

“Digitize Me”: Generating E-Learning Profiles for Media and Communication Students in a Jamaican Tertiary-Level Institution

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Abstract:

The purpose of this project was to develop an e-learning profile for a group of media and communication students enrolled in a Jamaican tertiary-level institution in order to make informed decisions most the appropriate [online] learning complement for these students. The objectives sought to determine the e-learning profile of media and communication students but more specifically, the profile examined students’ demographic data, their technology access, usage, proficiency and comfort levels as well as their learning styles, preferences, behaviours, strategies and their preferences for specific teaching styles.

The research utilised a survey research design and the participants involved in the research were ninety-eight students from all year groups in the programme. Findings reveal that the “typical” media and communication student is a young Jamaican adult with limited technology access, usage and proficiency, who stays connected with others largely by phone texts, phone calls, emails, instant messages and posts via the Facebook social network, who has a visual-learning orientation, is a sequential learner who is extrinsically motivated and who readily employs surface learning strategies.

Keywords: E-Learning Profiles, Media and Communication, Online Learning, Typical Student, Jamaican Tertiary Learner

INTRODUCTION

The institution in which this research was conducted is a Jamaican, government-owned higher education institution which offers technical and professional level education and training for candidates in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. This research was conducted in one of institution’s five faculties which delivers courses of study in technical and vocational education and communication and media.

The Media and Communication Programme

The media and communication programme offered by the faculty is a four-year undergraduate degree which commenced in the 2009/10 academic year. The media and communication programme is a unique blend of communication as an academic field with creative professional practice that prepares students to become transmedia¹ specialists with a focus on Advertising, Journalism and Public Relations. The skills garnered by students pursuing this course of study span a bevy of creative fields including digital audio production, graphic design, message creation and analysis, navigation of digital culture (digital literacy, Internet literacy, Information literacy), research and analysis of social and cultural texts, still photography, videography production, web design and writing for multiple genres and purposes (academic, script, creative and technical).

The media and communication programme is also unique in that all its modules are complemented with an online component using the Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE) system.

Changing Student Demography

The composition of tertiary-level entrants has evolved significantly. Enrolment rates have exploded in tertiary level institutions locally, regionally and internationally. The student population now entering tertiary institutions includes more mature students, more young learners, non-traditional learners and special entrants (including prior learning students), more students with full-time employment and carrying a full academic load and more part-time candidates. Each group brings to academe a set of learning needs quite distinct from the other and as such the diversity of the entrant population dictates immediate transformations in the field of education. The literature indicates that new learning paradigms as well as emerging e-learning technologies have the potential to address some of the diverse needs of tertiary level students. Before this concern can be addressed, there has to be identification and articulation of tertiary

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofproduction/podcast/view/transmedia-storytelling>

level learners diverse needs. (Jeffrey, Atkins, Laurs and Mann, 2006; Cercone, 2008; Palloff and Pratt, 2003).

E-Learning Profiles

A learner profile is narrative description or an academic compilation of key learning assumptions of the learner. This profile comprises the learner's characteristics, needs, preferences, attitudes and capabilities (Gardner and Miller, 2005; Rothwell and Kazanas, 2008). Currently we operate in a digital age in which ICT-enhanced education (e-learning) abounds. An e-learning profile is therefore a compendium relating to the student's characteristics, needs, styles and preferences, attitudes and capabilities as well as his/her knowledge of, access to, use of and comfort levels with e-learning technologies.

Most of the research literature examined by the researcher regarding tertiary level learning profiles concentrated on a circumscribed selection of learner attributes (Amir, Jelas and Rahman, 2011; Bullen, Morgan, Belfer, and Qayyum, 2009; Hunte, 2010; Jeffrey, Atkins, Laurs and Mann, 2006; Cercone, 2008; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005; Tapscott, 2009; Tucker, 2003; Sadler-Smith and Riding, 1999) which may not be sufficient in generating a comprehensive e-learning profile. This paper examines a more inclusive e-learning profile which embraces students' learning styles, preferences and processing strategies, their preferences for teaching modes and their information gathering sources. This profile also captures learners' motivational orientation, academic impetus, as well as their technology knowledge, access and usage.

The work conducted with the media and communication students at this research setting is an extension of the researcher's doctoral study at the University of the West Indies, Mona campus which examines the design, development and implementation of e-learning enhanced environments based on students' e-learning profiles.

Purpose of the Research

The specific purpose of the research was to generate a generic profile of media and communication students based on research-driven empirical data which could inform decisions made regarding online complements for conventional face-to-face instruction.

Research Question

In order to determine the best complementary, online learning experience for Jamaican communication and media students, it was critical to examine their learning styles and preferences, sources of information gathering, technology access, usage and comfort levels. The overarching question of the research was *what is the e-learning profile of the typical student enrolled in a media and communication programme in a Jamaican tertiary level institution?*

Considering that the investigation aimed at generating a comprehensive e-learning profile of these communication and media students, the research question further examined the following sub-questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the communication and media students under investigation?
2. What is the digital/technology profile of the communication and media students under study?
3. What are the learning styles and preferences of the select research participants?

METHODS

Research Design

This research sought to generate a comprehensive e-learning profile among media and communication students in a Jamaican tertiary-level institution. The research was conducted in the 2011/12 academic year; the third year of this new programme's 4-year cycle. The study utilised a cross-sectional survey research design in which data was collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2012; Babbie, 2007).

Participants and Sampling Strategy

This research utilised purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2012, Laerd dissertation, 2012). The total population sampling strategy was used because

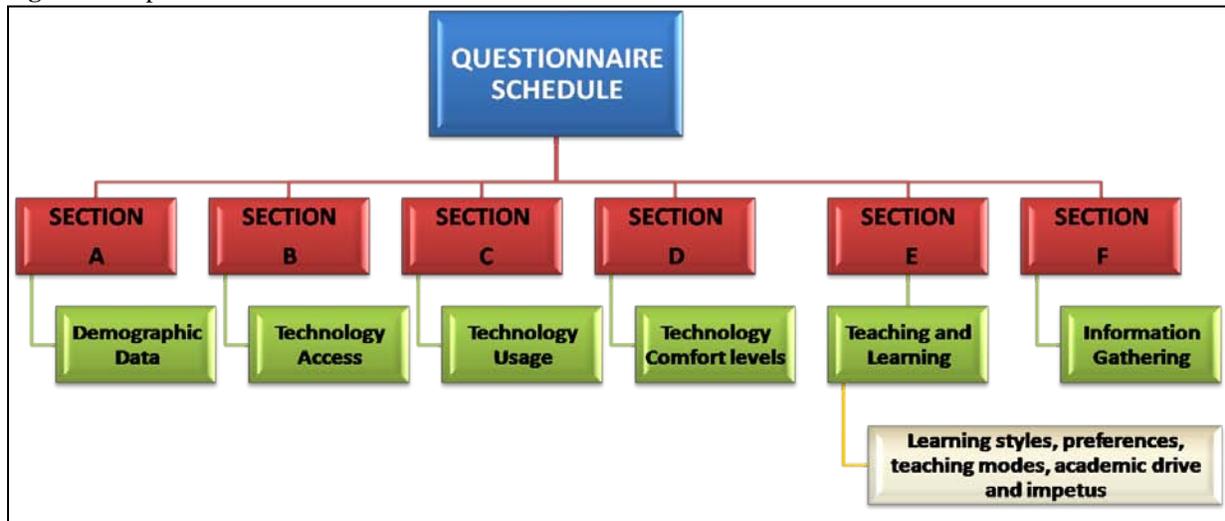
total population strategy targets all or as close to 100% of the study population. Given that the communication and media student population in the 2011/12 academic year comprised three (3) cohorts totalling one hundred and eight (108) students and also taking into consideration that the media and communication students' modules all had an online supplement, total population sampling was deemed the most appropriate to use. The sample variance was therefore zero (0) since all participants were targeted in the research.

