

Challenges of Pursuing Master of Education in Evening Mode and its Implications for Blended Delivery in Higher Education: A Case Study of Jordan University College - Morogoro

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Abstract

This study investigated challenges of pursuing Master of Education (M. ED) programme in evening mode and its implications for blended delivery in higher education, taking Jordan University College (JUCo) - Morogoro as a case study. The study used case study research design employing mixed methods to investigate challenges from a sample of 95 students comprising of 50 first year and 45 second year students drawn using convenient sampling technique. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using the Structured Questionnaire and the Focused Group Discussion Guide and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 20.0) and the Data Reduction Technique (DRT) respectively. Findings have revealed that despite students' positive perceptions about the M. ED programme, 29 (30.5%) reported to have time to attend at least 16 – 18 lecture hours per week on the campus. The study has identified the following four major challenges that hindered students from attending lectures in the campus regularly: (i) lack of study leave from employers to enrol in the program, (ii) late evening schedules for the lectures i.e. from 16:00-20:00 hours weekly on the campus, (iii) difficulty getting transport after 20:00 hours from JUCo to their respective homes and safety-related challenges and (iv) fatigue / tiredness. The study has also indicated that 93 (97.9%) and 89 (93.7%) of students in the M. ED programme preferred blended delivery mode preferably a blend of online and evening face-to-face and online and executive face-to-face respectively. The implications for blended delivery mode have also been discussed and presented in this study.

Keywords: *perceptions, programme, evening mode, blended delivery and higher education.*

Introduction

The implementation of programmes in *evening* delivery mode for purposes of widening access of the students with job, social or political responsibilities is widely reported in higher education (Cherry, Freund & Duff, 2013; Sehar & Malik, 2021; Pas *et al.* 2020, Bus, 2017). According to Sehar *et al.* Malik 2021 and Pas *et al.* (2020), the evening delivery mode is one of the approaches of delivering programmes which requires students to physically attend lectures either on campus or at an agreed venue during the evenings.

The approach offers those who could not access higher education due to other economic, social, political or cultural commitments an opportunity to pursue higher education in the evening mode

(Maijo, 2021; Dziuban, *et al.* 2018; Muthuprasad *et al.* 2021). According to Maijo (2021), the approach allows working students to attend their other commitments and at the same time find time to attend lecturers in the evening after completing the other equally important commitments.

Evidence indicates that although evening delivery mode of programmes delivery is possible for delivery of programmes at any level of education, at higher education context, the mode is more commonly implemented for delivery of postgraduate programmes such as postgraduate diplomas, master's and doctoral programmes (Sehar & Malik, 2021; Bus, 2017).

In recognizing the flexibility offered by the evening delivery mode, in 2018/19 academic year, Jordan University College (JUCo) conducted a market survey study to investigate stakeholders' perceptions and readiness for implementation of Master of Education (M. ED) by evening mode at JUCo (JUCo, 2018).

The study revealed that over 85% of the stakeholders perceived positively the establishment of the M. ED programme in evening mode at JUCo. As perceived by stakeholders, the M. ED programme in evening mode was convenient for the working staff who could not leave their homes or offices to join regular M. ED at JUCo, there is a growing demand for the programme and that majority of potential students reside within the Morogoro region. The study recommended for the development and implementation of the M. ED programme in evening mode with effect from the 2018/2019 academic year.

As a response to the recommendation, JUCo through the Department of Education (DE) of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) developed the M. ED programme in evening mode which was then approved by the Saint Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT)'s Senate in August 2018 and accredited by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) in November 2018 for implementation.

A total of 67 students were registered in the first cohort of the M. ED programme in evening mode at JUCo (JUCo, 2018). Enrolment data in the M. ED programme in evening mode for the past five years indicate that the number of registered students in the M. ED programme in evening mode has been fluctuating with an average registration of 50 students per year (highest 67 and lowest 45) which is far below the expectations of JUCo for implementing such a programme. The discrepancy between expectations and reality in terms of enrollment is what triggered the interest

to conduct the study reported in this article to investigate the challenges of pursuing the M. ED programme in evening mode at Jordan University College.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was *to investigate challenges of pursuing the M. ED programme in evening mode and its implications for blended delivery in higher education, taking at Jordan University College as a case study*. Specifically, the study sought to address the following specific objectives;

1. Determine students' perceptions of the M. ED programme by evening mode.
2. Find out students' attendance patterns to the M. ED programme evening lectures.
3. Determine the students' preferred programme delivery mode for enhancing learning flexibility in the M. ED programme in higher education and at JUCo in particular.

