

STUDENTS, COMMUNICATE TOGETHER ON-LINE

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- Open Distance Learning (ODL) have adopted on-line technologies to facilitate teaching and learning and to enhance interaction between the students-to - students, students-to-educator, students - to - study material and students-to-ODL institution.
- Students are encouraged by the university to interact on-line by using the discussion forum and electronic mails
- Irrespective of an opportunity afforded by the university students are not or are minimally interacting on-line

Research objective

Determine the extent to which on-line interactive tools are used to enhance student-to-student, student-to-educator, student-to-ODL institution forms of interaction

Research question

- How can on-line interactive tools be used to enhance student-to-student, student-to-educator, student-to-study material and student-to- ODL institution forms of interaction?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

- Quantitative and descriptive
- Cross-sectional survey

Population: Four hundred and ten second and third year Health Services Management students of an ODL institution in South Africa

Sampling: Probability random sampling

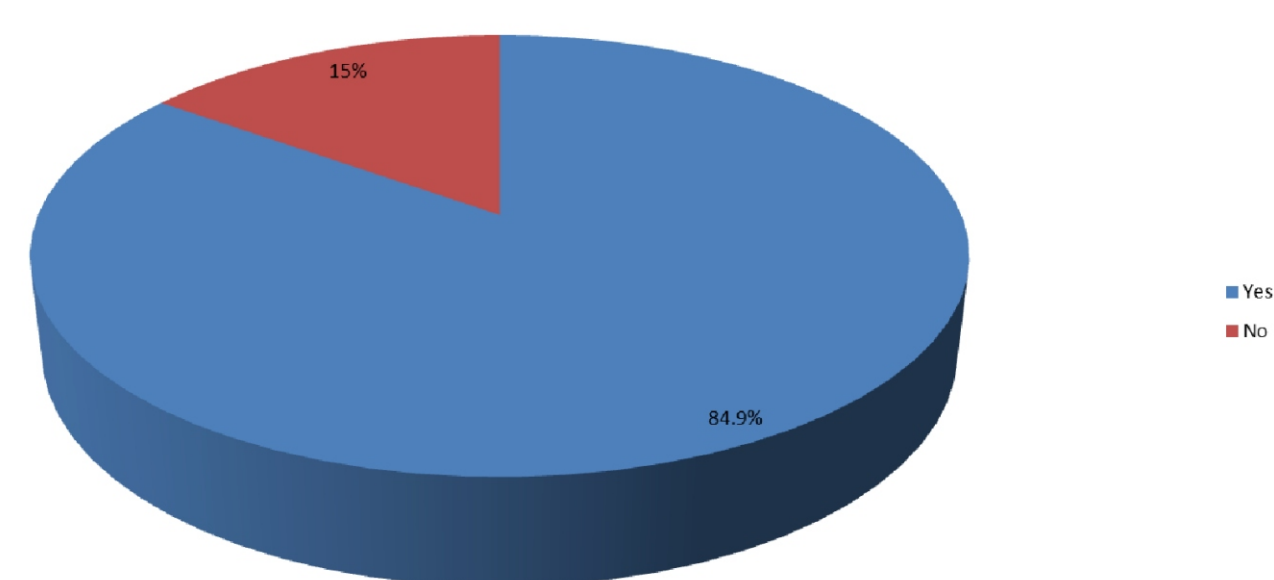
Data collection method

- A self-developed questionnaire was posted on-line
- Questionnaire consisted of Linkert scale and close-ended and open-ended questions
- Only students who do interact on-line should respond and return the questionnaire
- Duration for completion and due date for submission was ten to sixteen days
- Through SMS a reminder was sent to return the questionnaires
- Number of questionnaire returned were 87.
- Thus 51 from second year students and 36 from third year students

