

Learner Support in Open Distance and E-Learning for Adult Students Using Technologies

G. P. Baloyi

*University of South Africa, Department of Adult Basic Education and Training, P.O. Box 392,
Unisa, 0003, South Africa*

Telephone: 0124292646, Fax: 0124298812, E-mail: baloygp@unisa.ac.za

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ABSTRACT In this paper, the researcher investigated learner support in the Department of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) at the University of South Africa (Unisa), the largest dedicated ODL institution in South Africa. A review of literature studies identified the Community of Inquiry model as useful in this context. Thus, this model is used as a conceptual framework for the empirical inquiry. A mixed-method approach comprising two consecutive phases was employed to investigate the research questions. A self-designed questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data from a random sample of 400 students registered for the ABET diploma module (phase 1), followed by face-to-face interviews with selected lecturers and students (phase 2). The scope of the paper was limited to ABET lecturers, ABET diploma students and selected Unisa learner support systems, such as myUnisa, which includes a web-based discussion forum. The themes that emerged from the questionnaire and the interviews demonstrate clearly that learner support using new technologies in the ABET Department is crucial to ensure learner success. The findings suggest that the distance between the university and students needs to be reduced even more to ensure that student support reaches all students equitably. The new technologies have a role to play when considering this problem.