Data Collection Instrument

Data collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was selected because they are objective in nature guaranteeing standardized data collection and they were more likely to guarantee anonymity. Data can also be gathered from large groups quickly.

The questionnaire had six (6) sections and twenty-five principal items. Section one addressed demographic data and comprised ten (10) open-ended and closed items. Section two of the questionnaire addressed technology ownership and access and encompassed five main items. This items in this section also included contingency (subsequent questions in a series) as well as matrix question formats (using Likert-type responses). Section three, had four main items with matrix question formats and focussed on participants' technology usage in a variety of contexts. Technology comfort levels based on a range of contexts and using matrix question formats were examined in section four. Teaching and learning concerns were addressed in section five and this section included participants' learning styles and preferences, strategies, behaviours, teaching modes and preferences. Figure 1.0 is an illustration of the composition of the questionnaire.

Fig 1.0. Composition of Research Instrument



Data Collection and Analysis

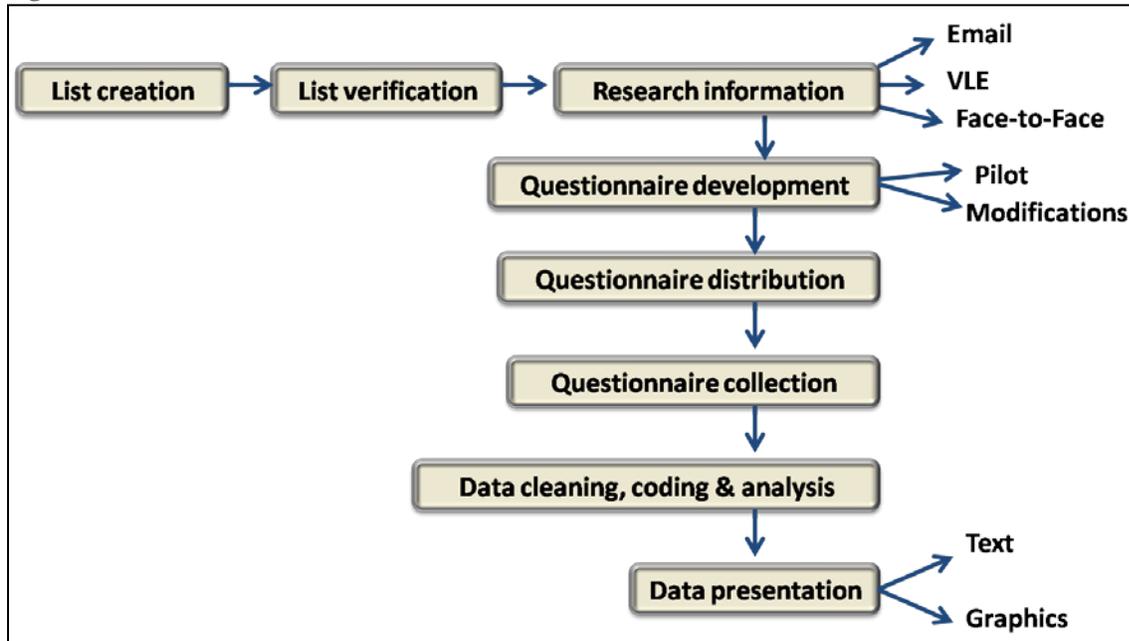
A population list was generated from the student database stored on the Moodle learning platform and the accuracy of the records was verified by the unit’s administrative support. Emails were constructed and sent out to the population informing them of the research and seeking their consent to participate in the research. Similar information was posted on the virtual learning environment used by all students and lecturers of the programme informed students of the impending research and its purpose.

The questionnaire instrument was developed, verified for reliability and validity and was piloted among sixty other tertiary level students. One hundred and eight (108) questionnaires were then printed and distributed by lecturers to students during one of their three-hour class sessions.

The lecturers collected one hundred and three (103) questionnaires (a 95% response rate) and handed them over to the research team. The team then cleaned the data one respondent at a time, checking for completeness and inconsistencies. After data cleaning, ninety-eight (98) questionnaires were coded and analysed. The coding of the data was done based on the categories and variables measured in the questionnaire and univariate data analysis was carried out using the computer software programme Excel.

The findings were presented using descriptive statistics which summarised the data's frequency distribution using both graphical (charts, tables and charts) and textual (descriptions and explanations) representations. See figure 2.0 for the graphical description of the process.

Fig 2.0. Data Collection Process



The questionnaire was examined by the development team a questionnaire design checklist to ensure that the items were not too long, misleading, did not contain errors or bias, had no double-barrel questions, ambiguity or measurement errors. A pilot of the questionnaire was conducted with sixty (60) tertiary level students three weeks prior to its administration to the media and communication students in the study. Based on feedback given, five items (technology usage and teaching and learning) were reworded the final questionnaire was modified, double checked by an educator and a research expert and was printed for distribution.

Ethical Issues

In research that involves researcher/participant engagements and which includes divulging personal information in order to gather data, the well-being of the research participants must take precedence.

Silverman and Marvasti (2008), Babbie (2007), Creswell (2012), Descombe (2007) among others remind researchers that while carrying out their investigations, the research ethics (permissions obtained, research purpose communicated, consent sought, confidentiality maintained and identities preserved) must be observed.

Departmental permission was sought and granted regarding the conducting of the survey. The students in the communication and media programme were informed electronically (via email and the virtual learning platform) and personally (in class face-to-face interaction) about the research and its purpose. They were also informed that by completing and returning the questionnaire, they were agreeing to participate in the research and were assenting to the publication of the findings. Additionally, they were advised that their participation was voluntary, that anonymity would be guaranteed and that they could withdraw from the process at any time.

Results

This research was conducted among three cohorts of students studying a media and communication programme in Jamaica. The study aimed at developing a “typical” profile of these students in order to determine the best online complementary instruction for them. The results of the findings are discussed in this section.

What is the e-learning profile of the typical student enrolled in a media and communication programme in a Jamaican tertiary institution?

