

Freirian and Postcolonial Perspectives on e-Learning Development: A Case Study of Staff Development in an African University

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ABSTRACT

E-learning is seen as a great opportunity for higher education institutions and considerable efforts and resources have been invested worldwide to promote this. However, consideration of specific issues within African higher education reveals that there are problems associated with bringing technology into local practices. Specifically, technology is often purchased and then, afterward, the staff is re-trained to make the best use of it. This process hides the fact that the technology is not 'neutral' but the product of particular ideologies and part of global economic patterns. The retraining of staff can, thus, be interpreted as the creation of consumers who conform to patterns of education developed in European or American contexts. This reinterpretation suggests that postcolonialism and Freirian critical concepts are useful in analysing such settings. These concepts have been illustrated by applying them to empirical data collected in an African university.

Key words: E-learning; Freire; Postcolonial; Staff development; Africa; Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Arguably, a knowledge revolution is sweeping the world and changing the way people communicate, purchase goods, and learn (Donat, 2001). This affects almost every country in the world. E-learning represents a challenge and an opportunity for education, in general, and for higher education, in particular, since "open learning and distance education are at the forefront of educational responses to the changes that are taking place locally, regionally, nationally and internationally" (Uys, Nleya & Molelu, 2004, p. 69). Furthermore, the computer, which is the core piece of technology in this knowledge revolution, enters all aspects of people's daily lives and every discipline. Udo and Edoho (2000) argue that the

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potential benefits of information communication technology (ICT) “cut across all sectors of economy and all fields of human activities” (p. 329). Thus, a great deal of the literature highlights the potential social and economic benefits that are associated with ICT (Akinsola, Herselman & Jacobs, 2005; Gunga & Ricketts, 2006; Lelliott, Pendlebury & Enslin 2000; Sofowore, 2009; Williams, Pitchforth & O’Callaghan 2010).

However, there are also negative influences of e-learning that have been identified, such as cultural effects and technological dependency (Amutabi & Oketch, 2003; Woherem, 1993). These negative influences occur because computers reflect the views of their creators (Irwin, 2000). Thus, in relation to teaching in higher education, Lelliott, Pendlebury, and Enslin (2000) argue that much of the content and style of the materials produced in developed countries is not suitable for social and cultural traditions in developing countries.

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, it was intended to provide a deeper understanding of the processes of incorporating ICT in an African context. Second, it was intended to demonstrate the relevance and utility of the theoretical concepts to studies of this kind. This paper argues that applying critical theory provides new insights into educational development practices that should lead to new forms of action in relation to the adaptation of technology in higher education. A case study exploring obstacles facing African higher education institutions’ e-learning development illustrates this concept.

E-LEARNING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Flexible learning, saving time, and saving money are among the potential benefits that e-learning can contribute to higher education (Gunga & Ricketts, 2006; Mashhour & Saleh, 2010; Uys, Nleya & Molelu, 2004; Hanna & Latchem, 2002). Due to these benefits, there is hardly a country in the world that is not actively engaged in the process of introducing e-learning into its educational system (Tsitouridou & Vryzas, 2004). Developed countries are continuing to discover different ways in which they can benefit, and developing nations are entering the competition of importing ideas and equipment from industrial nations. However, as Elsiddig (1993) and Adam (2003) pointed out, Sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of South Africa, has not witnessed much development in terms of e-learning at the university level.

Higher education is a growing sector in Africa. Kenya, for instance, “had only one public university in 1986, and no private university. Today it has six public universities and over ten private universities” (Amutabi & Oketch, 2003; Oketch, 2003). Even Somalia, which has lacked a central government and a ministry of education since 1991, has witnessed a dramatic increase in new universities (Leeson, 2006). Accessing higher education in developing countries, in general, and in Africa, in particular, is the best means to obtain higher salaries and

better employment opportunities (Elsiddig, 1993), and this could be the reason for the rapid expansion of higher education in Africa.

