



Teaching Advancement at Universities (TAU) project:

**Repackaging learning materials to improve online content for information and knowledge management remote learning**

**Matli Walter, University of South Africa**

**Abstract**

University of South Africa (Unisa) is a comprehensive, open, distance and e-learning educational institution that has contributed significantly over the past 140 years to delivering graduates who are leaders and innovators in their chosen fields. Unisa's vision of being "the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity" shows its clear and deep commitment to being Africa-focused and Africa-centred while retaining its global relevance. Globally, teaching and learning in contact face-to-face universities had to transition to emergency remote teaching in 2020, following the disruptions caused by COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns imposed in many countries around the world. Digital information and resources became essential in supporting teaching and preparing material resources in the times of disruption. This project highlights several problems that were noted with the emergency remote teaching. This includes but not limited to, the resources used does not reflect local environment, content is from further afield. Furthermore, resources used do not reflect the culture of most students studying in my module. Therefore, how do we expect students to solve local challenges? As students feel not related to the literature among other resources used. Considered and context appropriate materials that are packaged to support learning in an online context allow a seamless transition where student learning is supported consistently through periods of calm and in times of disruption.

**About the focus module: PBA4808 ~~Pilot project~~ programme**

The Teaching Advancement at Universities (TAU) programme afforded me the opportunity to work on a project aimed at enhancing learning materials to improve online content for postgraduate students enrolled for Information and knowledge management module at UNISA school of business leadership.

The PBA4808 module is designed to provide insight into key managerial issues in firms that use information technology, as well as the knowledge to gain and sustain a competitive advantage. So, the module focuses on the manipulation of data to derive information via processes and technologies that form the basis of information systems in the new economy. The purpose of this module is to investigate the business value of knowledge and the Information System strategy with the current Digital Futures at work. For most students, the idea of business being dependent on knowledge will be new.

COVID-19 forced Open Distance eLearning ODeL institutions like UNISA to go full-time online. As a result, summer schools were converted to Ms Teams [online classes]. Physical assessment converted to online assessment. This had a negative impact not only on teaching and learning but business and students. Regarding business, printing of material such as module overviews/study guides and assignments – as everything was converted to online material. Dissemination of learning resources – from physical posting to accessing everything

on learner management system (LMS) and other electronic platforms to support teaching and sharing of learning information. Exam centres used by UNISA become irrelevant, and invigilators lost jobs. On the other end, students were also affected by the abrupt change of accessing learning materials. For example, access to enabling resources and adjustments. Summer school interaction on campus and the opportunities to network with like minds at the business school was affected by the move to online.

Initially, the TAU programme was a pilot project but now I can see it as a continuous programme that will be refined over the years to suit the needs of the students.

### **Identifying a teaching and learning problem**

The TAU programme afforded me the opportunity to work on repackaging learning materials to improve online content for information and knowledge management module, with the code PBA4808. The PBA4808 module deals with current information system issues and provides intellectual insights and competencies that inform the key decisions of management.

More evidence is emerging, and an increasing body of evidence is growing on improving online learning materials particularly since the advent of the pandemic. Recent literature on learning materials to improve online content focused largely on challenges and opportunities of online teaching and learning under COVID-19 (Liu, Chen & Pugh 2021) comparative study of online Vs. blended Learning (Alipour 2020), online technology to improve student engagement (Cossu, Awidi & Nagy 2022), teacher and student engagement when using learning materials (van Dulmen, Visser, Pepin & McKenney 2022), the impact of shifting from a traditional to a hybrid (Cossu, Awidi & Nagy 2022). Despite having several prior studies contributing knowledge to repackaging learning materials to improve online content, there is still a significant lack of studies that are focused on university business school setting. As such, the significance of the problem derives from the repackaging learning materials to improve online content in ODeL business school. As has been pointed out, postgraduate students are exposed to learning materials. However, the resources used do not reflect local environment the resources used are from abroad. For example, prescribed textbooks are not reflecting the culture of many students registered for the PBA4808 module. Yet, we expect to produce business graduate students who will solve our domestic of African challenges. What is the consequence? students feel they are not related to the learning materials used and this translates to poor results, poor online participation, and social inequalities.

Because our lectures have an interactive format, learning material that students use to study is essential. Our students are expected to be individuals with business or management backgrounds who wish to gain a broader and deeper understanding of functional information system and how this supports the firm's strategic intent. Therefore, it is essential to have resources that reflect domestic or African challenges and cases so they can relate to the content in an afford to easily adapt in providing possible responses to the South African and African challenges. Equally, it is important to expose business school students to international challenges since we intent to produce students who are relevant to the providing solutions to international business challenges.

### **A sense of what needs to be done**

In 2021 UNISA decided that all the module overview/study guide should contain the below paragraph about curriculum transformation. This was to make students understand curriculum transformation and embrace changes they are experiencing at the university. The Tau project tallied with the overall university mission of curriculum transformation, particularly the infusion of African epistemologies and philosophies in our learning materials.