In order to generate an e-learning profile of the typical communication and media student, an analysis was done based on the results gleaned and using the patterns, a generic description was extracted.

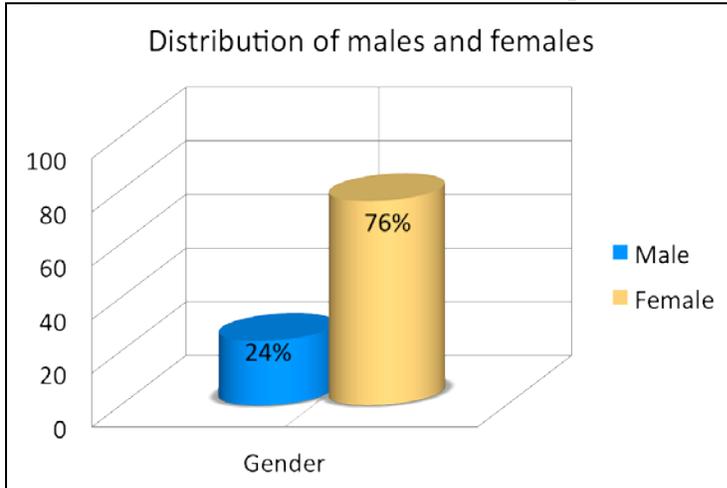
1. What is the demographic profile of the communication and media students under investigation?

Demographic information sought included, gender, age range, nationality, number of years since last place of study, academic workload, academic year level and employment status. Each area is discussed in the following sections:

Gender

Females accounted for the bulk of the media and communication participants with seventy-six per cent (76%). The males accounted for twenty-four per cent (24%) of the ninety-eight (98) participants. Figure 3.0 provides a graphical representation of this data.

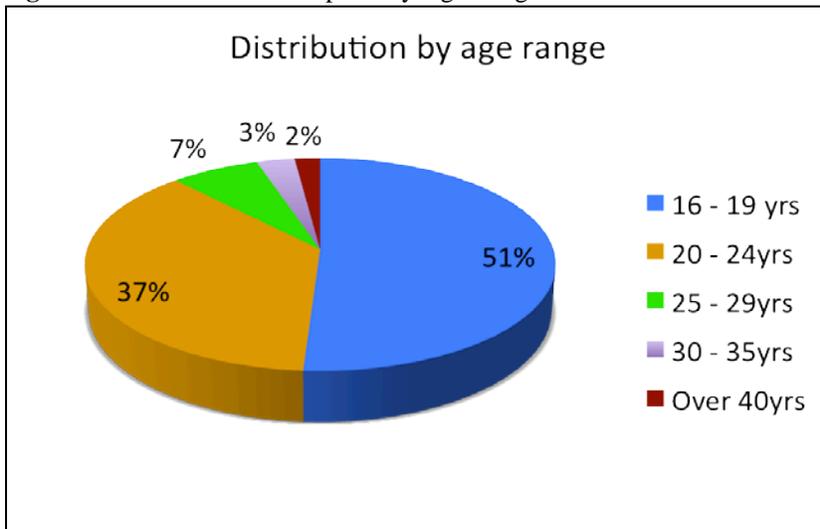
Fig 3.0. Distribution of Male and Female Participants



Age range

Regarding age range composition, more than half of the media and communication respondents (51%) fell in the 16 – 19yrs bracket, participants between 20 and 24 years accounted for thirty-seven per cent (37%) and seven per cent (7%) of the students were between 25 and 29 years old. The 30 – 35 year bracket and the over 40 year bracket accounted for three per cent (3%) and (2%) respectively. None of the respondents fell in 35 – 39 year range. See figure 4.0 for the breakdown of figures.

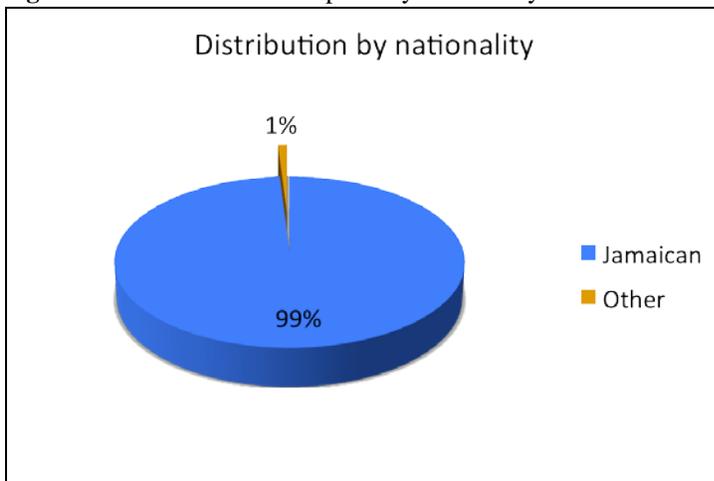
Fig 4.0. Distribution of Participants by Age Range



Nationality

Regarding demographic data, the questionnaire also sought to ascertain respondents' nationality. There were ninety-seven (97) Jamaicans (99%) and one (1) Dominican (1%).

Fig 5.0. Distribution of Participants by Nationality

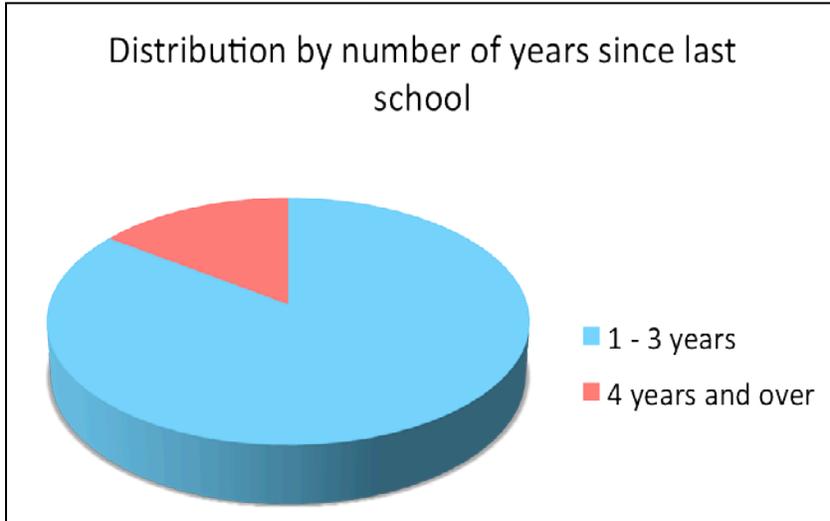


Number of years since last school

The researcher sought to uncover the length of time since participants last pursued formal academic instruction as such information may be deemed useful in generating students' e-learning profiles. The findings reveal that eighty-five per cent (85%) of the participants were recent graduates of academic

institutions with the other fifteen per cent (15%) leaving schools four years and beyond. See figure 1.6 for the graphical representation.

