe (Adeyemi University of Education). *Empowering and Sustaining Higher Education Through Open and Distance Learning for Sustainable Development Goals: A Needs-Based Skills Approach.*

Abstract. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relies on inclusive and transformative education systems that equip learners with the necessary skills to address global challenges. Open, Distance, and Flexible eLearning (ODFeL) has emerged as a reliable mode of education for democratizing higher education and promoting skills development, particularly in vulnerable communities. As interest in ODFeL has increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, several critical questions have arisen: How does Open, Distance Flexible eLearning (ODFeL) contribute to expanding access to higher education for sustainable development? What essential needs-based skills are required to achieve the SDGs, and how can these be identified? How effective are current ODFeL programmes in fostering these skills among learners? What challenges do learners and educators face in implementing a needs-based skills approach in ODFeL? What frameworks or strategies can institutions adopt to effectively integrate SDG-aligned skills into ODL programs? This study explored these aspects and projected a realistic future for realizing the objectives of the SDGs. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 800 ODFeL learners and 200 educators across four prominent dual mode institutions in Nigeria which were selected using purposively sampling technique.

A Needs-Based Approach Questionnaire for Learners (ANBAQL) and A Needs-Based Approach Questionnaire for facilitators (ANBAQF) with reliability coefficient of 0.88 and 0.79 respectively using Cronbach Alpha were used to collect quantitative data

From the analysis, the result revealed that 84% of learners identified access to needs-based skills training as critical to their academic and professional growth. Of these learners, 72% reported that ODFeL programmes had improved their employability through the acquisition of technical, digital, and leadership skills relevant to their local economies. Additionally, completion rates were significantly higher 87% among learners enrolled in skill-specific courses compared to 65% for those in other courses. Facilitators also emphasized the importance of contextualized curricula, with 68% noting the need for more industry-driven content.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Approximately 43% of learners reported limited access to digital tools and internet connectivity as barriers that hindered their full engagement with ODFeL programmes. However, institutions that integrated blended learning approaches and community-based support systems saw a 30% reduction in dropout rates.

The study concluded with a framework for incorporating a needs-based skills approach into ODFeL curricula, highlighting the importance of partnerships with industries, policymakers, and local communities. This framework aims to ensure that ODFeL not only broadens access to higher education but also equips learners with the skills necessary to contribute to sustainable development. By addressing skill gaps and promoting equity, ODFeL can play a transformative role in empowering individuals and sustaining education systems that align with the goals of the SDGs.

Track: Research
Keywords: Needs-Based Skills Approach, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Open Distance and Flexible eLearning (ODFeL), Higher Education, Learners, Facilitators, Dual Mode Institutions, Nigeria
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[104] Folashade Afolabi (Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos). *Empowering and Sustaining Change in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) through Engagement, Well-being, and Belonging.*

Abstract. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems have gained prominence for their ability to provide flexible and inclusive education. However, challenges such as student disengagement, isolation, and burnout remain critical barriers to effective learning and sustained success in ODL environments. This workshop aims to address these issues by focusing on the interplay between engagement, well-being, and a sense of belonging. Participants will be designing a well-being intervention for ODL by equipping participants with actionable strategies and fostering a collaborative environment. This workshop will contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable ODL ecosystem, develop a framework for institutionalizing engagement, well-being, and belonging, design metric tools for impact and develop an action plan for sustained change. The workshop will employ a mix of interactive group activities and discussions, case study analyses, and questions and answer sessions.

Expected Outcomes: By the end of the workshop, participants will:

• Gain insights into effective engagement, well-being, and belonging strategies.

• Develop practical skills for implementing these strategies in ODL settings.

• Understand the role of internationalization and transnational education in empowering ODL.

• Build networks with peers and experts in the field.

• Take away an action plan tailored to their specific ODL context.

Workshop Questions:

1. Engagement:

• What are the most effective strategies for increasing student and faculty engagement in ODL?

• How can technology be leveraged to create more interactive and participatory learning environments?

2. Well-being:

• What unique well-being challenges do ODL learners and educators face, and how can these be addressed?

• How can institutions implement sustainable well-being practices for all stakeholders in ODL?

