
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE ARTS AND COMMERCE

Learning Advancement Experience: Case of Emmanuel Tonya

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at explaining different learning styles with reference to Emmanuel Tonya as a case, a qualitative analysis. Learning is a process of transformation of knowledge, behaviour, skills and values. The learning process is where the learner acquires new or advancing knowledge depending on the ability and environment to support the process. This study used VARK model as the methodology for discussion of the learning experience. The learning styles bases on the VARK model (Visual, Aid, Read/write and the Kinesthetic). It is learned that, no one style is best than the other. Learner can use one or combination of the four. In this inspiration paper, it is known that distance learning is a mode which can be embedded with online learning and support learners to acquire knowledge while performing other activities. The study recommends that, the practitioners should acknowledge knowledge's acquired from different styles of learning. That is one who acquires the knowledge can perform duties depending on the span of learning requirement. Also, the paper recommends that, people should be allowed to learn through distance/online so as to practice what they learn simultaneously.

Key terms: Learning, Education, Mode of delivery

Introduction

Learning is the process of acquiring new or modifying existing knowledge, behaviors, [skills](#), values and preferences (Karban, 2015). Learning involves learners in acquiring and enriching knowledge for the purpose of changing understanding. The ability to learn is owned and modified by humans, and some machines as learning support systems (Lopez & Mejia-Arauz, 2012). Some learning is taking place of understanding immediate, induced by a single event but much skill and knowledge accumulates from repeated experiences (Bolin, 2006). The changes of understanding induced by learning mostly last a lifetime. Alexander (1996) argued when explaining learning as the process of acquiring new knowledge building on the existing knowledge and use prior knowledge to modify and support construction to design future learning (Alexander, 1996).

It is known that, Learning is a process that builds on prior knowledge and involves enriching, building on, and changing existing understanding, where one's knowledge supports the construction of the future *education delivery* (Alexander, 1996). Human learning begins during grow up and continues until death as a consequence of ongoing interactions between person and environment (Daniel, Daniel, & Daniel, 2011). The nature and processes involved in learning are studied in many fields, including [educational psychology](#), [neuropsychology](#), [experimental psychology](#), and [pedagogy](#) (Daniel, Daniel, & Daniel, 2011). Research in such fields has led to the identification of various sorts of learning processes (Terry, 2006; Gagliano, 2014). For example, learning may occur as a result of habituation, or classical conditioning, operant conditioning or as a result of more complex activities such as [play](#), seen only in relatively intelligent animals (Terry, 2006). Learning may occur consciously or without conscious awareness (Bolin, 2006; Perkins & Solomon, 1989).

Learning styles and modes

It has been known that, learning can take different modes, the conventional and distance learning. Compared to conventional learning, open and distance learning is not the first choice among students. The popular notion today is that distance learning is chosen by those who cannot access conventional colleges (Bisanda, 2015). However, this is not completely true. Open and distance learning is an alternative platform of learning for people who really want to learn (Basu, 2012). This is especially true in the case of working professionals and armed forces personnel who wish to learn while on their jobs.

Learning style or mode is an individual's distinctive approach to learning based on strengths, weaknesses, and preferences (Collins, 2012). The learning process is therefore the planned efforts of an individual having initiatives to achieve knowledge or skills for future use. Learning style is the way in which each individual learner begins to concentrate on, process, absorb and retain new and difficult material (Dunn, 1990). Everybody has different learning strengths a combination of personal preferences that enable beginning to concentrate, take in new and difficult information, remain focused on what one wants to achieve and understand and remember important information and ideas for future uses (Dunn, 1990; Daniel, Daniel, & Daniel, 2011; Gagliano, 2014). When one is able to apply the strengths becomes efficient, productive and more successful. The process of learning starts from childhood understanding different ideas which are used to cope with the environment (Bolin, 2006). When one grows has several learning modes from the parents, playmates, and school and college mates. The important issue in learning is individualistic and uniqueness of acquiring knowledge and skills.

The question here is do we need learning styles? The answer is obvious yes. We need to understand the learning style as learners have been developed from different set up and different environment. Here the learning style is needed as learning can take different mode and the outcome for different scholars becomes the same (Dunn, 1990).

