

New Strategies to Develop Effective Learning Environments that Support Learners: Real Practical Cases

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ABSTRACT- Structured teaching practices and student-oriented teaching practices both contribute to a positive classroom environment, promoting teachers' self-efficacy. In the contexts of many countries the classroom environment is believed to impact student outcomes.

The main problem of this paper is borne out of the need to make the learning process more effective and to improve learning outcomes among students. In bridging this gap in knowledge, the author employed different supporting tools, such as the whiteboard, classroom, data show, software, office visits, assignments, and group work.

The objective of this paper is to identify how teachers can create the best learning environment for maximum achievement of the students' learning outcomes.

This paper discusses different real and varied examples which were based on the examination of the following: special needs, students at risk of dismissal due to their low GPA, and limitations affecting open learning materials (OLM).

In conclusion, this study has revealed that the teachers have a positive feedback and enhanced performance for the students with special needs' in the classroom by implementing specific strategies to build students' confidence and encourage them to compete with their peers. For the academically disadvantaged students, special advisory assistance and associated support systems should be given to help boost their performance.

Also, the new platform as proposed in this paper is more advantageous and amenable for students to work more efficiently and seamlessly than other platforms.

Index Terms: Positive class room, Special Needs Students, Effective Learning Environment, OER, OLM.

I. INTRODUCTION

A positive classroom environment is essential for ensuring behavioral problems are minimized and learning outcomes maximized, and so the ways in which teachers can create positive classroom environments are discussed in this paper [1]. It discusses the effects of a positive classroom environment on learner behavior and achievements, and provides strategies to assist in the development of positive expectations concerning student achievements, and the importance of encouraging parental involvement in learning.

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Many strategies and tools for managing today's learning environments have proven effective at promoting and supporting a range of pedagogies, including delivering, applying, creating, communicating, and decision-making practices. Students will not require the use of specialized tools for all classes, but should have access to them should the need arise. In this way modern learning environments can support strengths-based teaching [2].

The author has students with special needs, including physical disabilities and learning difficulties. the author communicates with these students sensitively to ensure they have understood the delivered material in lectures and to raise their confidence and sense of fulfillment. The author supports them using a variety of IT tools and strategies to ensure their learning experience is as positive as possible. The use of these strategies has improved their understanding and interactions in the classroom and has also been reflected in summative assessment, proving they can perform and compete on an equal footing with their peers [5].

As an academic advisor, the author encounters students at risk of dismissal due to their low GPAs each semester. Low scores prevent them from continuing their studies until they can achieve a higher GPA to meet the requirements of the university regulations. The author has used a variety of formal approaches to help and support these learners. By implementing applicable strategies, it has been possible for some of these students to successfully register for coming semesters.

Open Educational Resources (OER) can deliver free and accessible education to all, and access to knowledge as a public good [6]. Thus, the author have made extensive use of the virtual learning environment resources available to her within the university to discover new tools to assist the students. The author has chosen to offer students additional assistance with Ubuntu –Linux. This strategy had improved their capacity for success, as reflected in certificates issued by the University.

II. PROBLEM DEFINITION

The problem encountered relates to how teacher s:

- Utilize and manage the full range of physical or virtual learning environments to ensure they are appropriate to learners' needs.
- Work with learners and service providers to ensure learners can access and use a broad range of learning opportunities. Learner support might include such activities as personal and academic tutoring.

III. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to establish how teachers can make effective use of both the formal and the informal learning environment to facilitate learning. It also describes how learners needs can be met through educational support and guidance using recently developed strategies.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to mention first that students with special needs often have difficulty clearly understanding the importance of establishing personal space between themselves and others. This misunderstanding can lead to intense conflict, as other children learn how to take turns and to understand the distance we should stand away from others, depending on our familiarity with them. Children also learn how to react appropriately when others enter their personal space [3].

Another issue to consider in this study is the major factors that determine the positive or negative impacts/factors of taking a job while studying on academic performance, GPA, and future employment prospects. Intuitively, it is concluded that, because time and energy are finite resources, holding a job will detract students from studying and be harmful to their GPA. Most studies concluded that this is only the case when student's number of hours worked each week exceeds 20 hours. In fact, students who work fewer than 15-20 hours often report higher GPAs than those who do not work at all [4].

Furthermore, the concept of Open Educational Resources does not only refer to teaching and learning materials. It also reflects on the use of software and tools that enable development, usage, adaptation and sharing of teaching/learning content, learning management systems (such as Moodle), tools to develop learning communities and the resources required to implement the above-mentioned items; e.g. open licenses [6].

V. METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes multiple case studies to explain the features of the learning environment that provide support and offer guidance to learners, using authentic practical examples.