3. Belonging:

• What role does a sense of belonging play in the success of ODL learners?

• What are practical ways to build and maintain a sense of community in virtual education spaces?

4. Internationalization:

• How can internationalization enhance the quality and reach of ODL programs?

• What are the key challenges in establishing transnational education partnerships for ODL?

5. Sustainability:

• What frameworks can institutions adopt to ensure sustained engagement, well-being, and belonging in ODL?

• How can international collaborations contribute to the long-term success of ODL initiatives?

Evaluation: Participants will complete a pre- and post-workshop survey to assess changes in knowledge and confidence levels. Follow-up feedback will be collected to evaluate the implementation of action plans.

Keywords: Open and distance learning, Engagement, well-being, transnational,   internalization

Track: Practice
Keywords: Open and distance learning, Engagement, well-being, transnational, internalization
Sub-theme: Well-being, TNE

[105] Xie Jun (Open University of China), Liu Xingguo (Open University of China) and Palitha Edirisingha (University of Leicester). *Generative AI-Supported Legal Education: a case study at the Open University of China.*

Abstract. Generative AI technologies (GenAI) have been making significant inroads into Education arguably since the release of ChatGPT by Open AI in late 2022. Researchers and practitioners have shown that integration of these tool in legal education has significant potential benefits for both students and teachers.

Over the past two semesters, we have conducted pilot study at the Open University of China using AI to provide detailed feedback on legal case analysis assignments using a structured evaluation framework. Basically the implementation of case analysis is consistent with daily operations. Teachers release tasks to students through the learning platform, and students complete assignments by applying the knowledge they have learned. The difference lies in that teachers cooperate with technicians to provide the requirements and standards for case analysis to artificial intelligence through prompts, and then the artificial intelligence gives targeted feedback on students' assignments. Given that local artificial intelligence systems have a richer accumulation of content regarding Chinese legislation, the project has adopted the local artificial intelligence system Qwen(Alibaba Cloud's Advanced Language Model). Over 600 students participated in this experimental learning activity during the two semesters.

Our results have shown that, with the use of well-defined criteria for evaluating case analysis submitted by students to guide the Gen AI to provide feedback, AI can reliably augment complex teaching support. By using a four-part structure of evaluating the quality of case analyses — core legal issues, applicable legal rules, reasoning process, and conclusions—Gen AI was able to evaluate the logical coherence and adherence to legal standards. The system maintained high consistency and objectivity in scoring, consistently applying the same rigorous criteria for all assessments. This not only ensured fairness but also provided students with clear learning expectations and goals.

In conclusion, Gen AI provides opportunities to improve legal education. By using AI's consistency and reliability in providing feedback on students assignments such as case analyses, it's possible to explore new ways to create personalized and participatory learning experiences. This approach not only prepares students for the modern legal landscape but also fosters continuous improvement and adaptability, equipping them with the skills needed for successful careers in law.

Track: Practice
Keywords: AI-Supported Legal Education, Case Analysis Feedback, Intelligent Learning Scenarios
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[109] Adetola Akanbiemu (National Open University of Nigeria). *Enhancing Digital Literacy and Accessibility for Inclusive Learning in Distance Education: A case of National Open University of Nigeria.*

Abstract. Abstract

In a rapidly advancing digital landscape, digital literacy is essential for ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in distance education. This study investigates the level of digital literacy among students at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and examines strategies to enhance their digital competencies to support inclusive learning in a technology-driven world. The study also focuses on barriers to accessibility and urban-rural disparities in digital learning. It is guided by research questions on digital literacy needs, perceived barriers, and strategies for inclusivity. Using a quantitative research design, a structured questionnaire from established frameworks like UNESCO's digital competencies was administered to a representative sample of NOUN students to assess their proficiency in digital skills, access to technology, and perceived barriers to effective online learning. Validation involved expert reviews and pilot testing with students to ensure reliability and cultural relevance. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to identify key factors affecting digital literacy and accessibility. Results reveal that while a substantial proportion of students have basic digital skills, there are notable gaps in advanced competencies, which limit their ability to fully engage in NOUN's digital learning environment. Additionally, findings highlight significant disparities in access to digital resources between urban and rural students, impacting overall inclusivity. The study suggests that targeted digital literacy programs and improved access to technological resources are essential to bridge these gaps. Recommendations include implementing tailored digital skills training, increasing access to digital tools, and integrating digital literacy into the curriculum to prepare NOUN students for equitable and inclusive participation in distance education.

