

Access for success: Exploring affordances theory in a new hybrid model teacher education programme^{1 2}

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ABSTRACT

Situated within the ambit of Affordances Theory, this paper reports on an empirical and descriptive investigation into a newly introduced hybrid-model teacher education programme in a developing context. The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which the first two student cohorts availed themselves of the ICT affordances provided by the institution, which could favourably compare to those found in a developed context. The study adopted the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design. This study involved two phases in which the quantitative data were first collected through surveys, followed by the collection of qualitative data that involved individual interviews, focus group discussions and documents. The participants included students, online tutors and an instructional designer. Findings from both cohorts show students rarely participated online due to diverse reasons, which included limited access to the internet, the cost of bandwidth, technophobia, and inadequate online and academic support. The findings reaffirmed the interdependent relationship between both individuals and the affordances that exist in an environment. If institutions paid adequate attention to the findings, it would help to stem the tide of poor retention rates in this mode of delivery. Further recommendations for research and practice include the need for institutions to provide relevant technology affordances, adequate and relevant student support, and ongoing monitoring of the quality of their programmes to encourage access for success.

Keywords: access, success, affordances, hybrid model, teacher education

BACKGROUND

Although a contact university, the institution under study has been involved in distance education (DE) through its Faculty of Education for almost two decades. Its DE programmes are geared towards teachers' qualification upgrades and were paper-based when they started with mirror replicas of some learning material on the university website. However, in its Vision 2025, the University adopted web-supported learning for all its programmes, irrespective of the delivery mode. In October 2016, it introduced a hybrid-model BEd Honours in Teacher Education and Professional Development (TEPD). On-campus students can

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take advantage of the technology affordances provided by the University because their technology profile could favourably compare to other institutions in the developed world. However, the same could not be said for its DE students due to their diverse profiles.

Technology affordances made available to the TEPD hybrid-model programme

The University has adopted the Blackboard learning management system (LMS). Given the technology profile of the students registered for the new programme, the University developed three contact sessions targeted to meet three different purposes. The first one is to train students in the use of the LMS, while the second and the third target module orientation and module consolidation in preparation for examinations, respectively. In addition, printed copies of core readings are made available to students for offline engagement with weekly online activities combined with tutor support and access to e-library resources. To provide quality programmes, the institution also provides continual support to module coordinators, presenters, and tutors on how to navigate the LMS. Due to the baseline data collected before the commencement of the programme, DE students had access to only three of the available repositories on the LMS. These are (i) online digital resources, (ii) discussion forums and (iii) wiki summaries.

AFFORDANCES THEORY AND ACCESS FOR SUCCESS

Scholars over the term 'affordance' was coined by James Gibson in 1977 and was later developed by Norman in 1988 (Bankole & Venter, 2017; Blewett & Hugo, 2016; Ingold, 2018). In the words of Gibson (1979: 127), 'The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes... It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment'. Norman (2002: 9), on the other hand, defines it as 'the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used'. Commenting on the differences that exist between the two authors, Blewett and Hugo (2016) explain that, while the focus of Gibson was on the affordances that are latent in the environment, Norman's was rather on what people saw, which would necessitate their action. Thus, if people could not perceive it, they could not act on it (Norman, 1999). Further commenting on the difference, McGrenere and Ho (2000: 2) assert, 'The frame of reference for Gibson is the action capabilities of the actor, whereas for Norman it is the mental and perceptual capabilities of the actor', which, according to Norman, is susceptible to, for instance, the culture and/or the experience of the actor (Blewett & Hugo, 2016). Therefore, 'an affordance is... an opportunity for action' (Volkoff & Strong, 2013: 822) and, at the same time, the 'complementarity of the acting organism and the acted-upon environment' (Gaver, 1991: 2). Although many scholars have attempted to probe the difference further, Soegaard (2003), cited in Blewett and Hugo (2016: 59), 'suggested a simpler understanding, that Gibson's affordances are more about the utility/usefulness of an object whereas Norman's affordances are more about the usability of the object'.