Despite this expansion, higher education remains a privilege that only a few wealthy individuals can enjoy. Many qualified students cannot access universities due to the limited spaces available in public universities. In Ghana, for instance, in 1996, only 27% of the 22,500 students that were qualified to enter a university were actually admitted (Donat, 2001). Similarly, in Kenya, over 40,000 students were qualified to attend universities each year, but the public universities could only admit 8,000 to 10,000 students (Oketch, 2003).

To respond to the current challenges, African educators have begun looking toward ICT and distance education as solutions to the challenges facing higher education (Donat, 2001). Elsiddig (1993) argues that most developing countries would be unable to maintain real expansion in higher education without seriously considering distance education initiatives. As a result, the continent has witnessed the development of a distance ICT-based university (John, 1996). Although, as Jenkis (1989) reports, the concept of distance education is not new to the continent, the previous form of distance education in Africa relied on print materials.

The new distance-based university is called the African Virtual University (AVU) and aims to bring high-quality education to a larger number of African students, thereby producing sufficient numbers of well-trained African scientists, technicians, engineers, and business managers for economic development (Donat, 2001; Amutabi & Oketch, 2003; Hanna & Latchem, 2002).

However, some researchers (Amutabi & Oketch, 2003) argue that, in at least one country, there is no indication that the AVU is solving problems. The fees of the AVU in Kenya are reported to be more expensive than other universities. (Amutabi & Oketch, 2003). Moyo (2003) also reported similar concerns from AVU's locations in Zimbabwe. Such issues are not unique to the AVU (Engelbrecht, 2005, p. 218):

‘Many e-learning initiatives have failed to achieve the desired learning outcomes, because not enough attention has been given to good learning design, management of the e-learning event, the selection of the right technology or to the adoption of e-learning by instructors and learner’.

Indeed, the continent has “some of the most modern ICT facilities, that have been either donated or sold to its people, or have been assembled with the use of cheap labour” (Ocholla, 2003). Instead, the problem stems from the readiness of the continent to facilitate ICT changes (Ilfinedo, 2005). Readiness for e-learning development must begin by considering how academics are preparing for ICT usage; attention should not focus on only developing infrastructures. In other words, preparing academics for e-learning usage and developing e-learning infrastructures must go hand in hand.

This does not imply that academics are to blame for the lack of progress with ICT development; it reflects the lack of perceived relevance that such technology has to many educators (Cuban, 2001). As Oliver and Dempster (2003) point

out, ICT should not be acquired because it has some special status or is different from traditional approaches, but rather because of its usefulness to teaching and learning processes. The aim of introducing technology into higher education should be pedagogically led rather than technologically driven. However, there is no evidence that higher education institutions in Africa have given as much consideration to staff development as they have to the provision of ICT facilities (Quinn, 2003; Lelliott, Pendlebury, & Enslin, 2000). In African universities where technology development has begun, they are using imported e-learning staff development models from developed countries as an *off-the-shelf* solution to their local problems. This raises the question of whether African higher education institutions are fully considering their options in reference to preparing their academics for ICT usage.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Freirian and postcolonial theories were adopted as the theoretical basis of this study. The two theories are similar in that they both focus on issues of oppression and empowerment and both recognise the agencies of individuals in creating change. They also both emphasise the importance of empowering local people and liberating them.

Postcolonial theory, in particular, places participants' responses into an historical perspective, while Freirian theory highlights the process of liberation using problem posing and dialogue tools. The following sections provide an overview of the two theories.

The Freirian Method

Paulo Freire is well known for his methods of educating illiterate and semi-literate adults in Brazil and Chilli through dialogue and problem posing. The methods that Freire developed have attracted the attention of those concerned with adult education issues within developing and developed countries. Freirian methods and concepts have also been used beyond adult literacy contexts. Healthcare, employment, teacher training, women's studies, research methods, and ICT staff development are some of areas in which Freirian approaches have been used (Gadotti, 1994; Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989; Klein, 2007; Malewski, Phillion & Lehman, 2005; Mooney & Nolan, 2006; Nuryatno, 2005; Padilla, 1992; Raja, 2005; Stigmar & K_rnefors, 2005).