Track: Research
Keywords: Accessibility, Digital Literacy, Inclusive Learning, Distance Education, National Open University of Nigeria
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[110] Busra Jaunoo (busra.jaunoo@careers.lon.ac.uk). *Using multimedia eLearning design to engage TNE learners.*

Abstract. During this presentation I will outline how interactive multimedia eLearning design can be used to engage our transnational education learners. To demonstrate this, I will explore the role of interactive multimedia in the Moodle areas of a Higher Education Careers Service and how this approach is impacting on student engagement in our transnational and completely digital context.

At the University of London Careers Service, we adopted a blended learning approach offering our students a combination of live webinars and events with asynchronous self-paced resources to guide them in their professional development.

Most of our online asynchronous learning materials uses multimedia in order to reach and suit the needs of our global, distance and flexible cohort of students. In fact, our students are based around the world, studying at different moments of their professional life and are enrolled in a range of degree courses that spans from Organizational Psychology to Law, from Economics to Tropical Medicine. In order to adapt to the busy lives and limited time of our students, our material is organised into segments using multiple formats such as audio podcast excerpt, short video content, interactive presentation, text and graphics.

The most recent project to which we have applied this multimedia learning approach is the Global Employability Skills Micro-Module, an e-learning module that can be completed in 6-12 hours with self-paced content and inputs for self-assessment and reflective activities. Since its launch in April 2024 the GESMM has had a significant impact with over 21,600 student views and 11,000 student posts (April - December 2024).

The multimedia format based on a mixture of interactive content, visual and audio assets enabled us to:

- Capture the attention of the students through visual design.

- Keep our learners engaged throughout the course using real work-scenario testimonials in video and graphic format which bring the content to life.

- Reduce cognitive load by segmenting the content into multiples interactive windows rather than presenting it in an exclusively textual format which can lead to a passive, information-heavy and far from real-life application.

- Showcase real examples of Global Employability Skills, our learning outcome, sourced from the work experience of our network of employers, graduates and students.

The multimedia activity that we have identified as able to deliver our learning gain is the Image Hotspot H5P, a ready to use JavaScript interactive format that can be integrated in Moodle.

This overall approach was very successful as highlighted by the evaluation data showing that 93% of our learners found the digital resources and activities engaging. This suggests that a similar approach would be effective for a range of teaching and learning contexts.

During the session, I will showcase an example of H5P in order to:

- Analyse the reasons why we have opted for it to convey our learning content.

- Show how it answers scientifically proven learning design principles (Multimedia Theory of Learning, Mayer, 2001).

- Illustrate how we have made the resource easy to digest and accessible

- Explain how it creates engagement amongst our global community of digital learners.

I am open to suggestions for further improvements and to understand which similar solutions there are in the learning design landscape. I also welcome a discussion on how others could use or may have used multimedia for their e-learning content.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Learning design, Careers and Employability, Visual design, Interactivity, Usability, Moodle and H5P
Sub-theme: Well-being, TNE

[116] Julie Bourguignon (University of Oxford). *Improving accessibility of online courses at scale: where do I start?*

Abstract. This presentation will describe how a team approached what seemed like an impossible task of discovering and addressing accessibility issues in our historical portfolio of 100+ online courses, and how this journey helped them develop our new, more inclusive approach. Improving accessibility is not just a technical and operational concern, it pervades every aspect of the learning experience. The following questions will be explored: Where do you start? How do you identify what needs to be fixed? How do you empower the team, and sustain change in practice? How do you make it happen without any additional resources? We will share examples and practical tips of our approach, reflect on the challenges we faced along the way and the lessons learnt.