Regardless of whether one prefers structure or choice, traditional or creative applications, or formal or informal learning style approaches helps produce the best work in the classroom or workplace. Whatever style is adopted learning style strategies are important to learners. The strategies includes introduction to new or unfamiliar context, study challenges strategies, tackling previous under achieved goal, and confidence level and learning support (Bolin, 2006; Daniel, Daniel, & Daniel, 2011; Lopez & Mejia-Arauz, 2012).

Learning styles/mode known to the understanding that student learns differently (Dunn, 1990; Daniel, Daniel, & Daniel, 2011). Technically, an individual's learning style refers to the preferential way in which the student absorbs processes, comprehends and retains information. The notion of individualized learning styles has gained widespread recognition in education theory and classroom management strategy (Jeanne, 2012; Simandan, 2013). Individual learning styles depend on cognitive, emotional and environmental factors, as well as one's prior experience (Howard, 2010). It is clear that everyone has a different learning style. It is important for educators and learners to understand the differences in learning styles and the ability of ones to acquire knowledge and skills. The implement of best learning practice strategies should be based on learning activities, curriculum and the ability to acquire knowledge and skills.

To support ones individual acquire knowledge and skills, there are four model developed by Neil Fleming (Fleming, 1992). Fleming developed a model known VARK which suggests four modalities that reflect the experience of learning for students and teachers. The concepts under VARK are Visual, Aural, Read/Write and Kinesthetic (Fleming, 1992; Cherry, 2018; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2009). Visual learners learn best by seeing or presentations. Graphic displays such as charts, diagrams, illustrations, handouts, and videos are all helpful learning tools for visual learners (Pashler, et al., 2009). People who prefer this type of learning would rather see information presented in a visual rather than in written form (Cherry, 2018). Aural (or auditory) learners learn best by hearing information. They tend to get a great deal out of lectures and are good at remembering things they are told (Bolin, 2006; Cherry, 2018). This is the popular style of learning in Tanzania, the style in well known as conversional system. Learners are costumed to learning through this system when it comes to other systems like the reading and writing majority do not want to use it. Research need to be done to understand to why majority wants aural style of learning.

Reading and writing learners prefer to take in information displayed as words. Learning materials that are primarily text-based are strongly preferred by these learners. This is one of the best ways of learning for persons with other obligation. From this notion has been accommodated by the introduction of distance learning where learners are given study materials and asked to attend examinations (Kalplan & Haeniein, 2016). This is known as distance learning (Tabor, 2007; Dron & Anderson, 2014). The process of acquiring knowledge and skills is done depending on time planning and preferred place of the learner. The learner is not bound to attend for physical infrastructure all the time of learning.

Distance education or long-distance learning is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school (Tabor, 2007; Kalplan & Haeniein, 2016). Traditionally, this

usually involved correspondence courses wherein the student corresponded with the school via post. Today the distance education, learning involves online education (Kalplan & Haeniein, 2016). Courses that are conducted (51 percent or more) are hybrid blended distance learning. Massive open online courses (MOOCs), offering large-scale interactive participation and open access through the World Wide Web or other network technologies, are recent developments in distance education (Dron & Anderson, 2014; Kalplan & Haeniein, 2016).

Kinesthetic (or tactile) learners learn best by touching and doing. Hands on experience are important to kinesthetic learners (Fleming, 1992; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2009; Cherry, 2018). Kinesthetic refers to the process where learners achieve learning through experience and practice. Learners/students use the life experience to learn new knowledge or skills (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010). Through experience learners prefers touching and interaction in the environment. Students who possess these characters of learning have been said to be quick, active in learning physical skills and their performance be higher (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010).

There are seldom instances where one mode is used, or is sufficient, so that is why there is a four part VARK profile (Fleming, 1992). Despite the criticism lacking empirical support, the VARK model remains fairly popular among both students and educators (Dunn, 1990; Kalplan & Haeniein, 2016). Many students immediately recognize that they are used to a particular learning style for better understanding. Others may find that their learning preferences lie somewhere in the middle. For example, a student might feel that both visual and auditory learning is the most appealing. While aligning teaching strategies to learning styles may or may not be effective, students might find that understanding their own learning preferences can be helpful (Daniel, Daniel, & Daniel, 2011). One might know that visual learning appeals most, using visual study strategies in conjunction with other learning methods might help for better remember the information studied or at the very least make studying more enjoyable.