RESULTS

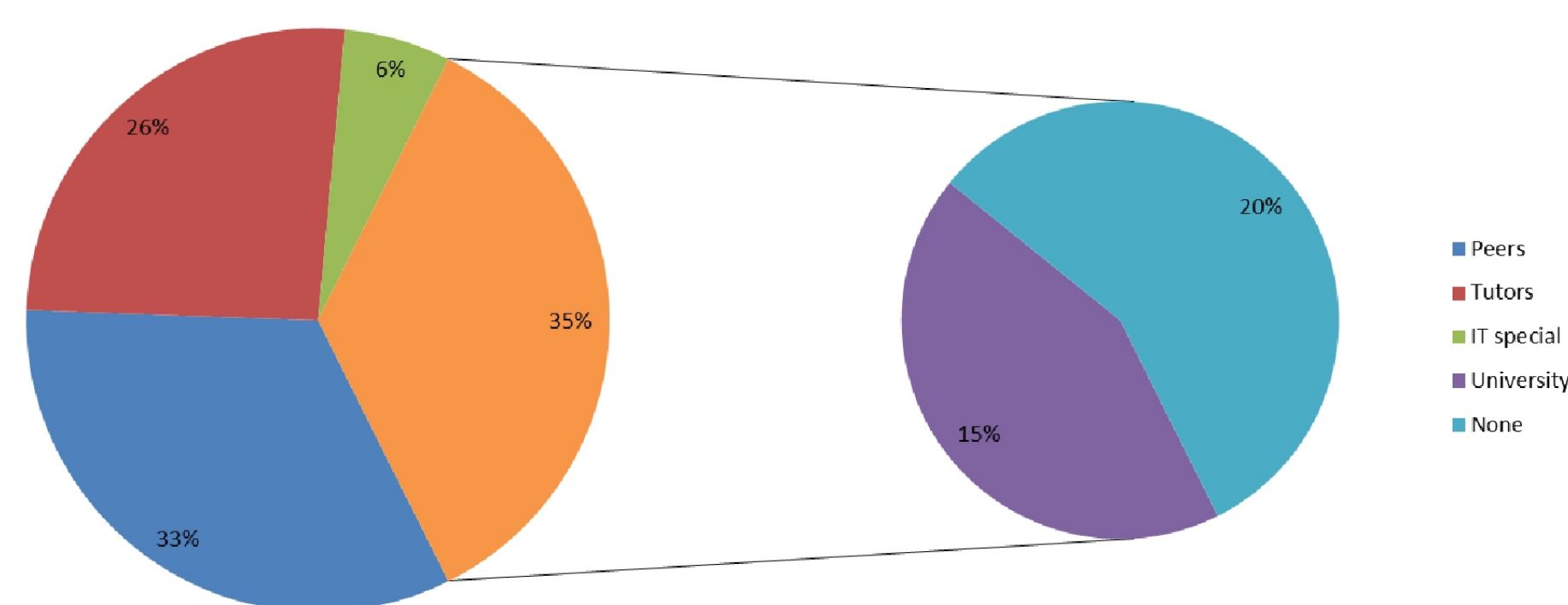
- Data analysis was done quantitatively and descriptively
- The results indicated that 84.9% of the students owned computers and 100% owned cellular phones
- Only 3.8% participated in on-line discussion forum

FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS BY COMPUTER OWNERSHIP



- Although many of the students own cell phones, the majority of them do not use it for teaching and learning only 30 (34%) communicate with peers on a monthly basis.
- Of the total number of respondents (n=86)
- Only 26 (30.1%) are good in using the discussion forum
- Twenty-one (24.4%) are good in accessing study material on-line
- This is questionable considering that the percentages are lower regarding the excellence and the good response relating to the utilisation of cell phones, access to study materials and the discussion forum

FIGURE 2: SUPPORT OF STUDENTS ON-LINE



- Findings 28 (33%) confirmed the support they get from their peers when interacting on-line
- Twenty-two (26%) receive support from their educators
- Seventeen (20%) no support from educators and their peers

DISCUSSION

- The results suggested that there should be high possibility that students might interact on-line as the computer is one of the tools which enables accessibility to on-line interactive tools
- Cell phones ownership by students might be related to social, more than academic relationship
- Majority (3.8%) of the students do not participate in on-line discussion forum
- Some students indicated that they struggle with the use of technology
- Educators not supportive and interacting minimally
- Sometimes the university systems are offline worse during assignment submission and registration
- A study by Barbera and Linder-VanBerschoot (2011) indicate that on-line educator must be resourceful in guiding students through the learning process as well as leading them to other people who can provide support such as the University technical support team
- Institutional support involves administrators
- Administrators to step in by assisting students with technological problems by ensuring that the system must not be off-line during peak times like assignment submission (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

CONCLUSION

- Student need support from the educators and the ODL institution in order to actively participate in the discussion forum
- Educators and ODL institution must be made aware of student's need for support
- ODL institution should consider intensive teaching and orientation of students of how to use on-line interactive tools

REFERENCE

- Barbera, E., & Linder-VanBerschoot, J. (2011) Systemic Multi-cultural Model for online Education. Tracing connections among learner input, instructional processes and outcomes, *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 12 (3),167-180.
- Moore, M.G., & Kearsley, G. (2012) *Distance education: A Systems view of On-line learning* (3rd ed.), United States of America: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.