Track: Practice
Keywords: accessibility, inclusivity, online learning, digital pedagogy
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[117] Tim Hall (Online Education, University of London Worldwide) and Jonathon Thomas (Online Education, University of London Worldwide). *How can microcredentials support inclusive and global education?*

Abstract. There's much discussion about how Microcredentials are reshaping higher education by offering flexible, targeted, and accessible learning opportunities to non-traditional learners, breaking down barriers, fostering collaboration, and creating pathways to formal qualifications.

Showcasing the University of London's Microcredentials pilot initiative, we will discuss how these short courses equip learners with globally relevant skills aligned with industry demands, enhance employability, and support lifelong learning.

We invite participants to explore key questions:

How can the offer of microcredentials engage local industries and global organisations to create meaningful partnerships?

What policies or frameworks can higher education institutions adopt to make microcredentials more affordable and accessible globally?

How can institutions build trust and credibility for microcredentials, ensuring they are seen as robust alternatives or complements to traditional qualifications?

In what ways can these initiatives contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), particularly those focused on quality education, reduced inequalities, and decent work?

How can learning and development teams design and deploy microcredentials quickly while maintaining quality?

How can microcredentials align with national and international frameworks for credit transfer and recognition?

This talk aims to spark a dynamic and forward-thinking discussion amongst attendees.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Microcredentials, Inclusive, Lifelong, Employability, Pathway, Partnerships, SDGs, Global, Interdisciplinary
Sub-theme: Inclusive, TNE

[119] Jasmin Kroll (King's College London), Paula Alves (King's College London) and Mark Kennedy (King's College London). *A Mixed-Methods Study on Sense of Community in Online Learners .*

Abstract. A strong sense of community is a critical predictor of engagement, retention, and satisfaction in educational settings, yet its role in online postgraduate programmes remains underexplored. While online education has expanded rapidly, much of the existing research focuses on undergraduate learners, neglecting the unique challenges faced by diverse postgraduate cohorts. Additionally, frameworks often overlook the complexities of fostering community in programmes with sociodemographically and culturally heterogeneous student populations.

This mixed-methods study investigates a sense of community among students in two online MSc programmes: the Psychology & Neuroscience of Mental Health MSc (PNoMH) and the Applied Neuroscience MSc, encompassing approximately 2,700 students. It seeks to identify barriers to community development and effective strategies for fostering inclusivity and engagement in these settings. Emerging qualitative themes utilising (N = 30), included motivations for online learning, the significance of interpersonal connections, barriers in connectedness and the influence of instructional practices. The second stage will commence in the new year and will use quantitative measures to complement the qualitative themes to examine clustering of key factors such as motivation and geographical location and their role in the students perception of a sense of community.

Qualitative findings stress the importance of interactive activities, culturally responsive teaching, and personalised feedback in enhancing the sense of community. This research contributes to the innovation in digital education by addressing the intersection of diversity, postgraduate learning, and community building, offering actionable insights for inclusive course design and policy development.

Track: Research
Keywords: postgraduate, online learners, sense of community
Sub-theme: Well-being

[122] Rachel Bancroft (Nottingham Trent University), Rachel Challen (Nottingham Trent University), Rosemary Pearce (Nottingham Trent University) and Bethany Witham (Nottingham Trent University). *What does "digitally confident" look like?*

Abstract. Using a mapping activity and breakout discussion, this workshop will initiate discussion and reflection on what digital confidence looks like, how this differs from digital competence, and whether failing to address digital confidence might become a barrier to inclusion for some groups of students when engaging with learning activities.

Digital confidence has been a concept increasingly discussed across Further and Higher Education in the past decade (Bancroft, R., Challen, R. and Pearce, R., 2024), but there is so far little in the way of a shared understanding of what it is or how it operates alongside related concepts such as digital competence, capabilities, or literacies. We invite attendees of RIDE to come together and puzzle out what it means to us in our respective practice contexts, and explore the idea that explicitly building digital confidence could be key to ensuring all staff and students feel empowered when facing uncertainties in the technological and educational landscape.

Bancroft, R., Challen, R. and Pearce, R. (2024) "Searching for a shared understanding of digital confidence in a tertiary context: a scoping review", Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education, (30). doi: 10.47408/jldhe.vi30.1061.

[123] Jenny Duckworth (The Open University), Jennie Bellamy (The Open University) and Harriet Marshall (The Open University). *Does sharing slides in advance of online learning events impact student attendance?* .

