BU
Bournemouth University

Briefing paper

The kaleidoscope of voices: An action research approach to informing institutional e-learning policy

The importance of digital competence and capability has been highlighted by the European Union (EU) policy framework which was designed to encourage and support digital competency. However, there is a huge gap in digital skills. The House of Lords reported that 2.2 million people in the UK were categorised as having only basic digital skills - "technology might as well be magic to these people". Furthermore, a labour force report indicated that 300,000 recruits are needed to invent and apply new technologies within the UK workforce. Therefore, the challenge is for Higher Education Institutions to incorporate these digital skills and facilitate institutional change towards enhancing technological learning.

Outline of research

This study used action research to explore the experience in one university and evaluates their approach to inform institutional eLearning policy to meet the UK workforce gap in digital skills of workers. This study encompasses the voice of an expert panel comprised of leaders from industry, academia and technology. Our students' voices are represented through our partnership working with the Students' Union. Both staff and student views are solicited through a survey on the latest Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) which is drawn upon to inform the eLearning strategy at Bournemouth University (BU).

Key findings and impact

- There are two spiral approaches that are used in digital learning in institutions. One of the approaches is the institutional top down approach which consists of a set of expectations around the use of tools, leverage virtual learning environment and a school-based set of eLearning experts charged with dissemination throughout the institution.
- The second spiral approach is the transformative change that is offered by BU and based on staff engagement with research, education and professional practice where BU uses common themes founded on the partnership with students to meet their digital literacy expectations and needs.

Read the full paper here:
http://www.ejel.org/volume14/issue5/p293

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- Findings indicate that to achieve strong research and technological leadership, there is a need to build internal coordination with key stakeholders, placing emphasis on the 'middle out' and a partnership approach to working with the students. These all contribute to a transformational and shared approach in institution-wide digital learning change contestation of Higher Education policy.
- This incorporation of all stakeholders' voices and input in the technologically enhanced learning offers a solution which uses the middle out approach to enhance technological advancement in learning for staff and students in Higher Education Institutions.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the need for better collaboration and coordination among key stakeholders to manage the change in learning in universities. They must realise the full potential of students in developing their digital competencies for greater learning, as well as preparing for employability in the UK and global workforce which is advancing towards technological necessity. Although the kaleidoscope of voices is not a simple or clear cut process, the use of action research helped to bring forward common themes expressed by different stakeholders. Overall, the study expresses the desire to assist students with TEL experiences that will help in ensuring we equip students for success in their careers.

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