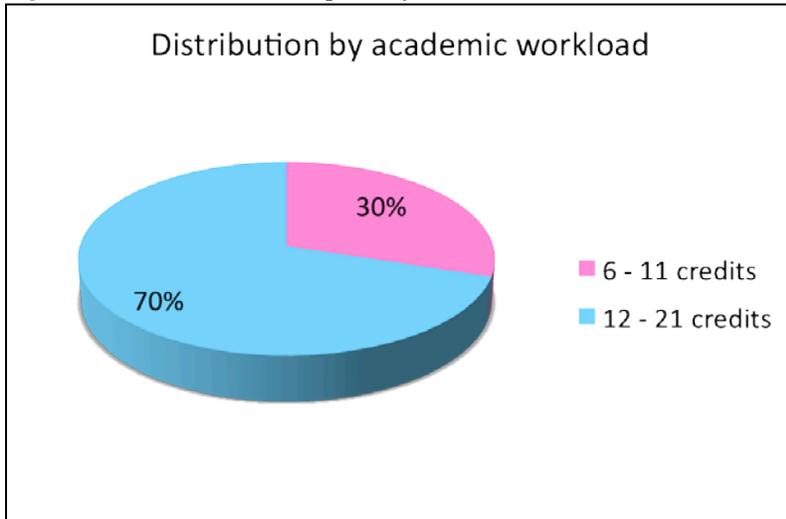
Fig 6.0. Distribution of Participants by Number of Years Since Leaving Last School



Academic workload at the research site is rationalised by the number of module credits taken. A full academic workload carries twelve to twenty-one (12 – 21) credits. Depending on work obligations, financial standing, academic capabilities, a student may pursue a reduced workload. This reduced workload carries with it six to twelve (6 -12) academic credits.

Seventy per cent (70%) of the media and communication participants were carrying a full academic workload of twelve to twenty-one credits. Those carrying a reduced academic workload accounted for thirty per cent (30%) of the respondents.

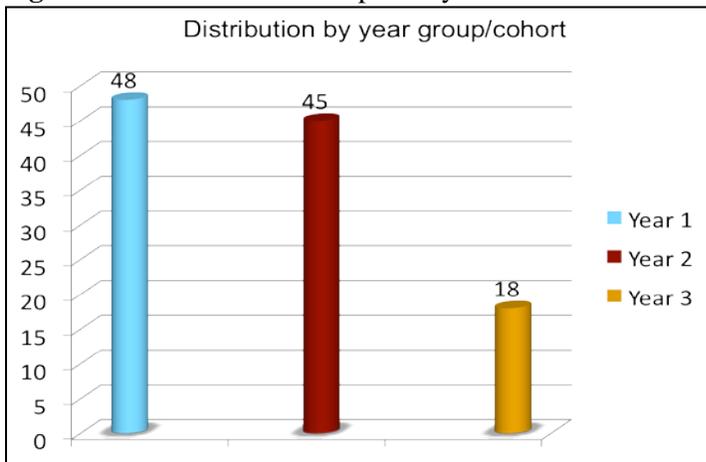
Fig 7.0. Distribution of Participants by Academic Workload



Year level

The media and communication programme commenced in the 2009/10 academic year. It is therefore still in its embryonic stages. Data were analysed for ninety-eight (98) of media and communication students. Of this total forty-eight (47) were pursuing first year modules, forty-five (45) were studying content at the year two level and eighteen (18) students (the pioneer group) were studying level three/year three content. The distribution of participants by cohorts follows in a graphical format.

Fig 8.0. Distribution of Participants by Cohorts



Employment status

The research site has an “earn and study” programme in which students are employed on the campus while pursuing their studies. Although the “earn and study” programme is not as lucrative as employment beyond the gates of the institution, it is considered employment and was included in the employment category of the questionnaire. The findings reveal that eight per cent (8%) of the media and communication students were employed as “earn and study” students. Twenty-three per cent (23%) had employment external to the research site. Sixty-eight per cent (68%) of the total respondents were not employed during their academic studies.

Table 1.0
Distribution of Respondents’ Employment Status

Description	Value N=98	Percentage (%)
“Earn and study” student	8	8
Employment outside of the institution	23	23
Unemployed	67	68

Note: Due to rounding, total percentages may vary from 100%

2. What is the digital/technology profile of the communication and media students under study?

This study sought to construct an e-learning profile for media and communication students enrolled in a newly established programme. In order to determine an e-learning profile, there was need to include a digital/technology component. The digital/technology profile was concerned with determining students’ access to different technology, their levels of usage with different technology/digital tools as well as their proficiency and comfort levels using the tools and accompanying software. The following sections describe each component which comprised the digital/technology component of this research.

Technology access

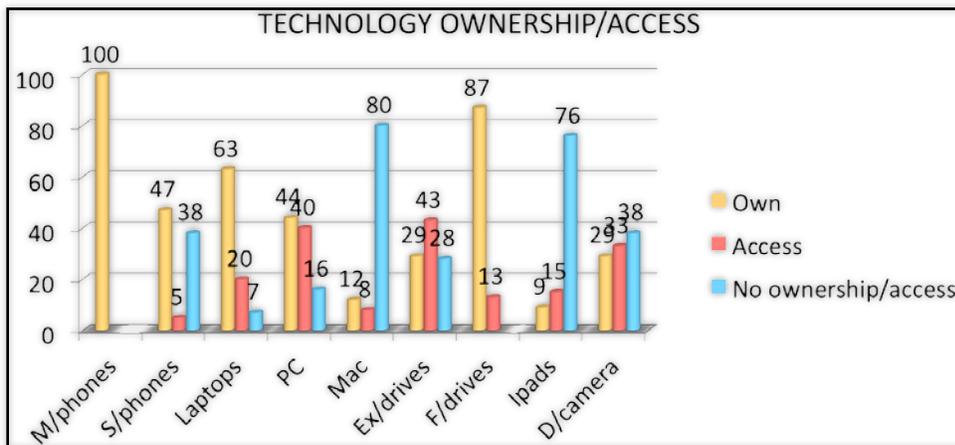
Students were asked to indicate from a list the different technology tools they owned. They were also asked to indicate, in the case where they did not own the tool, if they had access to such device. If they did not own the device and did not have access to same, they were asked to select the “no ownership/access” option.

All respondents (100%) owned mobile phones. Forty-seven per cent (47%) indicated that their mobile phones were smartphones (with or without Internet connection) and five per cent (5%) of all mobile phone owners indicated that although they did not own smartphones, they had access to same. Eighty-three per cent (83%) of the media and communication students either owned (63%) or had access to (20%) a Windows-based laptop and eighty-four per cent (84%) had Windows-based personal computers (44% ownership, 40% access to someone else's) at their disposal. Macintosh-type devices were not very popular among the group as only twelve per cent (12%) owned and eight per cent (8%) had access to a Macintosh laptop or desktop device. Similarly only nine per cent (9%) of the respondents owned Ipads, with fifteen per cent (15%) having access to same.