Abstract. Participating in online learning events is of key importance to distance learners and provides an opportunity for interaction between students and with their tutors, thus reducing isolation. Access to slides in advance of online learning events is thought to benefit many students, including those with disabilities, mental health challenges and English as a second language. Universal design principles (e.g. Burgstahler & Cory, 2008) suggest that this practice would benefit all students, not least as some will have undeclared needs.

Prior to our project, guidance for OU tutors delivering the learning events was inconsistent or lacking in terms of how and when slides should be shared. However, not all tutors are keen or willing to share slides in advance, for example because they perceive that it might lead to lower attendance at the live event. Furthermore, the literature gives a mixed picture regarding whether accessing slides in advance impacts students' attendance of learning events, with both positive (e.g., Babb & Ross, 2009) and negative (e.g., Léon & García-Martínez, 2021) effects reported.

In this presentation we give an overview of our scholarship project that aimed to:

- Establish existing slide sharing practice amongst tutors

- Identify the perceived benefits of and barriers to sharing and accessing slides in advance of learning events by tutors and students

- Inform and develop recommendations on good practice in slide sharing.

We will outline our approach, which included surveys of approximately 2000 students and 100 tutors, and a focus group discussion with members of the Student Support Team and present our key findings. These will highlight the benefits of and barriers to advance slide sharing including how students use slides accessed in advance and how this might impact attendance at learning events. We will also discuss the impact our findings have had to date at School and Faculty level. We will conclude by considering the implications and would welcome the opportunity to discuss how to encourage students to engage in live learning events whilst ensuring they are accessible as possible with colleagues from other online and distance education providers.

Babb, K.A. and Ross, C. (2009) 'The timing of online lecture slide availability and its effects on attendance, participation and exam performance', Computers and Education, 52, 868-881.

Burgstahler, S. and Cory R.C. (eds.), (2008) Universal design in higher education: from principles to practice, Cambridge MA, Harvard Education Press.

Léon, S.P. & García-Martínez, I. (2021) 'Impact of the provision of PowerPoint slides on learning', Computers and Education, 173, 104283.

Track: Practice
Keywords: online learning event, slide availability, accessibility, inclusion
Sub-theme: Inclusive

[126] Alberto Asquer (SOAS University of London). *Exploring Policy Problem Spaces through Chatbot-Mediated Interviews: Analyzing Student Interactions with Simulated Stakeholders.*

Abstract. This study investigates how students explore and conceptualize public policy problems through interviews conducted with chatbots that impersonate stakeholders. An issue with the definition of public policy problems is gathering and integrating views from multiple stakeholders. Policy analysts should master data collection techniques, like interviews and focus groups, and develop the skills to understand and mediate between conflicting interests and perspectives. Case studies are often employed as teaching methods to make students learn how views from multiple stakeholders can be integrated, but they do not stimulate data collection skills because all relevant information is already embedded in the case narrative. Passive acquisition of information from case study text also limits student engagement.

Powered by the contemporary advances in Large Language Model (LLM)-based generative AI, chatbots open up the possibility to accurately simulate real-world characters. This study used customized ChatGPT-based chatbots to impersonate two stakeholders in a fictional public policy problem scenario assigned to a class of 25 MSc students. Following principles of synthetic experiential learning (Kolb 2014, Hébert 2015), the students were required to explore the problem space (namely, overtourism in Greece) via interviews with the two simulated stakeholders (namely, a local resident and a local tourism business owner). Transcripts from the interviews (i.e., chat logs) have been analyzed via Python-assisted thematic and frame analysis. The results provide indications of how students explore the problem space, synthesize the perspectives from different stakeholders, and ultimately construct the definition of a policy problem.

The study sheds some light onto the cognitive and communicative processes students use to frame policy issues, as well as how the simulated interaction influences their approach to problem-solving. Findings also suggest that chatbot-mediated interviews provide novel platform for students to practice exploring problem spaces and can be a valuable tool for synthetic experiential learning in educational settings. Last, limitations of the approach and implications on the use of LLMs in education are discussed.