The latter assertion by Soegaard resonates with this paper because, to move on with the rest of the world, DE institutions in the developing-economy context are striving to provide information and communications technology (ICT) affordances for their programmes. However, it appears that there is a gap between what they make available and the extent to which the target audience avails themselves of the opportunity (Mao, 2014; Smale & Regalado, 2017) due to diverse reasons. The target audience, in this case, include staff (both administrative and academic) members, part-time presenters, and tutors and students. Therefore, one could agree with Latour (2005), cited in Blewett and Hugo (2016), that both the objects and the actors are of equal importance. The attempt made by this paper was to assess to what extent an institution in the developing context has provided relevant ICT affordances (objects) to its target audience and how far the latter (actors) has taken advantage of these.

The capability of ICT affordances for education access, if well implemented, is well documented in the literature (Dlamini & Coleman, 2017). According to Holmberg (2001), 'access' refers to opening

opportunities for people, who were once excluded, to attend college, or giving a second chance to intending students. The first World Access to Higher Education Day took place on the 28th of November 2018 to raise awareness regarding access into this level of study (World Access to Higher Education, 2019). According to the organisation, in every country in the world (with evidence from over 90% of countries), participation in higher education (HE) is unequal, while 'across 76 of the lowest-income countries, the poorest people are 20 times less likely to complete a HE course than the richest'. Almost all countries in the world are prioritising access to HE, due especially to the value it brings to the economy. Although authors are diverse in their understanding and explanation of the value of HE to economic development in general (Mollar & Cuthbert, 2015; Tomlinson, 2018), there is a consensus that there are both market and non-market benefits inherent in it (Kruss et al., 2015).

The South African context is no exception, especially given its transformation goal due to its dismal political past. For instance, access to high-quality, post-school education and training, which is responsive to the needs of society and the economy, remains the country's focus (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2018). In the same vein, the country recognises DE as a precursor for opening the doors of opportunities for many disadvantaged students (DHET, 2014).

Although providing access to HE is a laudable idea, and it is often the argument for encouraging DE to thrive, scholars have argued that access without success is a proverbial 'revolving door' through which as many students as are provided access eventually exit without actually completing their studies (Aluko, 2015). Irrespective of the mode of delivery, success should be of concern not just to HE institutions, but also to every stakeholder, including students. The reasons for lack of success in this mode are multifaceted (Aluko, 2015; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Tinto, 1975). One could group these into institutional, faculty and student factors. Tait (2015) stresses that the risks of student incompleteness in DE are higher due to the emphasis on access and inclusion, which is not the focus of elite institutions that appear to record better success rates. Therefore, student access to and success in the university continue to be an area of considerable research interest and has been the subject of a great deal of research over the past 30 years (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). In South Africa, there has been an enormous improvement in student enrolment rates in HE. For instance, they have increased by 23% from 2008 (799 490) to 2013 (983 698) with a target of 1.6 million in 2030 (DHET, 2018), according to the National Development Plan. Nonetheless, access goes beyond quantity. The question should rather move to the quality of the access provided to students because access may not necessarily mirror quality (Aluko, n.d.). Voigt and Hundrieser (2008) have argued that students persisting to the completion of their educational goals is a key gauge of student success, and, therefore, institutional success. If completion rates are to be improved, DE institutions need to be continually dynamic and pragmatic in their approach, which technological affordances make possible if well implemented.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study took place within an HE institution context that offers DE programmes through its Faculty of Education. Participants included DE students, module presenters at contact sessions, online tutors, an instructional designer and administrative staff members. The paper adopted the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design that involved two phases in which the quantitative data were first collected through surveys followed by the collection of qualitative data that involved individual interviews and focus group discussions. The purpose of the quantitative instrument was to generate data that would guide the questions for the interview schedules while the qualitative data also helped explain and interpret the quantitative data (Center for Research and Innovation in Teaching, n.d.).

Quantitative data

The sampling technique adopted for the quantitative approach of the study for both the first and the second student cohorts was the Total Population Sampling technique, a type of non-random, purposive sampling

(Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016) because of the relatively small numbers of both cohorts (1st cohort: 250; 2nd cohort: 230). Other reasons were that each population met the benchmarks set for the student-participants (that is, they had to be registered for the new hybrid programme, because the programme was in its beginning phase). Data collection for the survey included both online and paper-based techniques to increase the number of respondents. Data analysis was done by the Statistics Department of the University using SPSS. Participants' responses to the few open questions were read several times to identify codes and themes from them. Lastly, data were also collected from the data analytics feature available on the LMS.

