**Vice Chancellor’s Report on Visit to ODeL at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (17th February 2025)**

1. **Online Learning Journey at UEAB**

UEAB adopted a blended learning model integrating both asynchronous and synchronous learning methods. The asynchronous learning is managed through Moodle-based LMS, while synchronous learning is facilitated using Zoom Education licenses.

Significant progress has been made in implementing online learning through the Directorate of Online Learning and Distance Education (ODeL) which was established in 2021. This initiative has enhanced access to education by close to 5000 users through integrating Learning Management Systems (LMS), video conferencing tools, and structured online pedagogy training for faculty and students.

Faculty and student training sessions have been conducted to enhance proficiency in online learning. Since 2021, various workshops and capacity-building seminars have strengthened online module development, quality assurance, and instructional design. A total of 15 training sessions have been conducted to build capacity among faculty and students so far.

Major milestones in the online learning journey are.

1. Establishment of the Directorate in 2021.
2. Opening of the Elearning Centre Building in 2022.
3. Attainment of Provisional accreditation of the ODeL centre by CUE in 2022.
4. Integration of LMS with the University Management Information System (UMIS) and later on to Icampus, streamlining course registration and enrolment.
5. **Staffing of ODeL**

The ODeL Directorate is staffed by three key personnel:

1. Dr. Meshack Misoi (Director),
2. Felix Chepsiror (E-learning Coordinator),
3. Brian Lelei (E-learning Support).

This team plays a crucial role in overseeing the development, implementation, and support of online learning at UEAB.

Soon, an Instructional Designer (ID) will be needed as soon as the first phase of the module writing process is complete. A furnished office for the ID is already available.

1. **Elearning Support**
   1. **Faculty Support**

Faculty support is a key aspect of UEAB's online learning strategy. Regular training sessions on course design, LMS utilization, and interactive teaching methods have been conducted. The introduction of an automated help desk has improved technical assistance for faculty.

* 1. **Student Support**

UEAB has established mechanisms to ensure students receive adequate support for online learning. New students undergo orientation sessions to familiarize them with LMS, Zoom, and e-learning best practices. A dedicated e-learning support desk addresses technical and academic queries. Moreover, efforts are being made to provide affordable internet access options and digital devices for students.

1. **ODeL Centre Accreditation**

The ODeL Centre at UEAB received provisional accreditation from CUE, with significant progress made towards fulfilling accreditation requirements. However, some gaps remain that need to be addressed for full certification. These include:

* Strengthening instructional design training for faculty to improve module quality.
* Increasing student engagement through interactive online learning tools.
* Enhancing technical support infrastructure to ensure seamless learning experiences.
* Implementing a comprehensive assessment framework to uphold academic integrity in online examinations.
* Addressing aspects of inclusivity especially about those with disabilities as well us those who face access challenges due to lack of gadgets etc.

1. **Infrastructure Development**

To support the growing demands of online learning, UEAB has made investments in infrastructure, including increasing LMS storage capacity, upgrading Moodle to version 4.4, and enhancing campus internet bandwidth.

1. **Module Development**

A structured approach to online module development has been adopted. Faculty members have received training on content creation, and iSpring Suite 11 is being used to develop interactive modules. However, module development delays remain a significant challenge. Recommendations to expedite the process include:

* Establishing a dedicated instructional design team to assist faculty.
* Providing financial incentives to faculty for timely module completion.
* Setting clear deadlines and accountability measures for content development.

1. **Challenges and Suggested Solutions**

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| **Challenges** | **Suggested Solutions** |
| **Technological Limitations**:  Insufficient internet bandwidth and low laptop penetration among students hinder seamless online learning experiences. | Expansion of storage for LMS and increased internet bandwidth through collaboration with Kenya Education Network (KENET). |
| **Faculty Adoption and Training**:  While faculty participation in LMS usage is high (91% as of March 2024), new faculty members often require additional training to optimize platform utilization. | More targeted training on LMS navigation, online pedagogy, and use of course-authoring tools such as iSpring Suite 11. |
| **Synchronous Learning Participation**:  The use of Zoom for real-time classes remains low, with only 65 faculty members engaging in video conferencing out of 161. | Continuous integration of Zoom scheduling with LMS to encourage synchronous engagement. |
| **Online Examination Integrity**:  Issues such as navigation difficulties, timing constraints, and ensuring exam integrity remain key concerns. | Acquisition of proctoring tools like Respondus Monitor and Lockdown Browser to enhance exam integrity. |
| **Module Development Delays**:  The slow pace of online module development has been attributed to the initial lack of clear policies and the need for more training in instructional design. | Accelerated development through faculty training and active departmental involvement, with completion expected by the end of the 2024/2025 academic year. |
| **Student Engagement and Retention**:  Some students struggle with motivation and consistency in online learning. | Implement mentorship programs, interactive learning techniques, and gamified content to improve engagement. |

1. **Conclusion and way forward**

The University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, has made commendable strides in online learning, but ongoing challenges need to be addressed for full optimization thus ensuring the sustainability and efficiency of online learning. Going forward full accreditation of the ODeL Centre is being sought as well online accreditation of 13 online programs. Additionally, the procurement of modern eLearning facilities such as smartboards, high-speed routers, and multimedia lecture recording equipment is necessary. Further enhancements, such as cloud-based data backup and AI-powered learning analytics, are recommended for future development.