References

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Hébert, C. (2015). Knowing and/or experiencing: A critical examination of the reflective models of John Dewey and Donald Schön. Reflective Practice, 16(3), 361-371.

Track: Research
Keywords: Synthetic Experiential Learning, Chatbot-Mediated Interviews, Policy Problem Definition, Stakeholder Perspectives, Large Language Models (LLMs)
Sub-theme: Well-being

[129] Jo Elliott (Queen Mary University of London), Usman Naeem (Queen Mary University of London), Nora Lyn Hoffman (Queen Mary University of London) and Amina Bouhedda (Queen Mary University of London). *Student perspectives on engagement and using learning analytics to guide learning behaviours.*

Abstract. Student engagement is positively correlated with achievement and study success (Lei, Cui and Zhou, 2018). Engagement is multi-faceted, incorporating cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects, not all of which are measurable (Kahu, 2013). Engagement is also influenced by a range of factors seemingly external to a student's learning experience, including time poverty, work and caring commitments and the cost of living (Kahu, 2013). Universities and teaching staff increasingly employ learning analytics to assess student engagement and attempt to identify students who may be in need of intervention and support (Caspari-Sadeghi, 2022).

[University]'s policy on the use of learning analytics positions their use as a key avenue for the tailored provision of student support. It references the importance of transparency and student access to their learning analytics to empower them to make informed decisions about their learning and study behaviours. Students were consulted throughout the development of the policy. However, the choice of suitable engagement markers, thresholds, and corresponding communications with students has been entrusted to schools and course teams. We believe that understanding students' perceptions of engagement and associated behaviours, motivators, barriers and risk factors would help inform how schools and teaching teams select, communicate about and use learning analytics to support student learning.

This project, a collaboration between staff (authors 1 and 2) and students (authors 3 and 4), was designed to investigate student perceptions of and perspectives on engagement and learning analytics, and their preferences for designing a student-facing learning analytics dashboard. In this presentation, we will present findings from the first stage of the project, a series of focus groups exploring student perceptions of engagement and the factors which might reflect, facilitate or hinder engagement with learning. We will also discuss the importance of tailoring approaches to different programmes and student cohorts, including online learners. Finally, we will share how the focus group findings will inform our co-creation of guidance for both staff and students on the use of learning analytics.

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Track: Practice
Keywords: student engagement, learning analytics, student voice, co-creation
Sub-theme: Well-being

[136] Jude Dunkwu (CODE Fellow) and Luis Pereira (City St George's, University fo London / CODE Fellow). *Lessons learned from an evaluation of an international online programme.*

Abstract. This proposal reflects on lessons learned from the evaluation of an international online programme. During the 2023/24 academic year we were tasked to look at the impact of an initiative, a project aimed to enhance student satisfaction, retention, and engagement in a global online learning context. The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating literature review, data analysis from virtual learning environments, and student feedback through focus groups.

Key insights revealed the value of online tutor support in fostering flexibility, personalised interaction, and academic preparedness. Positive outcomes included improved pass rates and grades, especially among resitting students and those who attended multiple tutorials. The evaluation highlighted specific challenges, such as resource allocation and the need for scalable approaches to accommodate diverse international learners. The project benefited from the support of the programme leaders who were very keen on the evaluation and provided access to all the materials.

In this session we will also reflect about the applicability of this model to other programmes. Furthermore, the findings can be used for similar programme enhancements and strategies to better support global online learners, contributing to the evolving discourse on international distance education.

Track: Research
Keywords: International distance education, Evaluation, Online tutor
Sub-theme: TNE

[139] Natalie Strange (Staff). *Empowering and Sustaining Change: A Whole-University Approach to Student Wellbeing at the University of London.*

Abstract. Cultural attitudes towards mental health and wellbeing vary significantly across the globe, creating unique challenges for international HE providers in delivering accessible and effective support. At the University of London, we address these challenges through a whole-university approach that integrates prevention, early intervention, and engagement strategies tailored to a diverse, globally-distributed student population.

