Policy Brief

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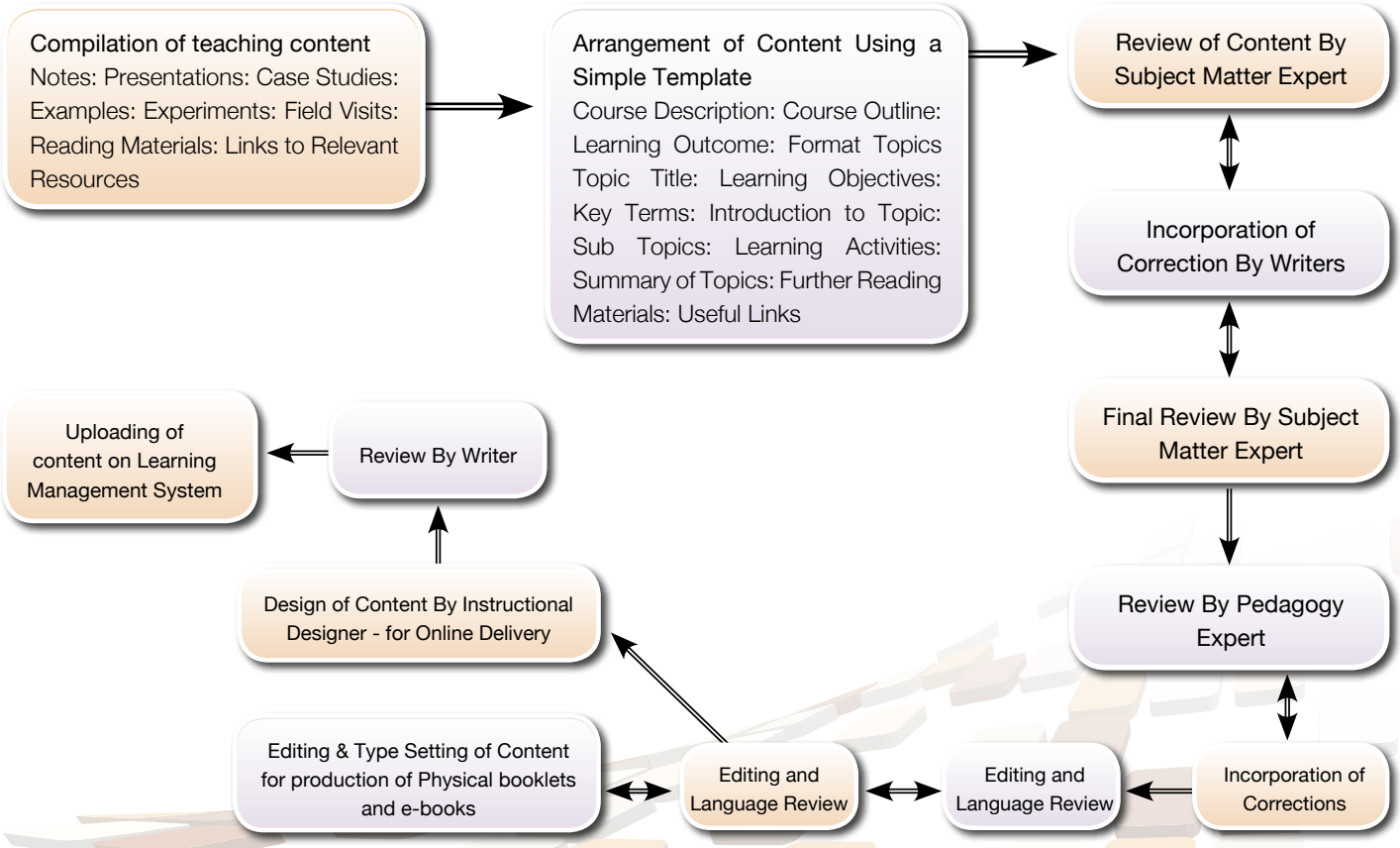
RUFORUM
Capacity Building in Agriculture

How to Get Academic Faculty to Digitize their Teaching Materials

Curriculum Development → Content Design → Content Development → Implementation → Project Evaluation