*"Unisa has implemented a transformation charter based on five pillars and eight dimensions. In response to this charter, we have placed curriculum transformation high on the teaching and learning agenda. Curriculum transformation includes the following pillars: student-centred scholarship, the pedagogical renewal of teaching and assessment practices, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the infusion of African epistemologies and philosophies. These pillars inform the curriculum*

*transformation standards as outlined in the Curriculum Transformation Guidelines developed by the Curriculum Transformation Unit following the analysis of Colleges Curriculum Transformation Frameworks. The curriculum transformation standards will be integrated at both programme and module levels as a phased-in approach. You will notice a marked change in the teaching and learning strategy implemented by Unisa, together with how the content is conceptualised in your modules. We encourage you to embrace these changes during your studies at Unisa in a responsive way within the framework of transformation”.*

In addition, the TAU project was able to transform learning materials by ensuring that we learning materials used reflect locality by using articles that report on recent developments. However, it was also important to ensure that we internationalise in terms of real-time teaching for information and knowledge management module. The project investigated introducing international guest lecturers as part of transforming teaching and learning during summer schools. This was to afford business school postgraduate students to interact and ask questions to the international experts instead of the lecturer covering all the topics in the module.

The project went further to attempt to look at ways of using a local language in addition to the medium of teaching instruction which is English at UNISA. In the first phase, maybe look at introducing local language on the LMS by using dual languages on the control panel used to navigate the LMS so that students can easily adapt to using one or two of the local languages.

#### **What has been done**

I presented part of the TAU project at the 2021 ODeL virtual conference workshop. In 2022 February I presented part of my TAU project at an advanced stage at the Digital Learning Africa Summit 2022. Though I have made several applications to fund the project, I only received feedback towards the end of the TAU programme. Therefore, I will have to reconfigure the project and undertake phase two as I was not able to secure funding on time. The issue of linguistic accessibility in the ODeL business school is an important one. During this phase of the project there were mixed feelings. For instance, one may ask if it does not disadvantage people to teach them information and knowledge management module in local languages whereas when it is time to perform (academically and globally) the content is primarily accessible in English. What is the truer solution? teach information and knowledge management in English while we wait for content to be available in local languages? Or teach the module in local languages and develop translations of the content later?

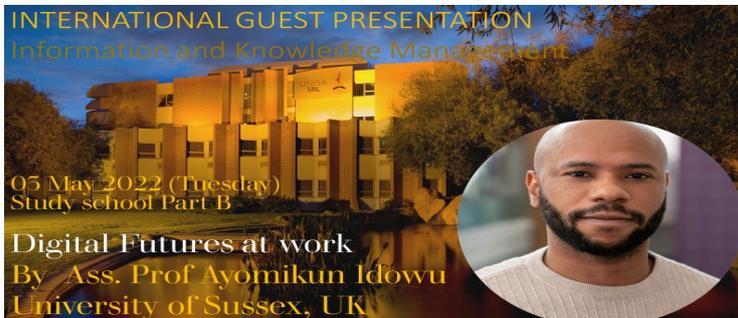
The first objectives were to use dual languages on the LMS navigating tools and to include a glossary table using two local languages, namely TshiVenda and Tsonga in the information and knowledge management module. The table below depicts some of the words that we managed to translate and use in the module. The decision was taken to start with two local languages XiTsonga and TshiVenda.

English	XiTsonga	TshiVenda
Announcement	Xitiviso	Ndivhadzo
Overview	Angarhelo	U tukufhadza
Topic	Nhloko-mhaka	Dzi thoho
Discussions	Nkanerisano	U dzudzanya mafhungo
Additional resources	Switirhisiwa swo engetelela	Zwinwe zwa zwishomiswa
Official study material	Switirhisiwa sea ximfumo swo dyondza	Zwishumiswa zwo vhals zwire
Assessment information	Voxokoxoko byo kambela	U thathuvhiwa ha mahungu

The second objective was to do away the prescribed textbook and introduce articles as learning resources. Articles within the African context were used to replace the non-contextualised literature. We could not find all the literature that contextualise South Africa and Africa in relation to the topics covered for the module. Therefore, we supplemented with international literature. Instead of using case studies from the non-contextualised textbook, we extracted and asked students to provide possible responses to the National Development Plan 2030 challenges. This was done to respond to having learning resources that reflect local environment.

The third objective of the project was to introduce international experts in the field as guest lecturers to share industry experience with business school students. This was essential as the move to moving summer schools from physical to online robed students with the opportunities to engage and network at face level. The postgraduate students at the business school should be tested to solve complex business problems and come up with technology driven solutions that have an impact on society. The two posters below are some of the few international guest lecturers that lectured on some of the topics covered under the information and knowledge management.





### Appraisal and next steps

The TAU project has been impactful in several ways. Firstly, the awareness-raising and capacity-building workshops achieved the intended goals, with business school students feeling empowered. The project encourages student participation, to reflect local setting, to embrace diversity, and to fuse local literature.

Despite the limitations, the TAU project has demonstrated proof of concept. It has provided a basis for me to undertake several further iterations, which accommodate a much wider scope of issues related to improving online content than has been possible within the TAU phase. Further iterations along with envisaged publication and dissemination activities should assist in making other lecturers understand the importance of repackaging learning materials to improve online context as useful practice in the ODeL context outlined at the beginning of this report.

List of references and the full report available on request.

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**Commented [1]:** this is the first time these are mentioned. what were these?