A high percentage of students owned or had access to external drives. Eighty-seven per cent (87%) owned flash drives with the others having access to such devices. Regarding external hard drives, seventy-two per cent either owned (29%) or had access to (43%) to these data storage devices. A little more than half (52%) of the participants owned (29%) or had access to (23%) the use of digital cameras.

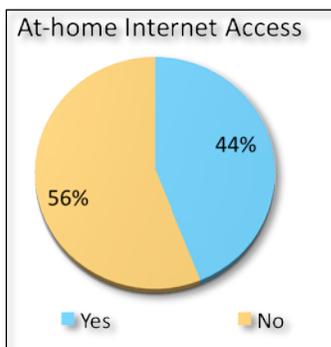
Figure 9.0 provides a graphical breakdown of the figures.

Fig 9.0. Participants' Technology Ownership/Access



When asked about at-home Internet access, just over half of the respondents (56%) indicated that they had Internet access at home. They (98%) also signalled that they had active email accounts and eighty-one per cent (81%) communicated that they members of social networking sites. Of this figure, seventy-three per cent (73%) were members of Facebook, thirty-two per cent (32%) were Twitter members, thirty-four per cent (34%) were Flickr lovers and seven per cent (7%) were committed to the professional site LinkedIn. Figures 10. 0 to 13.0 explain this graphic format.

Fig 10.0



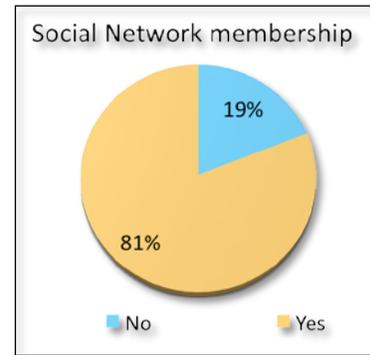
At-home Internet access

Fig 11.0



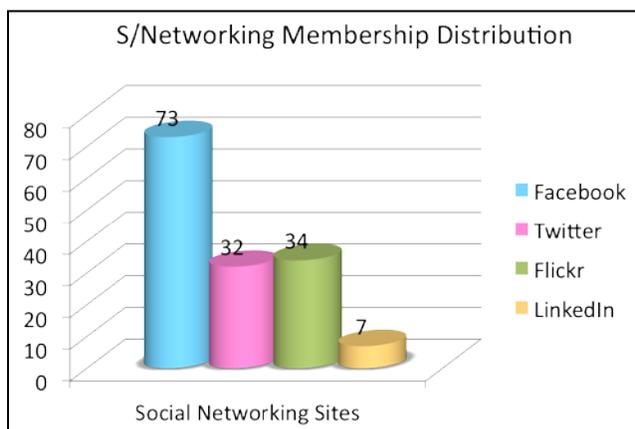
Active email account

Fig 12.0



Social network membership

Fig 13.0. Participants' social networking membership

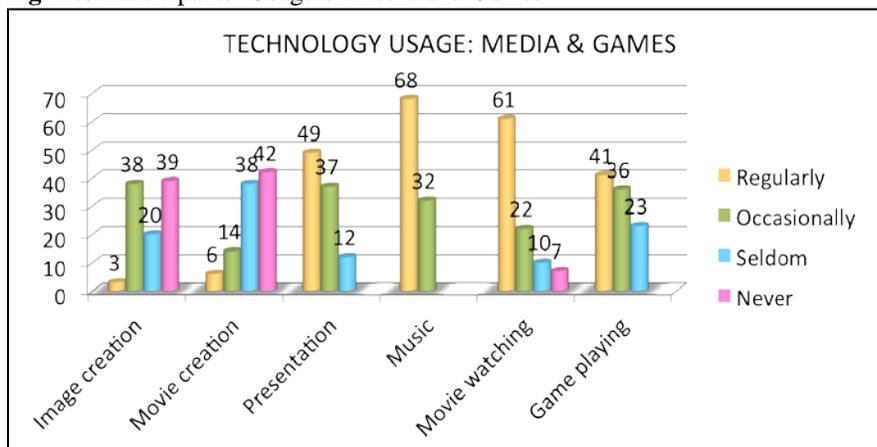


Technology usage

Students' utilisation of technology tools was divided into four sub-sets; each addressing participants' usage of media and games, mobile devices, traditional web/Internet and web 2.0 tools. Students were requested to indicate how frequently they used a selection of activities/tools. Frequency was operationally defined into three bands; regularly (several times per day, once per day, several times per week), occasionally which was explained as once per week or once per month and seldom which accounted for usage every few months or once per year. If their usage patterns did not fall into any of these categories, participants were advised to select the option "never".

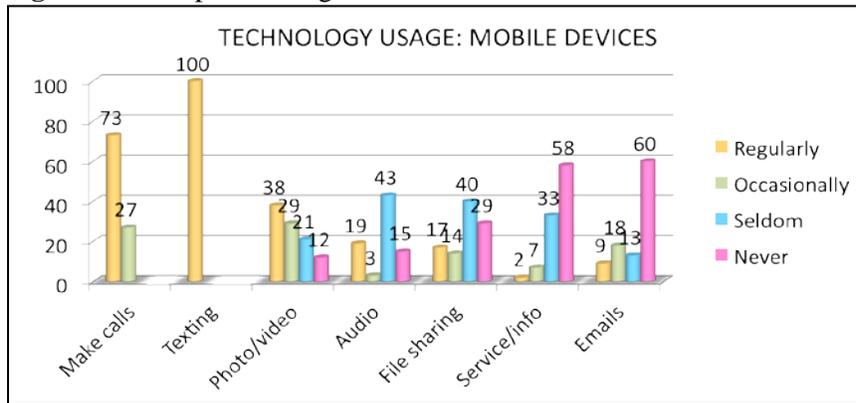
The data findings reveal that as it relates to regular usage of media and games, the communication and media students listened to music (68%) and watched movies (61%) several times per day to several times per week. Fewer than fifty per cent (50%) of the participants created presentations (49%) and played games (41%) on a regular basis. Neither image creation/manipulation nor movie creation/editing using requisite software were regular engagements of the research participants. See figure 14.0 for the graphical details.

Fig 14.0. Participants' Usage of Media and Games



All respondents (100%) indicated mobile phone ownership. The items pertaining to mobile phone usage were concerned with how often students communicated with others (text/calls/emails), created content (photos/videos/audio), shared files or accessed services/information. Communicating via calls (73%) and texting (100%) were carried out several times per day to several times per week. Content creation (photo/video – 38% and audio – 19%) and file sharing (17%) tasks via mobile phones were curtailed and not done regularly by these participants neither were accessing and responding to emails (9%). Please see figure 15.0 for the breakdown.

Fig 15.0. Participants' Usage of Mobile Phones



Technology usage also included students' use of traditional web and web 2.0 technologies. Students used the Internet to access their virtual learning environment several times a day to several times a week. There also used the web regularly to engage in school-related internet search (68%), general internet search (100%) and to communicate with each other (100%) via email, instant messaging etc. Regular use of web 2.0 technologies were restricted to social networking (87%) especially the Facebook site and file downloading (85%). Figures 16.0 and 17.0 provide the graphical breakdown of the data.