Content Development: The Emerging RUFORUM Work flow for Developing Quality E-Learning Content



With support from the Association of African Universities through support from DFID

RUFORUM POLICY BRIEF

How to Get Academic Faculty to Digitize their Teaching Materials

Executive Summary

E-learning has the potential to improve the quality of education in African Universities through the digitization of teaching content that is contextualized for African settings. Contextualized African teaching resources would contribute to the African knowledge repositories and the adoption of e-learning could enable African universities to share these resources. Cossa (2009, p.16) argues that we should "pursue the establishment of an educational system that is founded on indigenous African world views without neglecting the presentation of non-African world-views".

Between 2010 and 2011 the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) carried out research on how to sustainably support member universities to digitize teaching materials. Academic Faculty from Egerton University (Kenya) and University of Malawi, Bunda College of Agriculture (Malawi) participated in this research activity. Funds were pooled from the Association for African Universities (through the Mobilizing Regional Initiatives Project) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to sup-port the research activities.

Introduction

The digitization of teaching content is an important and integral part of any e-learning implementation. The problem we face in African Universities is that the development of physical e-learning infrastructure has progressed faster than the digitization of teaching materials. According to the 2009 RUFORUM ICT Situation Analysis of 25 member universities in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, 86% of the universities had campus back-bones and 45% had all their buildings and offices connected. However, the majority of lecturers and professors in our African Universities still keep paper based teaching materials. With the advent of e-learning the major challenge is for African Universities to devise a systematic strategy for academic faculty to digitize their teaching materials.

Critique of Policy Options

Dhlamini (2011) contends that there are contradictory views about who should be responsible for content production. "One view is that content development is the role of content developers and instructional designers who are guided by a course outline". She argues that "from RUFORUM's experience, this approach poses ownership problems, and questions about relevance of content, examples, and case studies used". She further states that "there are two types of contributor to content development – the subject-matter specialist and the instructional designer". Consequently, lecturers and professors are "essential during instructional design to mediate subject-matter knowledge and to input pedagogical strategy in course development".

There is a clear need for policy direction in clarifying the roles for content development, training academics in pedagogical concepts, facilitating a systematic process of content development and recognizing those academics that digitize their teaching materials.

> The commonly cited measures of progress and success in e-learning are the number of modules developed or the number of Online users. Rarely is success determined using measures of learner performance or quality of instruction.

Key Policy Recommendations

Academic Faculty members are key contributors to the process of content development and its digitization. They therefore need to be sup-ported in a number of ways to enable them carry out this important task:

1. Universities must institutionalize the training of academic faculty in pedagogical concepts as part of staff orientation and skills development. It is recommended that universities set up 'centres of academic development' to support this function.

2. Universities must not only establish E-learning Units but adequately staff them with various experts – e.g. educational technologists, instructional designers and graphic designers. These experts are important in supporting academic faculty during the digitization of teaching materials.

3. Universities are urged to schedule and sup-port Content Writing Retreats. Writing Retreats are the key to the digitization of teaching materials by academic faculty. Honorariums as a token of appreciation are necessary but are not the determining factor in relation to the actual production of the e-content.

4. Universities must recognize academic faculty that digitize teaching content. This can be done through including the aspect of e-learning and e-content production in staff performance appraisals and promotions.

About the Project

The project purpose was to improve the delivery methods for selected RUFORUM supported post-graduate programmes by building staff capacity to develop e-learning content and by encouraging the electronic sharing of research outputs.

Acknowledgment

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We also thank all the lectures who participated in this project.
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When setting standards for e-content, it seems that there is no common reference point. Where standards exist, each institution seems to take its own unique approach.

Sources Consulted

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There seems limited collaboration between e-learning practitioners in different institutions in Africa yet much can be shared and reciprocal support is quite possible.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a 19 year old net-work of 29 universities in 17 African Countries. RU-FORUM sees ICT effectively used and integrated into the operations of the member universities .

The Association of African Universities (AAU) is forum for consultation, exchange of information and cooperation among institutions of Higher Education in Africa