Review of Literature

Numerous studies have reported stakeholders' perceptions of traditional programmes and the need for flexible modes of programmes delivery in higher education including students' perceptions of the programme, the challenges of undertaking studies through a particular delivery mode, attendance patterns, students' preferred programmes and delivery mode for enhanced learning flexibility in higher education (Sehar *et al.* 2021; Maijo, 2021; Swanson *et al.* 2019; Keskin, 2021; Garba & Abdulhamid, 2024).

It has been commonly established that students' perception of a programme is among the critical determinants for students' enrollment in a particular programme (Cherry, *et al.* 2013; Sehar & Malik, 2021; Bus, 2017). Evidence indicates that students who are fresh from schools perceive full-time campus-based programmes as convenient and therefore are attracted to enroll in such programmes (Cherry *et al.* 2013). On the other hand, students with full-time job responsibilities or with serious social, political or economic engagements perceive programmes offered through flexible modes as more convenient to enroll than other programmes (Sehar & Malik, 2021; Bus, 2017).

Regardless of profiles, studies indicate that generally, students are positive about programmes for various reasons including the fact that the programmes provide education that facilitates career growth and development (Cherry *et al.* 2013). Also, students are positive about the programmes because such programmes develop subject-centred knowledge and skills, promote soft skills such as information literacy, problem-solving, communication skills, critical thinking skills and others (Bus, 2017; Sehar *et al.* 2021).

Programmes' demand for students to regularly attend lectures physically on campus is another critical determinant for students' decision to enroll in a specific programme (Pas, *et al.* 2020). Mokhtar *et al.* (2021) and Moores *et al.* [n.d] identify various factors influencing students' physical attendance to lectures on campus, including lecture scheduling at specific hours of the day, among others. According to Mokhtar *et al.* (2021), majority of students dislike lectures scheduled either early morning, late evening, weekends or holidays which require them to disrupt their social and sometimes job responsibilities.

Recent trends indicate that the majority of students who have full-time engagements related to jobs, social-economic or political responsibilities prefer virtual attendance to physical attendance (Maijo, 2021; Mtebe & Raphael, 2013; Dziuban, *et al.* 2018; Muthuprasad *et al.* 2021; Namyssova *et al.* 2019). As perceived by students, virtual attendance allows them to pursue studies without necessarily required to disengage in other responsibilities (Maijo, 2021). Regardless of the nature of attendance whether virtual or physical, lecture attendance is demonstrably related to students' effective learning and improved academic outcomes (Lukkarinen *et al.* 2016).

Students' preference for programme delivery mode is another determinant for students' decision to enroll in a specific programme (Bramorski & Madan, 2016; Maijo, 2021; Swanson *et al.* 2019; Keskin, 2021; Garba & Abdulhamid, 2024). Studies indicate that students prefer flexible modes of delivery such as Open and Distance Learning mode which allow students to study without a study leave from employer or disengaging from their other social, economic or political responsibilities (Maijo, 2021).

According to Swanson *et al.* (2019), students in postgraduate programmes prefer the blended delivery mode over traditional on-campus-based face-to-face programmes. Blended delivery is a mode of programme delivery in which students learn via online media as well as traditional face-to-face learning, which also integrates face-to-face with distance learning (TCU, 2022). Blended

delivery is preferred because it provides opportunity for flexible learning from anywhere any time supplemented by online learning through the use of diverse learning tools such as recorded lectures, texts, chat forums and many others which make learning more interactive (Garba *et al.* 2024).

Studies recommend that higher education should prioritise online and blended delivery technologies integration into face-to-face campus-based delivery, leveraging innovative pedagogies to enhance students' enrollment, learning and academic outcomes (Garba *et al.* 2024; Keskin, 2021; Swanson *et al.* 2019).

Methodology

This study was conducted using case study research design employing mixed methods to investigate the challenges of pursuing the M. ED programme in evening mode at JUCo. According to Yin (2014), a case study research design is an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not easily separated.

A total of 95 students pursuing the M. ED programme in evening mode at JUCo comprising of 50 first year students and 45 second year students drawn using convenient sampling technique participated in the study. The convenient sampling technique was preferred because it ensured participation of only those with adequate experience of pursuing the M. ED programme in evening mode at JUCo. Students' participation was voluntary and ethical issues were considered including informing them about the nature of the study and seeking for their consent.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a Structured Questionnaire and a Focused Group Discussion Guide respectively for both first- and second-year students pursuing the M. ED programme in evening mode at JUCo during 2023/24 academic year. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 20.0) for quantitative data and Data Reduction Technique (DRT) for qualitative data as described in Creswell (2009) and findings presented based on the specific objectives of the study.

