USING A WHATSAPP MODEL TO SUPPORT QUALITY ASSURANCE SUBJECT LEARNERS IN AN ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT AT AN OPEN DISTANCE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The quality assurance course discussed in this paper posed numerous challenges to academics and students at an open distance learning institution. The study addresses the challenging problem of the pass rate of students. In a previous study the blended learning model emphasized face to face workshops, emails, telephone calls, mock exams, how to answer questions and use of discussion forums. It was recommended that discussion forums be maximised in terms of a community of practice model. Due to the expanding student registering for the course and scalability it was decided to use eLearning only and replace workshops emails telephone calls and mock exams using WhatsApp (WA) and MyUnisa platform as a communication media. WA was used as a tool to supplement the MyUnisa web-based discussion forum. WhatsApp is a free messenger application that works across multiple platforms and is being widely used among undergraduate students to send multimedia messages. WA groups have the potential to be used as online tutorial and complements the current Unisa online system. They have pedagogical, social and technological affordances, which allow putting up announcements, sharing ideas and resources, and implementing online discussions. Learning anytime and anywhere were thought to be the top two advantages of learning through WhatsApp. The aim of the study is to assess the effectiveness of WA model in improving QA scores. Previously blended learning model was used for year 2017.

Activity theory was used as a theoretical framework. A quantitative method process was used to collect and analyse the data. The quantitative data consisted of assignment and examination scores from 2017 and 2018 years of study. The quantitative results indicated a 72% pass rate for 2017 year and 55% pass rate for 2018-year WA sessions. The hypothesis tests indicated a significant difference in the 2017 and 2018 scores at a 95% level of significance. The pass-rate scores for 2017 were better than 2018 year. The results suggest the blended learning model is better. However, the blended learning model does not lends itself to scalability

Keywords: Blended learning, e-learning, quality assurance course, WhatsApp.