Qualitative data

To generate qualitative data, the researcher also purposively selected participants for the focus group discussions and the individual interview. Regarding the students, the researcher, with the help of the Student Call Centre, called students who would be attending classes at the contact sessions at the five contact session centres – Durban, Nelspruit, Polokwane, Pretoria and Richards Bay. The purpose was to identify willing student-participants. The focus group discussions took place at the five centres with a total of 30 students in attendance, although a higher number was expected per venue. Table 1 reflects the participants' distribution.

Other participants for the focus group discussions included six tutors, while a separate group interview was conducted with the instructional designer. The latter took place over many short meetings. Documents perused by the researcher included research reports from the unit responsible for the management of DE programmes. The researcher applied inductive thematic analysis that emphasises identifying patterns of themes generating initial codes, searching for themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report to the qualitative data (Mortensen, 2020). Table 1 reflects the participants' distribution.

*Table 1:
The distribution of the participants in relation to the instruments (2019)*

Instrument	Participants	Codes	Number of participants
Survey	Students	SS	126
Focus group (FG) discussion	Students	FGSDB (Durban, 6) FGSNS (Nelspruit, 5) FGSPK (Polokwane, 7) FGSPT (Pretoria, 7) FGSRB (Richards Bay, 5)	30
FG discussion	Tutors	FGT	6
Interview schedule (individual)	Instructional designer	ID	1
Total participants			163

FINDINGS

The findings in this section have been presented based on the developed themes from the qualitative and quantitative data collected. These are linked to the purpose of the study, which is to examine to what extent students in the new programme availed themselves of the technology affordances available to them. The implications of these findings, in light of the Affordances Theory adopted for this study, is discussed later.

Results from quantitative analysis

Changes in student demography

In 2015, the unit collected baseline data to ascertain the likely profile of DE students that would be coming into the new hybrid model programme. The purpose was to determine the kind of support they would need in the new programme. As reflected in Table 2, findings showed that the majority of the first-cohort students that participated in the study in 2015 were between the ages of 41 to 50 (62.3%), followed by ages 51+ (17.3%) and ages 31 to 40 (15.7%). In contrast to these, the lowest number of students fell within the bracket of ages 21 to 30. This picture depicts the previous age groups of students that have been enrolling for the previously paper-based DE programmes at the institution.

Table 2:
Age brackets comparison (2015, 2018, 2019)

Age brackets	2015	2018 (1st cohort)	2019 (2nd cohort)
21 – 30	4.6%	27.2%	35.2%
31 – 40	15.7%	31.2%	27.7%
41 – 50	62.3%	32.4%	28.9%
51+	17.3%	8.7%	8.2%
Missing frequency	0.5%	0.6%	0
Total	100.4%	100.1%	100.0%

However, within this current study (as reflected in Table 2), the data collected on the first cohort showed a different picture in which there was a sharp increase in younger generation students (21-30, 27.2%; 31-40, 31.2%). This pattern was also repeated with the second cohort, however, with an increase in the 21-to-30 age brackets (35.2%) in comparison to ages 31 to 40 (27.7%). The comparison of both cohorts showed a decline in the age profile of older students (ages 41 to 50 and 51+).

Student visit to the university website and the frequency of their LMS access

As earlier indicated, one of the major changes in the new programme was that students could only submit assignments online, which necessitates their online visit to the LMS. This ruling is in contrast with the previous programme in which it was not compulsory for students to go online. As reflected in Table 3, a comparison was made between student visits to the university website in both 2015 and 2018. This comparison showed less than a third (19.0%) of the student-participants in 2015 ever visited the university website in comparison to 92.6% in 2018.

Table 3:
Visit to the university website (2015 and 2018) – student website visits

Response	Year	
	2015	2018
Yes	326	237
%	25.7%	92.6%
No	942	19
%	74.3%	7.4%

Response	Year	
	2015	2018
Total	1 268	256
%	100%	100

Table 4 shows the frequency of the first cohort LMS login.