Fig 16.0. Participants' Usage of Traditional Web

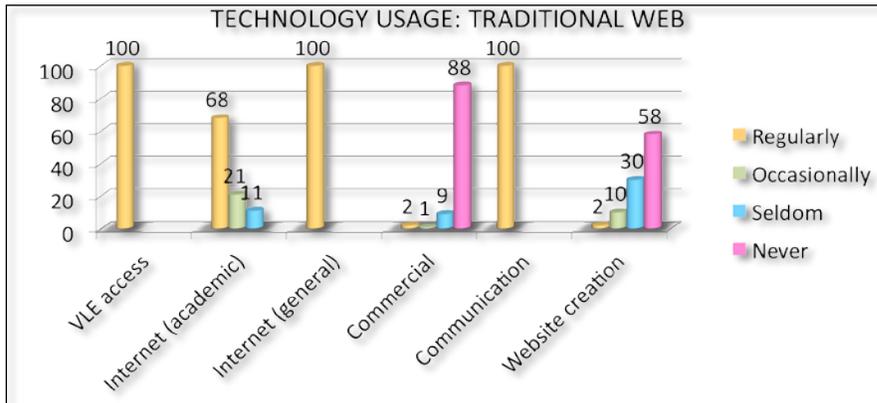
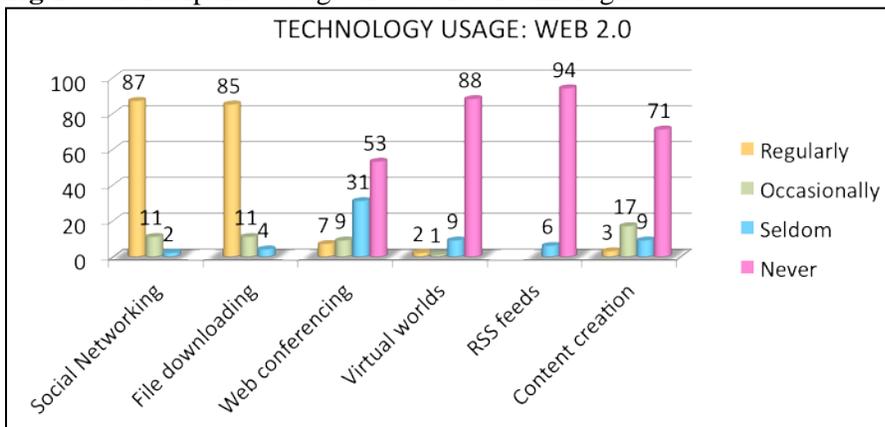
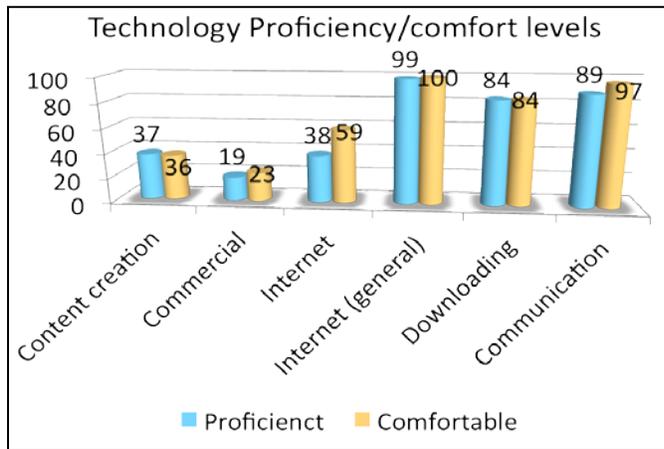


Fig 17.0. Participants' Usage of Web 2.0 Technologies



In addition to the abovementioned components, the survey sought to query students' proficiency and comfort levels with technology. Proficiency levels ranged from high (I can do this very well) to low (I cannot perform this task well) and comfort levels varied from very comfortable (I feel at home doing this task) to very uncomfortable (I feel nervous doing this task). The results showed that students were not very proficient or comfortable with creating original content using appropriate software, engaging in commercial online activities and engaging in academic search which went beyond Wikipedia and Google. They showed high proficiency and comfort levels in using the Internet for general purposes, in downloading files and communicating with others online. See figure 18.0 for the details.

Fig 18.0. Participants' technology proficiency and comfort levels

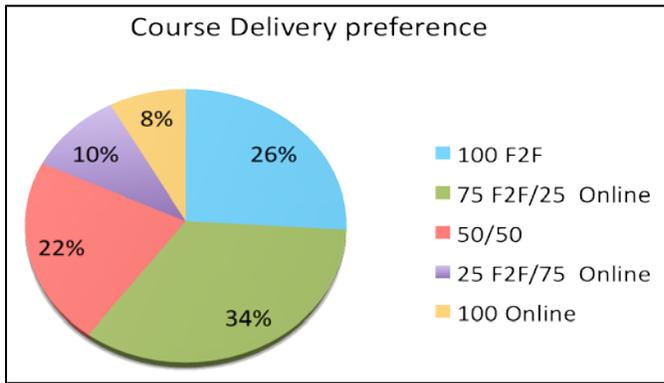


3. *What are the learning styles and preferences of the select research participants?*

The teaching/learning section of the participant' questionnaire addressed students' course delivery preference, their teaching mode preference, their learning styles and preferences (learning behaviours, cognitive processing, learning strategies, perceptual preferences and academic exertion) and their value judgement based on the programme's skillsets.

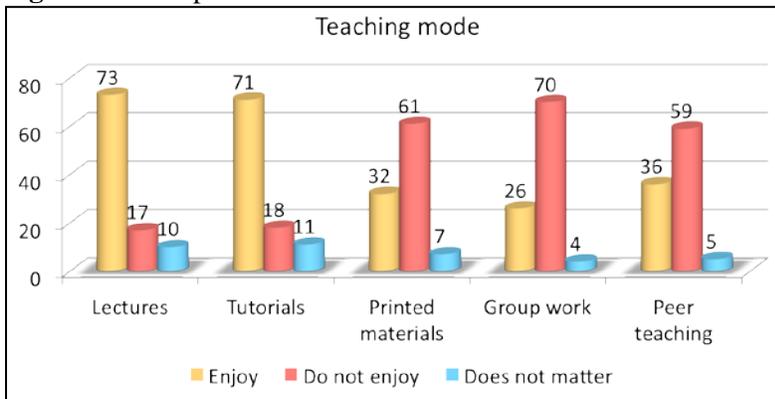
Sixty per cent (60%) of the respondents preferred face-to-face course delivery with twenty-six per cent (26%) accounting for face-to-face interaction void of online engagements and thirty-four per cent (34%) requiring a 75/25 face-to-face/online blend. Twenty-two (22%) per cent of the respondents opted for a 50/50 mix of face-to-face and online instruction. Eighteen per cent (18%) of media and communication students disclosed online preferences with ten per cent of tis sub-set (10%) signalling a 75/25 mix and eight per cent (8%) preferring fully online instruction. The distribution is illustrated in figure 19.0.