Freirian theory attracts not only admiration from different commentators but also criticism. Freire's ideas have met resistance from the dominant classes in his own country (Gadotti, 1994). Additionally, Freire's view of reality has been considered as too simplistic, too black and white; one is either an oppressor or oppressed. His rigid structuralist view of the world does not allow for its complexity (Facundo, 1984, 3, 5-6; Ohlinger, n.d.). Lately, Sharma (2006) viewed the Freirian model as "too utopia". Sharma added that "there is excessive idealism in the de-

scription of knowing and for the learner and educators to participate as equals. Such participation is seldom achieved in real world” (p. 48).

The most systematic criticism to Freirian theory came from a group of third world activists who claimed to have used Freirian theory. The group argued that “Freire’s pedagogy is based on western assumptions that undermine indigenous knowledge systems” (Bowers & Apffel-Marglin, 2005). However, the group has also received considerable criticism for their work from different commentators (Au and Apple, 2007; Kahn, 2005). Criticisms to Freirian theory reported here are largely irrelevant to this study. But in order to address the “simplistic” criticism to Freirian theory, which seems to be related to the concept of dehumanisation, I will use “dehumanisation” in a way that avoids absolute classifications in this study. Instead, a graded classification of dehumanisation was used. Dehumanisation was divided into main levels: high, medium, and low.

Despite the criticisms levelled against Freirian theory, his approaches have been implemented in different areas in both developed and developing countries. It is the contention of this study that ICT staff development in higher education in Africa is yet another field that could benefit from Freirian approaches.

Since Freire’s ideas are touched upon and discussed in different areas, it would be unrealistic to discuss all his ideas in this article; therefore I discuss only five Freirian concepts in this section, drawn from his famous book “*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*” (Freire, 1970) that might be relevant to ICT staff development, especially in developing countries. The five concepts are:

- **Dehumanisation**
- **Humanisation**
- **Internalisation**
- **Banking Style of Education**
- **Problem Posing**

Dehumanisation

According to Freire, dehumanisation occurs when someone treats a particular group of people as less human or not fully human. Subjugation, denying of freedom, injustice and exploitation are what dehumanised individuals experience. Freire defines the oppressors as those who deny the personal autonomy of others by imposing their own worldviews. He argues that the oppressors perceive dehumanised people as adaptable and manageable beings.

In order to address the “simplistic” criticism to Freirian theory, which seems very much related to the concept of dehumanisation, I used “dehumanisation” in a way that avoids absolute classifications in this study. Instead, graded classifications of dehumanisation were used. Dehumanisation was divided into main levels: high, medium, and low. A high level is when individuals experience “exploitation” and “subjugation,” while experiencing “injustices and denying of freedom” is considered to be a medium level of dehumanisation, and the absence of

these is a low level of dehumanisation. This is not quite what Freire has done or even recommended; however, the definitions that Freire provides referring to the concept suggest the possibility of such classifications.

Humanisation

Humanisation treats individuals as fully human even though they are oppressed, in the sense that they take part in the process of liberating themselves. Humanisation attempts to restore stolen humanity by trusting human abilities and skills. It positions human beings as critical thinkers who need to be encouraged to use their skills. Thus, the first step of the humanising struggle is for the oppressed to be aware of their oppression.

Internalisation

As a result of dehumanisation, the oppressed individuals adopt the actions and thoughts of the oppressors while losing their own identity and their worldview. The oppressed also believe the images that the oppressors project about them. Subsequently, the oppressors become the role models of the oppressed, so they follow the models, techniques, and approaches of the oppressors unconsciously. Thus, internalisation is the process of becoming somebody else. Additionally, Freire points out that this process of “being somebody else” becomes apparent “during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressor, or sub-oppressors” (p. 27).