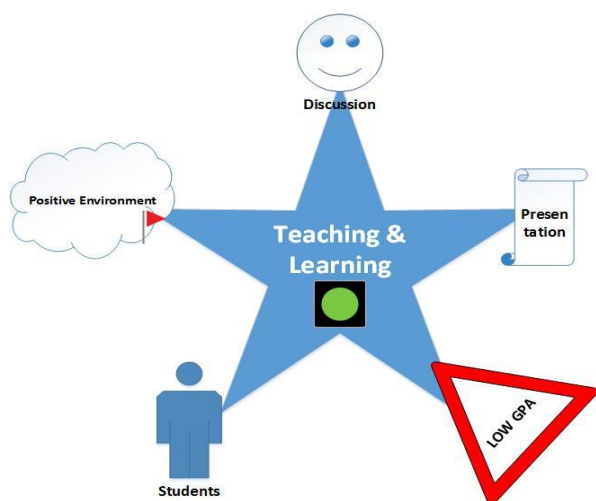


Figure1: Teaching and Learning methods to provide a positive environment

Figure 1 above represents the positive relationship that can be attained through a variety of teaching and learning methods. These include protecting students' voices through discussion, resolving weaknesses, enhancing students' performance through workshops, writing assessments, and conducting research ...etc. Of course in the case of teaching, the stare image is implemented throughout the semesters of the academic year, developing students' performance by utilizing new strategies.

All the cases that will be discussed in this paper answer the questions below:

1. What are the main types of educational environment that are used to support and deliver guidance to learners? (whether formal or informal.)
2. What contributions make the learning environment more effective for learners?
3. What Formal and informal methods have contributed to supporting and guiding learners?
4. What particular strategies have been used and how well do they work?

Figure 2 shows the development of a system life cycle, to enhance student's performance.

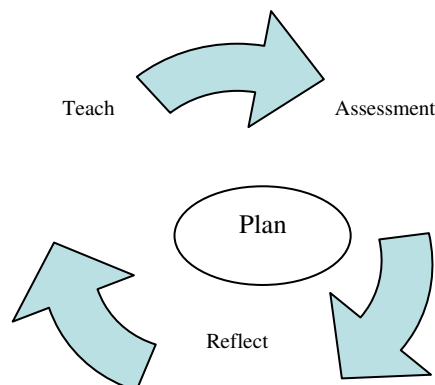


Figure 2: SDLC Teaching and Learning Processes

A. Case 1: According to subject and learning activity

The author permits students to arrange themselves in the laboratory in either groups or as individuals seated at computers. The author prefers to sit amongst the learners to support their activities and ensure a friendly atmosphere. This strategy improves the quality of their interactions with the teacher and encourages them to improve their skills.

B. Case 2: Special Needs Students

When responsible for students with special needs, the author emphasises appropriate care and builds their self-confidence to enable them to understand lectures and succeed in their studies. The author as a teacher did her best to give them additional support through meetings and during office hours, to illustrate points that were not made clear to them. In addition, the author used IT, such as PowerPoint and Videos, emphasising speaking clearly and slowly and offering the option to record lectures. In addition, the author

exerted extra effort to make the learning process as relaxed as possible [9], preparing special copies of assessment sheets, written in larger fonts, so they can be easily read, and separate examination rooms if necessary. These strategies have improved special needs students' understanding and interactions in the classroom and have been reflected in summative assessments, which prove they can perform to a standard equal to that of their peers [5].

C. Case 3: Students at Risk of Dismissal due to their Low GPA

As an Academic Advisor [7] with students at risk, the author tried her best to provide them with the support they need to improve their GPAs in accordance with university policy. In some cases this includes addressing the impact of part-time employment on students' GPA, which perhaps counterintuitively, can be positive. Although students might naturally assume working will be detrimental to their academic success, this is because they do not appreciate how working in moderation can increase efficiency and organization skills, and also possibly augment their post college marketability [4].

One of the methods the researcher used to provide students with the advice and support they need to improve their achievement involves organizing regular meetings with them, using social media within office hours, and tracking their performance. the researcher also conducted formal conversations with them to understand their problems (academic or personal) to find the best solutions. If there is an academic problem, the researcher contacts her colleagues for support and to follow up on their progress using the Student Information System (SIS) available on the university website to each Academic Advisor. Otherwise, the researcher communicates with the university's director of counseling for assistance. Furthermore, the researcher follows up on their progress by checking their results after they complete their midterm exams, advising them on how to progress successfully. These strategies help students register for the next semester, and ensure they receive the help and support they need to succeed academically.

D. Case 4: Limitations with available open learning materials (OLM)

Working and learning in partnership heightens awareness of conflicting priorities and results in tensions between the different perspectives and motivations of those involved, challenging existing assumptions and norms about higher education. Partnerships also offer possibilities for thinking and acting differently, and can effect fundamental transformations of higher education [10].

When students first used the Windows platform it became clear that it had some limitations in terms of providing access to open learning materials and facilities. Therefore, the author searched for a suitable alternative to provide more efficient access to virtual learning environments. My search led me

to establish that the new platform "Ubuntu –Linux" offers superior utility to Windows. The author has adopted this platform, because it provides access to open learning materials and the system operates with multiple source distribution and has low susceptibility to viruses and malware infestations. It has proven a very important tool that is able to protect the files of lecturers and students more effectively than Windows. Therefore, the author has introduced her students to Ubuntu-Linux and have observed that using the system has enhanced their abilities.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

1. Teachers seeking to improve students with special needs' performance in the classroom need to implement specific strategies to build students' confidence and enable them to compete with their normal peers.
2. Students who work may experience negative results (i.e. low GPA) or more positively attain new skills that enhance their performance.
3. The advisory role is crucial to support and help students organize their time, etc., when they have a low GPA.
4. Face to face discussion is a very important way to understand and resolve the problems students encounter both academically and in terms of lifestyle.
5. The new platform "Ubuntu –Linux" works better for students than Windows. It has proven to be a more useful tool to protect files (for lecturers and students) than Windows.

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