Fig 19.0. Participants' Course Delivery Preference



When asked to indicate enjoyment levels for different teaching modes, more than seventy per cent of respondents' propensity was for teacher directed instruction (lectures; 73% and tutorials; 71%). The results also revealed that the participants in this research did not enjoy having printed materials (prescribed text and study guides) as their main instruction mode, neither were they enthusiastic about group work (or any collaborative activity) nor peer teaching. Figure 20 has the breakdown of teaching modes by levels of enjoyment.

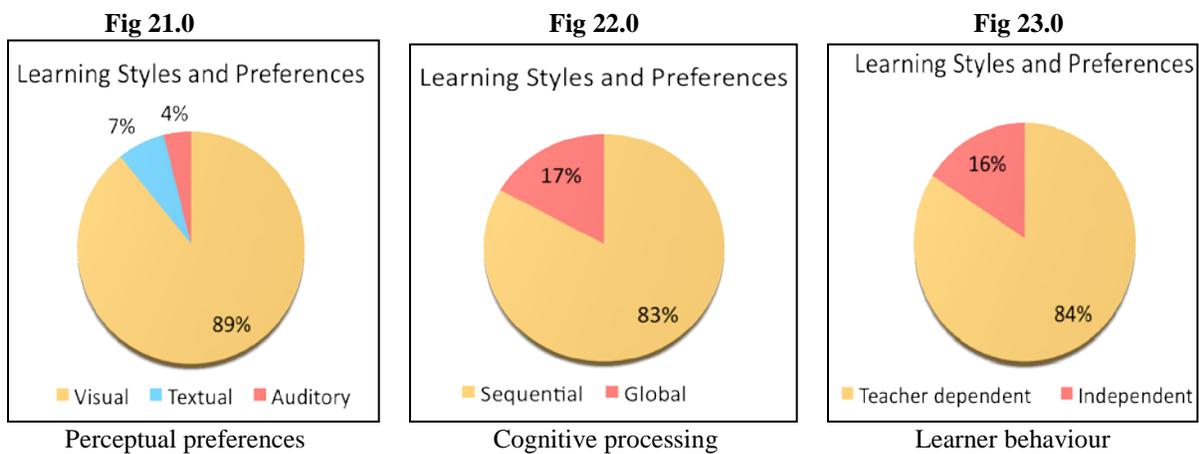
Fig 20.0. Participants' Course Mode Preference



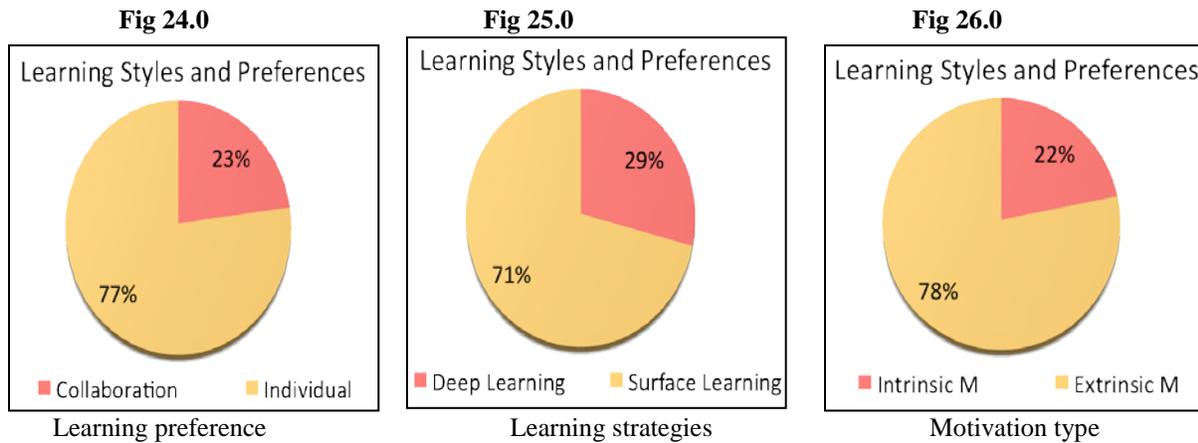
To establish student learning styles and preferences (learning styles, behaviours, cognitive processing, learning strategies, perceptual preferences and academic exertion), students were given a series of

statements and were asked to select the statements which best describe their learning styles, behaviours, preferences and strategies.

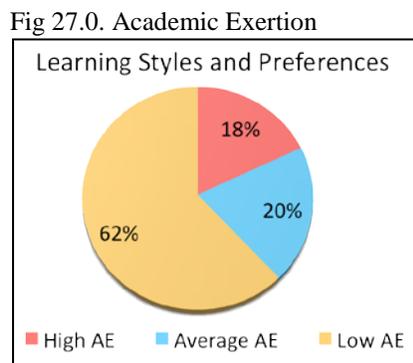
The outcomes of the statements reveal that more than eighty per cent of the respondents had high preferences for learning with visuals (89%), sequential learning (83%) teacher dependence (84%). See figures 21.0 to 23.0 for an illustration of the data.



Additionally, the results of the statements reveal that more than seventy per cent of the respondents preferred working alone (77%) and were engaged in surface learning strategies (71%) including rote learning, accepting information with an uncritical eye, regurgitating information for the purpose of passing a course. Seventy-eight per cent (78%) of the students are extrinsically motivated, driven by the promise of teacher praise/acknowledgement or passing course grades. See figures 24.0 to 26.0 for an illustration of the data.

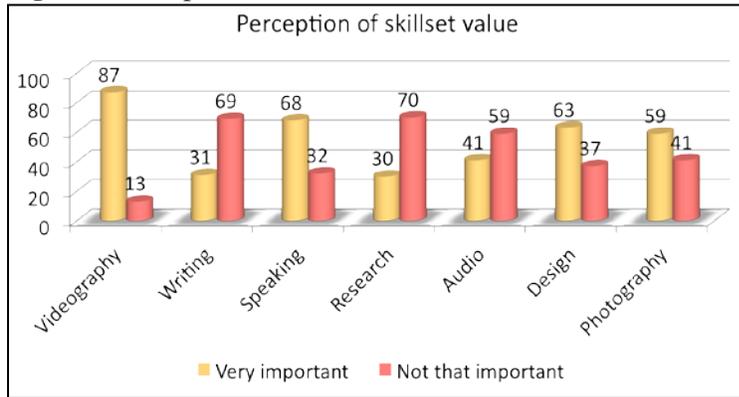


Questionnaire items regarding academic exertion solicited students’ levels of application to studying and included effort committed to scholarly activities as well as the amount of time spent on academic tasks/activities. Eighteen per cent (18%) of the students demonstrated high levels of academic exertion in that they spent additional time on tasks and utilised self-investigated resources in addition to lecturer assigned resources. Eighty-two per cent of the students displayed lower levels of academic exertion (average; 20%; low; 62%). Figure 27.0 shows the distribution of students’ responses.