Banking Style of Education

“Banking style” is the term Freire invented to describe an educational system based on memorising facts and figures, in which passive learners have preselected knowledge “deposited” into their minds. The subjects are developed without being consulted or without their local needs being considered. In the banking style, the educator has the knowledge and the students do not. In addition, the educator thinks and the students are “taught.” Finally, the educator chooses the content of the programme; the students’ ideas about the programme are never heard (Gadotti, 1994).

Problem Posing

Problem-posing education is utilized to reveal oppression and propose problems that enable students to think. In a problem-posing educational system, the teacher not only teaches but also learns, and the student not only learns but also teaches. The teacher introduces problems drawn from learners’ lives for debate and consideration and trusts learners’ ability to think critically.

Postcolonial Theory

The term postcolonial (or postcolonialism) is used to describe the period following the decline of European colonialism in third-world countries (Young, 2001; Ashcroft, Griffith, & Tiffin, 1998; Loomba, 2005). However, defining the term has never been an easy task, as Castle (2001) notes. Postcolonial theory discusses legacy—the impact of colonisation and the aftermaths of colonisations. However, questions arise about whether colonisation has in fact ended (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 1998; Loomba, 2005). New postcolonial terms, such as neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism, have been coined to express the position that colonisation continues in new forms.

The postcolonial movement calls for society to be examined and re-examined in the light of the aftermath of colonial activities. The movement uses language and culture as a means to minimise the effects of colonisation on a society. Thus, postcolonial writers widely use concepts such as ideology, image, senses, tradition, otherness, colonialism, neo-colonialism, culture, imperialism, diaspora, nativism, and Euro-centrism. As well as its obvious relevance to a study situated in the African context, postcolonial theory has recently been seen as a powerful tool for people concerned with developing academics (Manathunga, 2005, 2006, 2007).

Criticisms of postcolonial theory have also been noted. The theory has no tradition per se from which to draw its conceptual vocabularies. Rather, it draws concepts from a wide range of disciplines, such as anthropology, feminism, history, and human geography (Young, 2001). On a practical level, it has also been noted that postcolonial theories do not commonly address the issue of “colonisability” or “readiness for colonisation” (Bennabi, 1991). The conditions that led third-world countries to be colonised often do not acquire attention from postcolonial commentators.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Given the theoretical position of this design, a methodology that would permit the study of individuals and their agency is required. Thus, a case study research design employing a qualitative research method was adopted. Unlike a quantitative research method, a qualitative approach allows a situation to be investigated within its natural context. Additionally, qualitative techniques allow individuals to be interviewed in depth so that different aspects of the issue can be explored. I applied interviews, observations, document analysis, and field notes in order to gather the data in this study. All of the interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Before any interview was carried out, participants’ right of withdrawal from the interview at any stage and other ethical issues were discussed with them. All participants signed a form in which they stated their willingness to participate in this research. The ethical steps used throughout this study were approved by the Ethical Committee (*the college where the author was based*)

and are in line with the British Education Research Association ethical guidelines (2004).

Data was collected during the winter/spring term of 2006 at a public university in Uganda. Participants in the research included: six academics, four academic developers, an e-learning administrator, and a senior staff member at the university level. Furthermore, fifteen academics responded to open-ended questionnaires that were administered. The participants in this study were selected based on their involvement in the e-learning academic development. Academics' participation in the training was the main criteria used to decide whether they should participate in this study. The selection of academic developers was also based on their training experiences. Any academic developer who had not administered training was not involved in the study. The senior staff member, who was the dean of the faculty where the participating academics were based, hosted the research. He was also a member of the university's senate, which decides, amongst other things, the university's direction toward e-learning development. Speaking with him proved to be useful because he expressed his views about the e-learning development at the university.

During the fieldwork, the host faculty assigned a senior administrator to coordinate the visit. This administrator introduced the researcher to most of the academic staff as well as academic developers. The room where the research was conducted was shared with the academics. This enabled the researcher to become more familiar with them. The academics were approached in order to request their participation in the study on the basis of their involvement in e-learning and training.