Majority of students in Tanzania assume self learning is very difficult, however, theories state that one can learn and do other activities at the same time (Bisanda, 2015). The notion of individualized learning styles has gained widespread recognition in education theory and classroom management strategy (Fleming, 1992; Tabor, 2007; Simandan, 2013). Individual learning styles depend on cognitive, emotional and environmental factors, as well as one's prior experience. In other words: everyone's different. It is important for educators to understand the differences in their students' learning styles, so that they can implement best practice strategies into their daily activities, curriculum and assessments. The question by the use of individual learning is the competence as compared to conversational and group learning. It is the aim of this paper to inform how one can have self learning provided given the course prerequisite. The paper is an inspirational knowledge basing on the experience of Emmanuel Tonya. Emmanuel Tonya set in front of a teacher during the primary education and from there took initiatives to individual learning. By the use of distance learning Emmanuel is now holding a PhD in business management of the Open University of Tanzania.

Methodology

The paper's methodology bases on the case study which wants to inform and inspire the communities on the different ways of learning. This is a qualitative analysis study on the learning experience. The study used qualitative method to explain the experience of Emmanuel Tonya as the learning object of the study. The learning ladder was used as experienced as a learning adventure, a period of personal growth, and also leads to a strong appreciation of the differences between doing research in practice and research as described in texts (Pietersen, 2002). The final step in this phenomenological analysis was either to derive individual situated structures, and/or a general account of the structure of an event in learning process.

Education experience analysis

The analysis of the paper was based on explaining the ladder which Emmanuel took until reaches the highest level of a PhD. The ladder started way back in 1973 when joined a primary education. Emmanuel completed standard seven in 1979 without being selected to secondary education, by then he was 14years old. During those days there were very few private secondary schools where one could join as private provided having resources to finance the programme. However, during the stay at home working in small farms, Emmanuel started doing a distance sort of leaning. The distance education experience started by doing a certificate in bible knowledge from the Emmaus Bible College -Arusha, and later a certificate in farming from the Institute of Adult Education. Therefore Emmanuel stayed home for three years until 1982 after when the then Member of Parliament of Ludewa and Depute Speaker of the National Assembly (Mathias Kihale) organized a tuition class for those left without chances to join secondary schools

The MP agreed with the Roman Catholic Madunda parish to offer redundant buildings which were used by middle school to be used for the training/preparation of youth for qualifying test leading to seat for National form four examinations out of formal system. The training went smoothly for three years out of the Education system of Tanzania, and passed the qualifying test and lowed to seat for National Examination as private candidate in 1985. Emmanuel scored a division two in business studies; as this was out of the formal system Emmanuel did not join Advanced level. The decision was to use the business knowledge doing small business in the Njombe market. During the small business undertaking, it happened an opportunity of direct employment with the Cooperative Union. This was 1987 just after joining the cooperative union; an opportunity arose for sitting National Business Examinations. Emmanuel set for the examination while working and got a certificate in business management of the National Examination Council in 1988. The certificate was an inspiration for more efforts studying.

In the year 1988 just after receiving the certificate of business management, Emmanuel joined a Diploma course from the International Correspondence School in Glasgow –UK. The course took around one and half years when graduated in 1990 in Diploma of Business management and Accounting. This was a great achievement towards further studies preferably through distance

education. This has been a result of transformation of Education system in higher learning institutions. The transformation of education has been engineered by several scholars including professor Mbwette and quoted by Ikwaba and Sabaya, concluded that education system must be changing as a result of technology, culture, social activities, gender aspects and environment (Mbwette, *What Makes a Well Managed Modern Open and Distance Learning (ODL); University Closer to the Ideal University of the Future?*, 2011; Ikwaba & Sabaya, 2015).

The factors which has lead to the growth of education through distance learning of which Emmanuel went through is supported by Nihuka (2015), when noted that through digital influence the learning process for out of conventional. The use of computers for searching and learning was an encouragement for the distance learning while working, despite the earlier stages of using computers in leaning during those days. With the change of environment for learning as flexible learning opportunities encouraged Emmanuel to think of higher education through distance. Once may ask, if Emmanuel had the Diploma why he did not opted to join conversional University? The answer is clear as noted by Nihuka (2015), that ODL was designed not only as strategy to address challenges of limited learning opportunities but, rather open up the education opportunity for majority who might have no access to higher education and needs to tape other opportunities (Nihuka, 2015; Ikwaba & Sabaya, 2015).