Table 4:
Frequency of LMS login 2018 (1st cohort)

Frequency	Response	%
Once a day	70	27.3%
Once a week	119	46.5%
Once a month	35	13.7%
3 times per block	13	5.1%
2 times per block	4	1.6%
Never	16	6.3%
Total	255	100.5%

In addition, Table 4 shows the majority of the student-participants (46.5%) logged in once a week followed by those that logged in once a day (27.3%), once a month (13.7%), and those who rarely logged in (three times and two times per block respectively). A block is made up of a six-month cycle. The unit was surprised at the fact that some students (16 or 6.3%) claimed to have never logged into the LMS. Although this appeared to be a scant number, in a DE programme, the number counts, because the percentage of a given cohort could refer to a large number of students in programmes where more students are enrolled. In addition, it also signifies inactive students with the tendency to drop out of the programme if they do not get the right support at the right time.

Student use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries

The data reflecting student use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries are from 2018 and 2019 because, prior to these periods, students did not make use of these repositories.

Table 5:
Student use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries (2018)

	Online digital resources		Discussion forums		Wiki summaries	
	Response	%	Response	%	Response	%
Yes	99	57.3	75	43.4	36	20.8
No	74	42.7	98	56.6	137	79.2
Total	173	100	173	100	173	100
Paper responses	164					
Online responses	27					
Total	173					

Table 5 shows that from the first cohort in 2018, 99 (57.3%) participants confirmed that they had made use of the online resources attached to their modules, while 74 (42.7%) answered in the negative. Regarding wiki summaries, the responses showed that a minimal number of participants (36, 20.8%) availed themselves of this technology. Although the institution chose to limit student activity to only the discussion board, due to the reasons they gave for low online participation rates (which are discussed later), the study conducted in 2019 showed a repetition of the same trend based on data analytics from the LMS. This trend is shown in Table 6, which reflects a sample of five active modules.

*Table 6:
A sample of the discussion board analysis of five active modules*

Module	Number of registered students	Highest number of participants in discussion board	Percentage of registered students
Module 1	967	16	1.65
Module 2	925	5	0.54
Module 3	847	32	3.77
Module 4	770	12	1.55
Module 5	656	17	2.59
Total	4 165	82	2.02

In all five active modules, of the 4165 registrations, only 82 (2.02%) of the registered students availed themselves of this technology (Fourie, 2019).

Results from qualitative analysis

The researcher followed up all the responses reflected above with the second-cohort participants of students during focus group discussions that took place at all the contact session venues. These are highlighted under two broad themes: (i) perceptions of the participants regarding the usage of online learning and (ii) reasons for student low participation rates in the use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries. The explanation of each theme is supported with some comments from the tutors and the instructional designer that participated in the study.

Perceptions of the participants regarding the usage of online learning

The student-participants' perceptions regarding the usage of online learning were positive; however, this was punctuated by unhappiness from some participants. Firstly, most of them felt the University has taken a step in the right direction, especially in line with the government's directives that all teacher education graduates exhibit basic ICT skills (DHET, 2015) coupled with the digital advancement of the century. Buttressing this, some participants indicated the programme has added value to their lives, which they lacked before their registration. This includes their ability, for instance, to 'have access to their emails and use the facility', and 'an exposure to the LMS with its online components'. As expressed by one of the participants,

I wanted to add... the technical skills of this programme. It's a bit done online and by doing so we have gained a lot in terms of digitally... the world is changing at a rapid rate. (FGSNS4)

Nonetheless, some of them still yearned for the old programme that had no online component as expressed by a participant,

It is difficult to do most of the activities online. They are not informative as like face-to-face discussions or in contact. Yeah, a lot is missing when we go online. (FGSRB4)

Another participant lamented,

For me, it's difficult because... places where we live. We have a problem of networks. [I] am not promoting the online because if you have no data or Wi-Fi on your phone it's difficult... (FGSRB6)

Although the tutors and the instructional designer sympathised with the students' plight and hoped that, with more support, things would improve, the comment below by a tutor showed that students in general have no choice but to adapt to online learning:

Students expected something like the old programme; content driven and long contact sessions. Many do not understand. (FGT1)

Reasons for student low participation rates in the use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries

According to the student-participants, they rarely participated online due to diverse reasons, which included limited access to the internet, the cost of bandwidth, technophobia and inadequate online support. For instance, lamenting limited access to the internet, a participant said,

I've got [a] problem with especially the internet. It's easy to submit [an] assignment online. It's easy, but to discuss with other students. (FGSRB5)

Due to

sometimes the unavailability of resources like data. (FGSNS5)

The online system puts us at a disadvantage because it comes out of our pockets also. (FGSNS2)

Another lamented,

Sometimes, the schools like mine do not have the access to internet. So, it means you need to have more money for data. (FGSNS5)

On technophobia, a tutor said,

It is very easy for students who are computer literate to cope, but it's a challenge to elderly students.