Before interviews were conducted, a brief discussion was held to find out whether an academic had participated in training. Only academics who had taken part in e-learning training were involved. In order to obtain diverse points of view, an equal number of male and female academics were selected. However, this was not possible in the case of academic developers participating in this study because the number of female academic developers was negligible compared to their male counterparts.

This suggests that a range of data was collected during the fieldwork. However, due to the impracticality of presenting all the data in this article, only the major findings from five participants, who represent the groups taking part in this research, is presented. Results from the senior academic, two academics, and two academic developers are presented here. These particular participants were selected because their data was typical of the participants in their respective groups. However, this was obviously not possible in the case of the senior academic, who was the only senior academic taking part in the study.

Style of Interviews

The problem-posing method developed by Freire was used during the data collection. Researchers discovered the effectiveness of adopting Freirian concepts as data collection and data analysis tools. Padilla (1992), for instance, represents early researchers who employed Freirian concepts as data collection and data analysis methods. Stigmar and Körnefors (2005) used Freirian approaches as an approach to problematise ICT staff development. Stigmar and Körnefors (2005) employed problem posing in the context of faculty development in Web-based education. This obviously suggests other researchers have also used Freirian concepts as data collection and data analysis techniques prior to this study.

During interviews, participants were questioned and challenged in their different capacities. For instance, academic developers were challenged as to why they were developing training without consulting with academic members of staff. Similarly, the senior staff member's policy for using a humanising method with higher ranking staff members and neglecting to use this method with junior staff members was questioned. Academics were questioned as to why they were simply accepting whatever was decided for them by staff developers and not formally requesting to be involved in the planning process. It was not the aim of the research to solve the problems facing that faculty but to challenge participants in their different capacities so that issues of dehumanisation, oppression, and the banking style would become clear to all involved.

This interviewing technique was, to some extent, quite radical and there were some concerns that it could lead to the researcher being forced to leave the field. As a result, this work was constantly monitored by another researcher who received regular briefings regarding the progress of the research and strictly followed the ethical steps described in the methodology section.

Data Analysis Strategies

After data were collected, the theoretical frameworks used in this study guided the analysis of the data. The interviews were transcribed. All the transcripts were read, and on the basis of this reading, certain repeated (or similar) phrases from across the transcripts were gathered together. Where phrases related to more than one idea, a judgment was made about the main concern of the excerpt, and it was classified into only one category. The categories were then reviewed in order to identify those that were relevant to the e-learning staff development. This means that only quotations that appeared to reflect experiences about e-learning academic development were reported here. Categories that were not relevant were excluded from further analysis. Each category was then reviewed to see the range of ways in which this topic had been discussed. After describing the categories, their theoretical relevance was also established by relating the categories to the concepts drawn from the theoretical foundations.

The categories' relations to the concepts such as humanisation, dehumanisation and banking style of education were further explored. This was done by listing quotations that seemed to match each concept. As such, conclusions were therefore drawn about the extent to which categories were humanising, dehumanising, problem posing, based on the banking of education or anti-colonial nature.

RESULTS

The findings of the study are discussed below and structured according to the theoretical categories identified earlier.

Dehumanisation

Dehumanising practices around staff development and training for ICT usage were a general phenomenon. Academics had no choice regarding the type of training being offered. They were all expected to attend, and if a staff member did not take part in the training, his or her job at the University was threatened, as a senior staff member reported:

'We moved and came up with a policy that if you don't take this training you won't be promoted or if you are at the lower rank you can actually be dismissed at some point. So members of staff came because of that, but in the process they appreciated it and they now think it is the best thing for them.'

The University took such a strong stand in reference to forcing academics to take part in the training because, they argued, they did not want students to "suffer" as a consequence of academics' reluctance to take part in the training.