This presentation will explore UOL's evidence-based, three-fold approach to fostering wellbeing and belonging:

1. Creating a Culture of Care:

We empower staff to act as compassionate and effective responders by providing training in mental health awareness, de-escalation, and proactive signposting. Through initiatives like staff wellbeing networks, inclusive celebrations such as World Wellbeing Week, and a focus on empathy, we embed a culture of care that benefits both students and staff. Evidence of this approach's impact includes increased student referrals, positive staff feedback, and improved student satisfaction with wellbeing services.

2. Accessible Wellbeing Services:

To ensure our services are accessible to all our students, we offer globally available support tools such as the 24/7 TalkCampus peer-support platform and BetterHelp counselling service, which help address cultural and geographical barriers to students seeking wellbeing support. Student-led initiatives like the Student Ambassador programme and Safe Spaces project foster community-based support, and our centralised Wellbeing Hub provides continuously updated resources tailored to student needs.

3. Localised Support:

Collaborating closely with Recognised Teaching Centres, we empower local Wellbeing Champions to deliver support that aligns with regional contexts and cultural expectations. This ensures that students worldwide receive care that feels accessible, relevant, and empowering.

We will demonstrate how these initiatives enable a sustainable framework that is both globally adaptive and locally impactful, driven by passionate networks of staff and students. By fostering inclusivity and reducing stigma around mental health, UOL creates an environment where learners and educators can thrive.

Discussion Questions:

• How can institutions adapt wellbeing strategies to account for cultural differences in mental health attitudes?

• What role does staff training play in creating a sustainable culture of care?

• How can international universities ensure that wellbeing services are both globally consistent and locally relevant?

This session will provide insights into how a complex higher education framework can adopt simple, scalable strategies to enhance engagement, wellbeing, and belonging for all.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Wellbeing, Accessibility, Community, Diversity
Sub-theme: Well-being

[140] Jorge Freire (Queen Mary University of London). *Fostering Inclusive and Active Learning through Co-creation: Breaking Silos with a Multidisciplinary Online Programme Development Approach.*

Abstract. This presentation explores how the Digital Education Studio (DES) at the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, applies its CARE Approach to online programme development. This co-creation model has been implemented across six online programmes and one short course to date. It is a collaborative process involving students, academics, support staff, learning designers, and stakeholders, aiming to foster inclusivity and ownership, meet diverse learning needs, and promote active engagement.

As context, the Digital Education Studio was established to seize an opportunity to provide inclusive education while addressing the challenges of a dynamic higher education (HE) landscape. HE institutions face rising costs, evolving student demographics, and the demand for more flexible and personalised learning experiences (EDUCAUSE, 2024). While technology-enhanced learning has emerged as a solution, challenges such as digital equity, staff training, and student engagement persist (EDUCAUSE, 2024). JISC's 2024 survey reveals that while students appreciate the flexibility of digital learning and 55% found online resources engaging, only 30% participated in collaborative activities. This highlights the pressing need for varied digital learning experiences that promote active and social learning (Herrington & Herrington, 2006).

Developing active, collaborative environments, however, presents significant challenges for teaching staff, who often face barriers such as limited digital pedagogy expertise, competing demands on their time, and difficulties in fostering shared, empowering practices of collaboration (Bećirović, 2023). These challenges are compounded by the need for professional development that is both evidence-based and contextualised to the specific institutional and individual needs of staff. As highlighted by Taylor and Elliott (2020), effective support requires a combination of pedagogical theory, institutional inputs, and practical teaching strategies. For many HE educators, the shift to designing and facilitating active, online, collaborative learning represents a substantial departure from traditional teaching approaches. Overcoming these challenges demands tailored professional development resources that scaffold staff learning, provide practical examples, and foster a cultural shift to leverage the expertise of multidisciplinary team members, as well as students.

The presentation will share research-informed practices undertaken in collaborative curriculum design, professional development, and innovative co-creation of educational experiences. Practical examples will demonstrate how the CARE Approach has brought together academics, administrative and support staff, learning designers, students, and creatives to create impactful learning experiences for students. These examples will focus on how co-creation dismantled traditional silos in HE, promoted stakeholder engagement, empowered collaborators, and fostered student engagement and ownership.

By bridging research and practice, this session will demonstrate how collaborative curriculum design and inclusive educational experiences can create shared spaces for innovation and learning, enhancing both staff and student outcomes.