Buttressing this, two participants from Pretoria (FGSPT1 and FGSPT2) indicated they were supporting older students with technical assistance and advised that more support should be provided for older students.

Another participant, citing lack of technical skills, said,

I think the reason why [the majority] didn't participate, is because some of us don't understand technical skills. We don't understand how to use computers. (FGSNS4)

Although computer ownership and ICT training are compulsory aspects of the programme, one of the tutors felt the LMS training provided for students was inadequate. According to her,

we put them through a one-day, 4-hour intensive training process, but it's so brief. It is so quick that, it's almost like a hit and run.

To alleviate the situation, a student said,

The ICT [guys] was supposed to do a follow up... remember you are teaching me something I haven't yet done practically. (FGSRB2)

In addition, the complaints from students regarding available technical assistance they received when they ran into trouble with their studies were buttressed by the instructional designer, who said

more staff would be needed to assist students adequately with their studies. (ID)

As, at the time of collecting data from this study, there was evidence that the dedicated call centre for students was also understaffed. To further compound the problem, students complained about slow or nonresponse of tutors to their postings. A student-participant lamented

Sometimes, the tutor may come with late clarity on assignment, and we have already submitted our assignments by then. (FGSPT5)

Generally, regarding online activities, a student from Pretoria (FGSPT3) said the online discussion group was not working because students also have a way of managing their studies. According to her,

because we can form our group. For example, [I] am doing it with my friends and colleagues in Free State... a WhatsApp group.

When the student's attention was drawn to the presence of an online tutor, she responded,

It's working fine without the tutors.

Nonetheless, it appeared these comments tied in with an inadequate number of tutors because many resigned due to poor payment. In addition, students expressed their frustration regarding the lack of feedback, marks or comments on their assignments. However, tutors complained that questions often posted by students were not scholarly. A tutor commented:

I think most students use the discussion board to ask questions. They are definitely not engaging at all. (FGT3)

Also, most of the few students who participated were frustrated because many others that did not contribute to the discussions only wanted to see what others had posted. The data analytics gathered on the second cohort from the university LMS also indicated students' questions were limited mostly to clarification on assignments, study material and contact sessions (Fourie, 2019).

Discussion of the findings in the light of affordances theory

As earlier discussed, the crux of affordances theory in relation to this study is that affordances cannot be properties, or even features, of the environment alone, but are relations between the abilities of organisms and features of the environment (Chemero, 2003). This implies that 'affordances do not disappear when there is no local animal to perceive and take advantage of them' (Chemero 2003: 193).

Therefore, the discussion in this section revolves around three major questions, which are:

1. To what extent has the institution under study provided technological affordances to its students and other related stakeholders in relation to students' studies?
2. To what extent have the stakeholders availed themselves of available affordances?
3. To what extent have prevailing conditions aided or discouraged stakeholders from availing themselves of such affordances?

The extent to which the institution has provided technological affordances to its students and other related stakeholders

From all indications from this study, the institution has made technology affordances available to its stakeholders. For instance, the Blackboard LMS that it has provided, like other similar information systems, 'facilitate e-learning by supporting teaching and learning, and performs administrative tasks and facilitates communication between instructors and students' (Holmes & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2018: 21). According to these authors, its 'interactive tools such as blogs, wikis, chat rooms and discussion tools all have the potential to facilitate constructivist approaches to learning in contrast to traditional transmission models.' Even though contact programmes often use most of the available tools on the LMS, the DE programmes did not use the same due to the technology profile of the students. In addition, the institution provided other affordances to support the users of the LMS further. These included initial and continuous refresher courses for both permanent and part-time staff on the use of the LMS, compulsory ICT training for students on how to use the LMS, and the availability of a call centre and support staff, such as presenters and online tutors, to assist student module coordinators in their task. Pozzi, Pigni and Vitari (2014: 6) in their work grouped all these affordances as 'affordance existence', which differs from affordance perception, affordance actualisation, and affordance effect. According to the authors, 'Affordances exist whether the actor cares about them or not, whether they are perceived or not, and even whether there is perceptual information for them or not.' In their later work, Wang, Wang and Tang (2018) explained that, for this to happen, institutions need to recognise affordances, and adopt and actualise them in support of their goals before they could expect any effect. Nonetheless, Markus and Silver (2008) have warned the affordances must be functional for them to be regarded as goal oriented. In effect, this means DE institutions need to seriously consider the context of their students before expending money on ICT affordances. This is because the 'organisational level journey' totally differs from the 'individual journey' (Markus & Silver, 2008: 64), which is discussed in the next section.