'If you're going to be so soft with them they are not going to acquire those skills as soon acquire the skills as soon as possible. The students will suffer in the long term. So we're doing it because we want them to acquire the skills now and teach the current students.'

While there was a concern for the suffering of students, there was no similar concern about academics' welfare. They could not refuse the training. Ironically, the senior staff member pointed out this strong policy had not been used with senior staff members; it was mainly applied to junior staff. According to him, this was because higher ranking academics will soon leave the University due to retirement or other reasons, while junior or younger academics are likely to stay at the University for years to come. This explanation for this policy suggests that senior managers did not believe academics would act in the best interest of students. However, when academics were interviewed, they argued that they value the importance of e-learning in today's higher education and insisted that if they were given a choice about whether to attend e-learning training or not, they would

chose to attend. This suggests that there was no justification for the senior managers' views regarding their forceful technique.

The study also found that academics were not involved in any consultation about the kind of training being offered, in terms of timing, content or format.

'We were just asked to go for training; they did not like say: can staff say what they want. But I think what they thought we wanted was to learn so many things. ...All we wait for is there an e-learning session and if we are call ..we attend.'

A challenge to academic developers about their policy of not consulting with academics revealed a dehumanising explanation for their policy.

'There were those lecturers who didn't know anything about IT anyway, so there is no way they are going to make a choice of what they didn't know.'

Humanisation

Academics wanted to be treated with respect and be involved with the planning;

'Consulting people is good because they can plan for that thing', -- argued a female staff member.

By the end of the problem-posing interviews, academic developers started to say that their dehumanising methods were not successful and began thinking of trying out humanising approaches, giving academics more freedom and say in terms of the training.

'Maybe we have just fifteen people from the faculties, we sit down together with them, then we say O.K. you want to convert your courses, What does it involve? So we sit together and draw up a work plan.'

This would target academics who have a genuine interest, helping them to convert courses. This staff developer further mentioned that they had wanted to send training programmes, including the training contents of the programme, to academics so they *'Can identify the slots that can fit them, but we were unable to implement that because we had a power problem.'* Electricity was the power which this participant was referring to, which, at the time of study, was constantly going off.

However, as pointed out, a form of humanisation was already in use. Negotiating and humanising techniques were used with the higher ranking academic staff. These produced positive results as the majority of those members attended the training and seemed to use the skills gained.

'We're saying this is compulsory for all staff at this level but it is optional for the other group (senior) And you find that it's actually 75% of them (senior) came and attended. But if I state its compulsory then you may find that even the percentage has been lowered, they're simply not coming, you know? So but say to them this is good for all junior staff, we think it is also good for you. But for you it's not compulsory, please come and attend.' (Senior staff member)

Internalisation

Three forms of internalisation in the three different groups of participants were found in this study. The first form of internalisation was found in the senior staff member who indicated his ambition to import e-learning staff development from developed countries as they have more expertise than developing countries. The senior staff member, instead of trusting local expertise, was positioning himself as an outsider. He justified this when challenged about reasons for not relying on local expertise by arguing that:

'You see for the beginning there has to be somebody who is an expert and today the experts are the ones who have already used e-learning And we are getting some of those from the Netherlands.'

The second form of internalisation was seen with academic staff, who pointed out their admiration of developed countries' achievements in e-learning, and described how developing countries are copying and following whatever developed countries do.

'These people out there have good stuff that is true and in developing countries we are just learning we are just copying up with them.'

Interestingly, academics consistently welcomed the idea of using locally developed programmes, and repeatedly called for the localisation of knowledge imported from developed countries.

However, although they felt this way in relation to subject materials and training, they viewed technology as a natural thing which did not need to be localised.

'When I look at an expert for example, or a professor in computer science, you know that is science, so maybe it's the person how he presents himself but the content really is the same.' (Senior academic)

This is yet another example of internalisation. A view of technology as neutral reflects the assumptions of developed countries which the participants appeared to have internalised. Despite arguing the universality of technology, however, the same participants highlighted its subjectivity of the technology.