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[151] Michael Kay, Felix Kwihangana (King's College London). *Designing transnational online courses for African learners: collaboration, prototyping and evaluation.*

Abstract. King's College London is currently collaborating with academic colleagues at several universities across Africa to develop online courses intended to help young African learners to improve their access to employment and to university study. Funded by prominent Nigerian lawyer Afe Babalola, this project will deliver a programme of short courses covering a range of academic and employability skills, as well as a post-graduate certificate in education to train academics to teach these students.

In this presentation, we will explore the learning design decisions made when developing these courses. These decisions are being informed and driven by three integral factors: inclusive learning design (eg Rossi, 2023), decolonisation of learning design (eg Adam 2020; Koole, Smith, Traxler, et al. (eds.), 2024), and mobile pedagogy (eg Traxler and Crompton (eds.), 2021).

We will show how we have also been influenced by evaluation work undertaken by and about the DIGIFACE initiative regarding African-German collaborative attempts to decolonise higher education (Kindiki, Möllendorff, Speck, and Webb, 2019).

To examine the learning design process for these courses, we will focus on the development and evaluation of two prototype courses: a short course for young learners and a sample of the post-graduate certificate. We will discuss how these prototypes have been built and evaluated with stakeholders from across the continent. This will include decisions regarding platform, structure, media, and ways of learning and knowing.

We hope that sharing this approach will contribute to conversations about best practices in transnational education and the decolonisation of educational technologies. We also hope to foster collaboration between institutions by building a network and exchanging ideas in these areas.

[154] Chrysoula Mangafa (Metropolitan College, Greece) and Antonis Mouhtaropoulos (Metropolitan College, Greece). *Online Learning Readiness and Motivation to Engage in Online Learning: Implications for Practice in a Transnational Higher Education Institution.*

Abstract. The rapid expansion of transnational higher education (TNHE) has transformed the global education landscape, driven by the demand for flexible, accessible, and high-quality learning opportunities. This study investigates the relationship between online learning readiness and attitudes toward online learning, focusing on their influence on student motivation and engagement in Metropolitan College, the leading UK TNE provider in Greece and one of the largest UK TNE hubs in the world based on enrolments.

This study explores the key dimensions of online learning readiness—technical competence, self-regulation, and social connectedness—and their correlation with intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers. An online survey to 300 undergraduate and postgraduate students identified critical challenges and enablers that influence learners' ability to succeed in distance and online education programmes.

The findings of this research will provide conference attendees with evidence-informed insights into improving online learning design and delivery for transnational education settings. Attendees will gain actionable strategies to enhance learner readiness, foster engagement, and cultivate motivation, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive online learning experience for students across borders.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Transnational Higher Education, Online Learning Readiness, Motivation and Engagement
Sub-theme: TNE

[157] Shoshi Ish-Horowicz (Queen Mary University of London) and Martin Compton (Kings College London). *Evaluating the impact of AI capacity building innovations for university educators.*

Abstract. Recent developments in AI have created new opportunities and disrupted conventional ways of working for both educators and learners. Universities have responded by creating new communities of practice for staff, funding small-scale innovation projects and hosting events for staff and students (workshops, hackathons, conference etc.) The broad goals of all these interventions are to support and grow awareness, skills and what is being seen as 'critical AI literacy'. This literacy is a key to delivering inclusive and accessible education, in line with institutions' strategies and visions. Given the speed of innovation, many of these initiatives have not been evaluated for their impact and effectiveness in capacity building for AI in education and in terms of impact on critical engagement.

This session presents the findings of a research project, funded by the Centre for Online and Distance Education, which aimed to assess the impact of AI-related training, experimentation, self-study, research, innovation projects and capacity-building programs on enhancing AI literacy among educators and learners at Queen Mary University of London and King's College London.

Data collection was from surveys and focus groups and findings are used to develop best practice guidance for effective AI literacy interventions, communities of practice and networks to support continuous growth of AI critical literacy across all higher education stakeholder communities.

Track: Practice
Keywords: Generative AI, critical AI literacy, evaluation of impact
Sub-theme: Inclusive