The opening up of the opportunity for distance education was a great to Emmanuel as the establishment of the Open University of Tanzania. Emmanuel Joined the Open University of Tanzania in the Bachelor of Commerce in 1997 and completed courses in 2001. Despite the programme completion, Emmanuel Graduated in 2002. Just after completion, Emmanuel joined Njombe District Council as Trade officer and Business Development Officer from 2003. Having the experience of the Open University of Tanzania and the education delivery mode; this was an opportunity of further learning. Joined Masters of Business Administration of the Open University in 2005 and completed in 2008. After working for five years Emmanuel though little of the knowledge is used in the Local Government, then opted to shift to Open University of Tanzania as Assistant Lecturer.

Joining the Open University of Tanzania was another room for more advancement in education as per scheme of service for academic staff (DVC-Academics, 2015). According to succession plan of the Faculty of Business management, Emmanuel was supposed to undergo a PhD studies to be promoted to a Lecturer. Emmanuel joined a PhD programme in 2010 and completed in 2014 and graduated in 2015. The PhD study was done by thesis from the Open University of Tanzania. The completion time was exactly three years, one could ask a question how was at this successful? The issue which managed to complete for a short period were of two fold, one was experience of distance learning which encourage self search of materials and hard work; and two is the level of commitment towards learning (Bisanda, 2015). Emmanuel Tonya is now a lecturer of the Open University of Tanzania.

Challenges of distance education

The major objectives of the Open and distance Education is the provision of equal educational opportunities to all citizens at different levels of education, specifically for those who need education advancement while doing other activities (Agyemang, 2014). With all the good objectives and education prospects through distance education, there are challenges for one to climb the ladder. The distance education system challenge involves or has been contributed by student and sometimes by the teachers. The contribution of challenges has been emphasized by Walsh (2011), that students need extra effort towards education success. The challenges affect the students the chances of success in completing a programme in time (Walsh, 2011).

The major challenge of distance education encountered by students is the real-time feedback for students or teachers (Basu, 2012). With the challenge of feedback, Emmanuel failed to graduate in time just due to one of the facilitator of a course when on sabbatical leave without realizing results to University. The challenge of results feedback faces majority of students which affect the students plan for their studies and even planning for further advancement.

The real time student feedback other challenges includes, the stakeholders change of mindset. Many people still have negative or mixed feeling about the quality of ODL outputs. The quality ODL graduates have been proved to as equal to other graduates from conversational Universities (Dron & Anderson, 2014). Also, political will of the stakeholders is as important for support of distance education development. The stakeholders need to change mind toward output of students through distance education, stakeholders assume distance learning is cheaper as compared by conversational education (Mbwette, 2015). The concept results into planning for small budgets for implementation of activities eventually the activities fail in the way. The delivery mode requires modern infrastructures including internet, libraries and updated hard copy materials for facilitating easy access of materials by students (Walsh, 2011). Other challenges includes, handling social and family issues while studying, financial support challenge as seen distance education needs financial investment.

In view of these challenges, Emmanuel encountered all them or some of them. However, to overcome the challenges Emmanuel used several strategies including hard working towards the studies without giving up. Some of the challenges were solved by creating study groups in Mbeya, Iringa and Ruvuma where Emmanuel was a member, these groups could be established through internet but it was not easier. During those days the internet connectivity was very poor, even WhatsApp were not there to support the group communication which necessitated physical visits to make sure materials were shared among the group members for better success despite the travel and accommodation costs.

Conclusion

Distance learning is a mode of education delivery as conversional mode. The difference is the delivery set up. It is concluded by this experience paper that, learners from different learning modes should be accepted depending on their acquired knowledge. It is concluded by advising instructors to take note of the amount of work included in the learning programmes as the learners experience different difficulties in doing what is required to complete a programme. Also the instructors should balance their responsibility for guiding distance learners and the experiential learning opportunities of independence and creativity.

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