I've had the opportunity to be almost in every country in this world, you know because of my position and role so by prior training. And what I can tell you is that everywhere I go I find people doing things differently. If you train in a Scandinavian country, the way the professor works with you, the way that person and so the kind of skills you get is different from the US different from UK and so on, and what I think is a good thing, and that's why I've told my staff that inbreeding is not the way forward. We need to train from different parts of the world.'
(Senior academic)

This again reflects an inner conflict that participants appear to be experiencing.

The third form of internalisation was found among staff developers. Staff developers were merely translating the University's policy that required academics to be forced into training. Therefore, staff developers internalised the "images" held by senior staff members of treating academics in a dehumanising way. This might suggest that the "dehumanised" staff developers were passing on their "dehumanising" experiences to academic staff. This can clearly be seen from the case of a female staff developer who took part the training when she was a lecturer before she was moved to staff development department;

'When it comes to KEWL lecturers want to do their work. And Blackboard makes lecturers lazy. Because what a lecturer is going to do is just post notes finished. That's what they do.... They are being lazy; really that's why they opt for Blackboard; just post notes, and a student is supposed to read.'

Anti-Colonial - Local Identity

Despite the different forms of internalisation discussed above, senior staff members strongly believed the importance of localising the delivery of training. Because some of the things that e-learning developers in developed countries do *'are not applicable to Africa'* (senior staff member), they were expecting external staff developers to localise their training and use examples that might be suitable to their own country.

The aim of using external expertise is to train the trainers and build local capacity so they would be technically sufficient. In fact, the university's policy of switching from Blackboard (a commercial virtual learning environment) to Knowledge Environment for Web Learning: The Next Generation "KEWL" (which this university was part of the development consortium for) can also be seen as valuing locally developed programmes and rejecting imported e-learning tools from the developed world.

'The entire tool is used in seven other universities in Africa.... So it's like a consortium of African universities that are coming together under an umbrella called African Virtual Open Resources and Initiative to build solutions which work for higher institutions. (...) So we are committed to contributing to that initiative

because as a university we know that, one with a local capacity to control what we use, we can add value to the end user.’

It is not entirely clear whether switching to KEWL and discouraging academics from using Blackboard was down to financial reasons (as the Blackboard subscription was costing substantial money whereas KEWL is completely free) or whether this change was due to localising e-learning. Whatever the reason, however, the effect of this policy shift attention towards locally developed expertise. However, a senior staff member was sceptical about this change and insisted on continuing using Blackboard alongside KEWL.

‘If the university stopped funding for Blackboard, I’ll continue paying money to make sure that the two systems run parallel and our staff can easily migrate to KEWL You only migrate to this so called KEWL Next Gen when you are sure that actually it is ok.’

On the other hand, although this was positioned as a post-colonial issue, other comments suggested a different reason and clear internalisation. The senior staff, for instance, believed that *‘most of these systems developed in Africa are not use friendly’* and not as reliable as *“Blackboard where it is stable 100% 365 days a year”*.

‘I cannot recommend a system that has just been developed locally to do (sensitive commercial work). Because I want something that has been tested over time. And in Africa, in most countries, ICT is just new, its a new thing.’

This indicates that the idea of using locally developed programmes would take some time before it materialised and it was very likely that it would meet challenges before it was implemented.

Banking Style of Education

The findings of the study revealed that the e-learning staff development was planned and delivered using the banking style of pedagogy. Academic developers planned the content of the training without involving academics and decided what academics should learn instead.

‘So even on the KEWL. We were focusing on very few aspects, what we wanted to show them the communication tools so that they can communicate, they can use it in their classroom for generating discussion forums, e-learn - email communications, chat and stuff like that.’ (Staff developer)

Academics were not involved in the development of the training, and their views were never sought, as a male academic pointed out when asked whether he had attempted to influence the content of the training to suit his needs:

‘No. Because at the training you find pre-arranged programs (and instructors) which you cannot change to suit your needs.’