The extent to which stakeholders availed themselves of available affordances

As earlier asserted by Kordt (2018), although affordances may be present, they only offer opportunities for action; they do not force the individual to follow a certain course of action. This means students need to go through their own 'individual journey'. Evidence from this study showed that very few students (2.02%) avail themselves of the opportunity provided by the University. Most students enrolled on the programme hardly participate online. In addition, some students failed to attend the ICT training meant to assist them in the use of LMS. This failure caused such students to struggle with their studies and, sometimes, to eventually drop out of the programme. Although situated in an American context, Smale and Regalado (2017: 1) in a study earlier warned that

despite a widely held view of college students as 'digital natives' proficient in the use of digital technology, undergraduates do not all share the same technology background or own and use technology to the same extent.

Since the affordance lens helps us understand the relationship between technology and the human actor (Wang et al., 2018), for students to make use of available affordances, they need to perceive and actualise the affordances. Both processes are important because users may encounter problems regarding

how to actualise them; thus, identifying and solving them become critical, which would translate into providing adequate support for them.

The extent to which prevailing conditions have aided or discouraged stakeholders from availing themselves of such affordances

Findings from this study showed that students were sometimes confronted with situations beyond their control. Examples of these were internet penetration and the cost of bandwidth. The data available at the inception of the new hybrid programme (2016) reflected that 30% of students have regular access to ICTs and connectivity; another 30% have irregular access, while about 40% have little or no access. These statistics are not unconnected with the country's internet penetration profile that has only recently moved up 2% from 52% in January 2017 with 29.2 million of the population having access to the internet on their mobile phones (My BroadBand, 2018). This is even though the country is one of the largest ICT markets in Africa by value with the number of internet users as a percentage of the total population in the country nearing 60% (Kemp, 2018). Other prevailing conditions, as at the time of this study, included inadequate technical assistance and an inadequate number of online tutors provided to students. Smale and Regalado (2017: 73) in their recommendations for the use of technology in HE advised,

it is critically important to consider commuter and non-traditional undergraduates, who may have less access to the internet or other digital technology and more pressure on the time available for their academic work.

This is the case with most DE students in the developing context. Institutions in such a context need to be innovative by, for example, training academics in their use of LMS platforms, which will provide the right conditions that were referred to earlier by Chemero (2003).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Although technological affordances are adding great value to DE programmes and increasing access for success, the fact remains that certain conditions must be met for these to be maximised. Apart from DE institutions providing a renowned LMS, they need to monitor the students' technology profile continually to support them adequately and to aid programme design. It is necessary to tailor the compulsory ICT training to students' needs in this instance. For students to maximise the benefits of the training, it should be divided into smaller modules, and not just be a one-off programme. Institutions, as well, need to improve the provision of adequate technical and online support staff to students. More regular and updated training is also recommended for both part-time and full-time staff members to enable them to provide the needed support to students.

Nonetheless, students also have a role to play by seizing every opportunity they are given. All these become important given increasing technology affordances that keep influencing academic offerings in the field. Scholars have argued that access goes beyond the quantitative to the quality of access given. Gidleya et al. (2010), cited in Aluko (n.d.), advised that social inclusion should not only focus on neoliberal ideas such as numbers and percentages, because those do not necessarily reflect student participation or success, nor do they reveal anything about the quality of the education that is accessed. Student success rates in DE is a sore point because of the often-reported lower rates in comparison to full-time students (Tait, 2015). Therefore, it is important to improve these for the sake of the students' self-esteem and the reputation of the institutions offering such programmes.

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