When asked what skills were critical in their current programme and crucial for their careers, eighty-seven per cent (87%) of respondents considered videography skills as one of the essential skills to possess. Speaking (68%), design (63) and photography (59%) skills were also rated as important. Not much precedence was given to writing skills (31%) or research skills (30%).

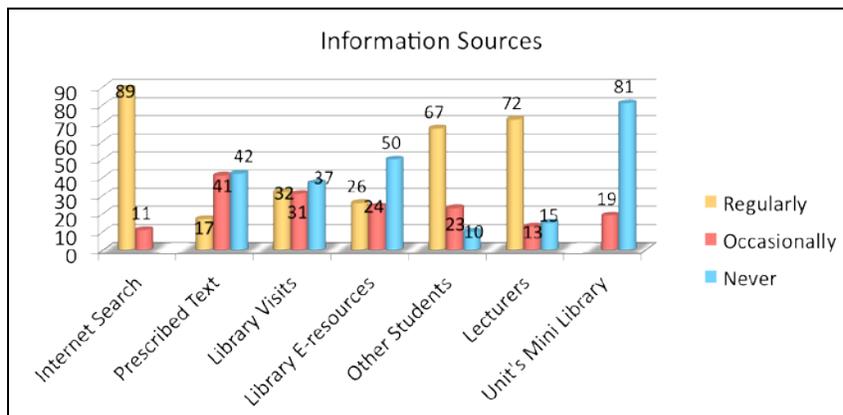
Fig 28.0. Perceptions of Critical Skills



The final section of the questionnaire examined students' sources of information and how often (regularly; several times per day to several times per week and occasionally; once per week to once per month) they accessed these sources in preparation of their academic tasks.

The outcomes of this probe reveal that students use the Internet (89%) via search engines such as Google and Bing and Wikipedia often when preparing their academic tasks. Students also relied on each other (67%) in groups or on one-on-one sessions and on their lecturers (72%) in the preparation of their work. The prescribed text (17%), library visits (32%) and library e-resources (26%) and the unit's mini-library (0%) were not considered regularly in the preparation of scholarly activities. Figure 29.0 is an illustration of the breakdown.

Fig 29.0 Information Sources



The results gleaned from the research conducted among the three cohorts of the media and communication programme highlighted several established trends within the data. Based on the patterns which emerged, an e-learning profile of the “typical” communication and media student was generated.

What is the e-learning profile of the typical student enrolled in a media and communication programme in a Jamaican tertiary institution?

The institution’s typical media and communication student is a young Jamaican adult (between 16 and 24 years old) who has recently graduated from secondary level education (coming straight from the secondary school system or having left between 2 and 3 years) and who carries a full academic workload (12 – 21 credits).

The ordinary media and communication student owns a mobile device, a personal computer/lap and a flash drive. He/she has limited at-home access to Internet and stays connected with others largely by phone texts, phone calls, emails, instant messages and posts via the Facebook social network.

Regarding his/her technological prowess, the average media student is comfortable with and proficient in using a limited number of technology tools. Proficiency exists in mobile phone usage, accessing websites and learning portals, emailing and instant messaging. This student has minimal creator and publisher skills which are restricted to email, instant messaging and Facebook interaction.

The regular media and communication student is a sequential learner preferring step-by-step linear learning in small, manageable chunks with a considerable details, copious examples and specific information. This learner possesses visual/graphic learner preferences, favouring instruction replete with images. He/she is highly teacher dependent, craves face-to-face interactions but does not enjoy

collaborative learning and tasks. He/she is extrinsically motivated, exerts minimum academic effort with learning tasks and activities using general internet search (primarily Wikipedia), pulling on other students and lecturers when preparing for assignments or quizzes.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the typical students' profile, what therefore are the implications and recommendations for an online complement to the traditional face-to-face instruction in a communication and media programme bearing a significant online seal? Education today dictates that faculty must prepare students to operate in a 21st century context. This of course demands the establishment and development of 21st century skill sets in learners.

The average communication and media student in this study hails directly from the secondary level where instruction is largely traditional, favours and encourages teacher dependency (Akerlind and Trevitt, 1999; Saddler-Smith & Riding, 1999). At the tertiary level in Jamaica, students "read for their degree" and student-directed learning is championed. Self-directed learning for these students is a new and frightening concept which has to be carefully inculcated. Students have to be gradually weaned from the concept that the teacher is all-knowing, ever-correct and ever-present.

The research results reveal that these communication and media students have a strong preference for face-to-face instruction. This may be so because it is much easier to read non-verbal cues (Shade, 1989) or it may stem from a high level of teacher dependence (Akerlind and Trevitt, 1999; Saddler-Smith & Riding, 1999) which originates at the secondary level and is expected to be perpetuated at the tertiary level. More compelling justifications seem to suggest that this preference may evolve from an absence of at-home internet access (56% of the respondents state that they did not have at home internet access) or more so from students' high levels of discomfort with using online technologies for learning.

Participating in online learning engagements demands a certain degree of comfort with digital and online technologies (Lee & Witta, 2001). In order to fully participate in online instructional activities, students need to be able to use a variety of modern hardware and software applications. If the requisite skills are deficient, students are likely to shun the online environment.

Facilitators will have to skilfully and gradually integrate online tools into the traditional curriculum, allowing students to become more comfortable with the digital tools. Indeed, extended and on-going scaffolding of communication and media content, relevant digital skillsets and appropriate attitudes (moving students from the known to the unknown) will play a critical role in these students' education.

Students share similar poor experiences of working in groups. The world for which the media and communication student is being prepared however; is one which is replete with collaborative engagements. The key to satisfactory group work lies in how the tasks are administered, how often they are assigned and on providing a clear accountability structure for individuals in the group.

The majority students in this research are not adept or very comfortable with a range of technology gadgets and software neither are they proficient in content creation. This programme dictates such knowledge and skills. Comfort levels and proficiency can be developed gradually with scaffolding (McLeod, 2010). This can be done with graphic-heavy instruction, a wide range of models, samples and tips, segmentation of work with constant reference to the "bigger picture". Implicit in this, is the "unlearning and relearning of learned practices" among lecturers for successful classroom applications.

E-learning environments (learning environments on a whole) must be learner-centred. Learner-centricity dictates knowing the learner and knowing him/her well. The development and utilisation of an e-learning profile is instrumental for learner-centred instruction as it directs customization of based on learner characteristics and behaviours, learning styles, preferences, strategies, knowledge and skills

competencies. The learning experiences and interaction of the average media and communication students must reflect 21st century practices. The key priorities for Jamaican tertiary institutions in general and this research site in particular, are to successfully engage learners and provide sufficient interaction and scaffolding without overextending lecturers.

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