An other male participant made a similar point “*No. because I wasn’t asked to contribute to workshop content by the organisers.*”

Delivery of training followed the banking style of education and not a problem-posing. Academics met in a training room and listened to staff developers’ talks.

(In the training) *‘They taught us using the tool and then they gave us some background about e-learning; what e-learning means, what other synonyms that exist of e-learning.’*

The academic further added that:

‘It was mainly lecture based, where there are over three instructors or four they would come in one for a sessions each one per a session, they talked, show slides and demonstrations and the case study was

KEWL.NextGen, so they demonstrated that they were teaching us.’

DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study suggest that dehumanisation practices within e-learning staff development did exist. Forcing academics to take part in the training or to face dismissal from their positions is a clear dehumanising practice. The failure to apply the skills gained from the training is a clear testimony that dehumanisation practices did not go beyond making academics attend training. The study further highlights how using humanisation approaches produced contrasting outcomes. Thus, it is argued that the humanising method will produce positive results; academics will feel valued and own the programme if they are involved in a humanising way. This finding supports Baird’s (1999) findings. Baird employed Freire’s humanisation approaches when working with women prisoners, and concluded that humanisation approaches were effective as this method made “women feel ownership in the process and participate on a regular basis”.

Internalisation was also discovered in this research. Participants argued the “neutrality” of technology, a view which academics appeared to have internalised from developed countries. The irony here is that participants highlighted the importance of localising imported “knowledge and skills” from developed countries; however, they explicitly positioned ICT as an exception for which localisation would not be necessary. This is because technology has been viewed as a universal thing that can be applicable to all people regardless to their cultural backgrounds. This is completely in contradiction with the growing literature that

highlights the subjectivity of ICT programmes and how technology reflects the views and perceptions of its creators (Arger, 1987).

It is not entirely clear why the views of the participants of the study are in conflict with the literature. But it is fair to say that apart from the particular literature cited above, there is also other literature that positions ICT as a universal thing which is applicable to all society. Wangusa (2005), for instance, considers the importance of e-learning being culturally sensitive and adaptive to fit with indigenous values. He further reports that currently developed countries appear to “export e-learning as one-size fits all, and culturally generic” thing (p.202).

Pedagogically, this study found that the aims, planning and delivery of training that e-learning developers offered to academics were in line with banking style of education. This finding supports the argument of Leinonen, Botero & Wideroos (2000), stating that although potentially ICT in education does support problem-posing education, the current trend seems to support of banking rather than problem-posing. In other words, there is a gap between potential and actual practices of e-learning. This gap between potential and actual use of technology, especially in design, was also highlighted in a recent study (Conole, et al 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

This case study has shown that Freire’s concepts, together with ideas from post-colonial theory, could provide insights into contemporary practices of e-learning development. Consequently, one of the things that I offer in this paper is a methodology that can be adopted for use in other studies in this area. However, the case study also reveals just how complex these situations can be: although there were clear examples of oppression and dehumanisation, there were also examples of liberating approaches to development. These contrary tendencies were, in some cases, expressed by the same individual. This suggests that the theoretical concepts used in the analysis here may need to be re-examined; rather than using them in a simplistic way to classify people or situations as oppressive or liberating, colonising or resisting, they have revealed the dynamics of the ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1992) which may or may not generate a positive and productive encounter between different cultures. This is an issue that could be explored further in future work.

The study showed that in this case, adopting dehumanising approaches to staff development for e-learning was not only oppressive, it was also inefficient; the e-learning developers seemed to realise this but had not previously felt able to act and adopt a new approach. Locally-based initiatives represented an important development, because they provided academics with a sense of ownership of the problems and also of the tools and techniques that might be used to respond to these. The implication of this is that the use of bought-in facilities which dominate the literature, such as the computing classrooms that have been provided as investments or donations, will not solve the problems of developing e-learning in

Africa. Supporting academics as they make sense of these facilities in relation to their own practices, however, would be productive.

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