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ESAMI ONLINE DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Described by Dr Clement Chinyanga
Senior Consultant, ESAMI

Online education is an innovative approach to distance learning in which the world wide web (www), the Internet and intranets are effectively utilised. At Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAMI), staff is currently exploring the issues of utilising this approach on the Executive MBA.

This paper discusses the issues involved in trying to introduce online distance education at ESAMI.

Existing Online Education Systems

The use of sophisticated communication technologies in enhancing the education of many geographically dispersed teachers and students is not new in Africa. The World Bank launched the African Virtual University (AVU) in 1997 and so far, 26 AVU learning centres have been established in 15 sub-Saharan countries.

AVU courses are mainly in engineering and science at the graduate level. Professors mainly in American and Europe deliver their lectures in front of television cameras in their own classrooms. The video is routed through fibre optics, ISDN lines to an uplink in Washington DC, which then beams it via satellite to campuses in Africa. In the program, students are able to talk to instructors in real time.

In South Africa, a Consortium called eLearning Systems has been set up with the core business of developing and delivering multimedia-rich, on-line learning material focusing on different levels of education. E-Learning Systems intends to work with academic institutions, which wish to outsource the development of on-line learning systems. Outsourcing for this activity is usually taken as an option by many academic institutions because the task is capital intensive, with tremendous time urgency.

E-Learning Systems has listed on its web site, its accrediting institutions as:

- University of Free State
- University of Stellenbosch
- University of Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch & Pretoria
- Parktown College.

These academic institutions are listed as offering diplomas, first degrees and masters programmes in different disciplines. On the list, only the University of the Free State offers a Master of Business Administration. This MBA is certified by the University of the Free State but the programme has been developed by the Kellstadt Graduate School of Business at Chicago's dePaul's University in the USA.

Besides the two initiatives on on-line distance education described above, the author of this paper was unable to locate any other on-line distance education programmes in Africa. Needless to mention that there are many such programmes in the USA, Britain, Australia and other developed countries.

WHY THE PROPOSED ESAMI ON-LINE MBA?

Background

The Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAMI) is an inter-governmental Management Development Centre. The Institute's roots go back to the former East African countries, viz Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In 1974, the Institute was established as the East African Community Management Institute (EACOMI). In 1977 when the East African Community broke up, the Institute survived and was renamed the East African Management Institute (EAMI). With effect from February 1980, following a unanimous agreement reached at the Third Conference of Ministers of the Lusaka-based MULPOC countries, EAMI was expanded and converted into ESAMI. The Institute's coverage was broadened beyond the three original founders (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) so as to cover all countries of Eastern and Southern African Sub-region, namely: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

ESAMI is, therefore, a Pan-African Regional Management Development Centre whose service area now covers 22 countries. It is a service and market-oriented institution offering high level specialised management training and development programmes, consultancy and action-oriented management research services targeted at government, parastatals and private sector and regional institutions in the Eastern and southern African region. ESAMI is a leader in the industry in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Functions of ESAMI

- . Serving as specialised regional centre for training, research and consultancy in various management fields with particular focus on the management of public and private enterprises;
- . Undertaking, co-sponsoring or facilitating the conduct of studies on administrative or management problems with respect to the socio-economic and technological development of the member states;
- . Providing management consultancy services to public and private institutions within its member states at their request;
- . Providing documentation and information services and acting as a reference centre in the field of management;
- . Endeavouring to test, evaluate, develop and disseminate new management techniques in strategic sectors;
- . Collaborating with national regional and international management development institutions and associations in carrying out any or all of the above activities.

In summary, therefore, ESAMI's role is to function as an African management Development Centre and a major forum for the international exchange and dissemination of ideas in the field of management sciences in the sub-region. Considerable significance has been attached by the member states to ESAMI's capacity to serve as high level instrument in the region, in particular its role to support, complement and supplement national and regional training institutions in its service area.

The ESAMI Executive MBA

In 1998, the Board of Governors of ESAMI gave the institution to award degrees. Since then, ESAMI has enrolled and conducted the Executive MBA programme to five intakes. The programme structure and content were designed by the ESAMI Business School. The current structure of the Executive MBA requires that the degree be completed over a period of two years. During every quarter, students come to any of the venues, up to now at Arusha in Tanzania, Nairobi in Kenya, Kampala in Uganda or Lusaka in Zambia, for a two-week period of intensive lectures. After that students return to work and continue with work related assignments. At the next quarter, students submit projects, sit examinations on the modules done on the previous quarter, and then take new modules full time for a period two weeks until the programme is completed.

ESAMI has a collaboration agreement with the Maastricht School of Management. In the agreement, both institutions participate in curriculum design and development. The focus of the entire curriculum is aimed at addressing the needs and challenges of African organisations and the global scenario.

Why ESAMI Online Degree?

ESAMI wishes to offer the following benefits to the learners:

- Freedom of choice of the place and time where the student can carry out tasks required in the degree
- Activities of each student with peers and with lecturers through e-mail
- Interaction of the each student with the lecturer on a constant basis through e-mail
- Using a variety of media to enhance learning
- Use of expert lecturers
- Offering immediate feedback to learners
- Permitting students direct access to the world wide web resources as part of the learning process
- Real time chats with peers and lecturers
- Repetition of course material as the need arises for students depending on the topic
- Access to latest information in each field of study
- Offer an alternative way of completing the Executive MBA for those who cannot otherwise attend full time two week sessions at venues
- Reach a wider section of the population with the Executive MBA programme.

ESAMI ONLINE APPROACH

The online approach called EsamiOnline, is in response to the needs of our students. EsamiOnline is a delivery model which has to be independently endorsed as the 'most simple and workable' currently in the market place. EsamiOnline provides a common format for all subjects, which means that students only need to learn one set of navigation tasks. EsamiOnline provides an identity for distance students to link and interact with the Business School and with fellow students.

Two Key Components of EsamiOnline

1. As part of the student enrolment fee, the student will receive all core materials in hard copy form. This includes provision of a textbook, in most cases with all supporting notes, readings and assessment materials. This means that the student can study and undertake assessment tasks without downloading large pdf and other files from the internet. This approach is important to avoid students wasting time on these downloads and printing large amounts of text from the internet. It also provides flexibility in the sense that you do not have to have access to a computer in order to study and work on assessment tasks.
2. EsamiOnline's interaction and submission of assessment tasks can be unique. Most universities are embracing the internet as a base for broadening market reach on online delivery. These universities are seeking to provide cutting edge technology from their servers, such as video streaming and full online text materials. However, full online text means that you will have to print realms of information on your local printer. Video and high-end graphics involve significant download times. A student wants to spend time on the subject matter, not waiting for information to download. The EsamiOnline is to provide video, subject software etc. on CD ROM as part of the subject materials package and use the internet for e-mail and group interactions. Each class group has an instructor who can be e-mailed for information and assistance. In addition, class members can interact directly with each other to discuss issues and form a class network. Class instructors also facilitate asynchronous discussions, which extend for a defined period (normally one week) and allows all students to participate in the discussion. There is also a bulletin board facility and frequently asked (FAQ) listing.

Our approach then is to provide the student with all the materials required to study for the subject and complete assessment tasks, while supporting the student's studies with online tutorials, discussions, and encouraging class groups to interact.

EsamiOnline allows a prospective student to see how the approach works, and then invites him to our web site by simply clicking on the web site address given on the screen.

Online Instructors

The Business School will seek to develop a list of suitably qualified people to undertake duties as online instructors for students initially in the MBA courses.

Duties:

- Facilitate online discussion
- Respond to student emails within 48 hours
- Maintain a constant presence in online workshops and interact with students on online tasks
- Provide a summary of online workshop participation
- Facilitate online tests
- Collect and assess assignments and tasks
- Aggregate assessment marks
- Liase with the Faculty Subject Coordinator regarding assessment, grade processing, and consistent content between online and on campus mode delivery
- Provide information to update the EsamiOnline site and place course content on the Business School's preferred online platform.

Qualifications

- A master's degree or equivalent in a relevant discipline
- Familiarity with computing technologies
- Teaching experience at the tertiary level
- Access to appropriate computing facilities

Remuneration:

Instructors will be employed on a contract basis for an agreed period of time.

Online Programs

All current Executive MBA modules would be offered online.

The whole program would be advertised describing in full the program structure, admission requirements and course costs.

What A Student Needs To Study Online

EsamiOnline courses would be based around the use of a combination of print-based materials and web-based technology. In order to access the online aspects of the courses (which includes communication with other students in each subject), the student will need access to the following items:

- A Pentium class computer of at least 100 MHz processor
- A CD ROM or DVD drive
- Modem
- Reliable access to the internet
- A web browser of at least a version 4 level

Some subjects may require the use of specific software that needs a higher level of computer technology. Students should check with lecturers to ensure that their computer technology is adequate.

How A Student Enrols

Application Form

The student will need to obtain an ESAMI online application form, which will be given on the ESAMI web site. The student can also download the instruction for completing the form. Alternatively, the student can contact the ESAMI and the student can be sent the application form. The form will have detailed instructions on how to fill it.

Cost of Online Programs

All online programs are full fee paying programs. The fairest charge method is that where the student pays by the subject, in the period that the student takes that subject. The cost of each subject includes all written program materials, textbooks, and DVD ROM information. The exact cost per subject can be arrived at after full development costs and other aspects of the program have been taken into account.

SHORT COMINGS OF ONLINE PROGRAMMES IN AFRICA

In Africa, the main problems of internet access are: limited telecommunication infrastructure, the cost of computers and telephone calls

Telecommunication Infrastructure

From our experiences in different countries in Africa, we know that telecommunication infrastructure is run by parastatals or state monopolies which are facing many problems. It is reported for example that over one million people are currently waiting for telephone lines to be installed. The encouraging state of affairs is that there is now a thrust towards privatisation of this sector. Privatising this sector could improve the telecommunication infrastructure. In Ghana for example, privatising the sector in 1996 caused an increase of 67% in telephone lines by 1999. The two main reasons for slowness in infrastructure development are the lack of telecommunication policies and poverty of the African governments.

Cost

The cost of computer equipment is very high in Africa compared to other continents. Many African governments add high import duties and taxes on information and communication technologies equipment. This makes the number of companies and individuals who can afford to buy and maintain such equipment very small. According to domainatlas.com, Africa has the least number of registered domain sites on the internet. Internet content developed in Africa is negligible.

The cost of telephone charges is very high in Africa compared to developed countries. In countries like Tanzania, a local telephone call costs over US\$3 per minute. Such high telephone costs are prohibitive to internet use. Internet service provider subscription charges are also much higher in Africa than on other continents. In North America, ISP US\$20 monthly charges are available while in Tanzania for example, the minimum is US\$60 for the same kind of services.

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