Findings of the Study

Students' perceptions of the M. ED programme

The first specific objective of the study reported in this article was to determine students' perceptions of the M. ED programme offered at Jordan University College. Findings in Table 1 reveal that the program develops 21st Century skills [93 students (97.9%)] and in-depth expertise in areas of specialisation [91 (95.8%)].

Table 1. *Students' perceptions of the M. ED programme in evening mode*

Students' perceptions	Responses (n=95)	
	Frequency	%
Develops in-depth expertise in areas of specialization	91	95.8%
Develops critical reflections on complex educational issues	88	92.6%
Promotes skills in solving contemporary educational issues using research	65	68.4%
Contribute towards reducing the shortage of human resources in education	79	83.2%
Engage students in cutting edge research in education	68	71.6%
Develops skills for learning and working independently	85	89.5%
Develops 21 st Century skills	93	97.9%

Findings also reveal that the programme develops critical reflections on complex educational issues [88 (92.6%)] and skills for learning and working independently [85 (89.5%)].

Moreover, findings reveal that the programme contributes towards reducing the shortage of human resources in education [79 (83.2%)], engages students in cutting edge research in education [68 (71.6%)] and promotes skills for solving contemporary educational issues using research [65 (68.4%)].

Students' attendance patterns in the M. ED programme evening lectures

The second specific objective of the study reported in this article was to find out students' attendance patterns to the M. ED programme evening lectures offered at Jordan University College. Findings in Table 2 reveal that majority of students i.e. 57 (60.0%) attend only 7-9 lecturer hours per week and other 53 (55.8%) attend only 10-12 lecture hours per week.

Table 2. *Students' attendance pattern in the M. ED programme in evening lectures*

Attendance pattern in the M. ED programme by evening lectures	Responses (n=95)	
	Freq	%
1-3 lecture hours per week	43	45.3%
4-6 lecture hours per week	41	43.2%
7-9 lecture hours per week	57	60.0%
10-12 lecture hours per week	53	55.8%
13-15 lecture hours per week	35	36.8%
16-18 lecture hours per week	29	30.5%

On the other hand, findings in Table 2 reveal that only a few students i.e. 35 (36.8%) and 29 (30.5%) attend 13-15 lecture hours or 16-18 lecture hours per week respectively. Also, only a few students i.e. 43 (45.3%) and 41 (43.2%) attend 1-3 lecture hours or 4-6 lecture hours per week respectively.

Analysis of interview responses identify four major challenges students' hindering regular attendance to lecture hours per week. One of the challenges is the lack of study leave to enroll in the program from employers as reported by majority of students as evidenced in the following quotation:

“.....it is rather very difficult to get study leave permission from my employer because of a few numbers of teachers in our school. This is a major cause for me to miss some lecture hours on campus scheduled in a week (ASH 01-12-2023).

Another challenge that was reported by majority of students during focused group discussion is unfriendly scheduling of the lectures i.e evening from 16-20 hours weekly on the campus and that given the distance from their workplaces (about 45-50 kms away from JUCo) make them unable to attend lectures on time, as evidenced in the following quotation;

“.....my work place is very far from JUCo, so I take daladala and change at Msamvu before I take another one to nane-nane and then bodaboda to JUCo. This is because I work at Mvomero primary school and lectures begin late evening at 4:00pm on campus at JUCo. This makes me miss some lecturers in a wee.....”

Difficulty getting transport after 20:00 hours from JUCo to students' homes and related safety challenges is another challenge which hinders students from timely attending lecture hours on campus at JUCo, as evidenced in the quotation;

“..... getting transport from JUCo to Mikese after 20:00 hours has often been a problem for me. Sometimes I risk taking Lorry transport to Mikese, it is a risk because I don't know the kind of people on board in the Lorry but since I don't want to get home very late, I just take such transport...”

Fatigue/ tiredness is another challenge hindering students from attending lecture hours regularly at JUCo. Majority of the students reported that:

“.....I come to lectures straight from work which involves travelling long distances (more than 50 kms) to JUCo campus. This makes me feel stressful and experience fatigue and tiredness which makes me unable to attend some lectures on campus.....”

Students' preferred programme delivery mode

The third specific objective of the study reported in this article was to determine students' preferred programme delivery mode for enhancing learning flexibility in the M. ED programme at Jordan University College. Findings in Figure 1 reveal that students prefer a blend of online and evening face-to-face 93 (97.9%) and online and executive face-to-face modes of program delivery 89 (93.7%).

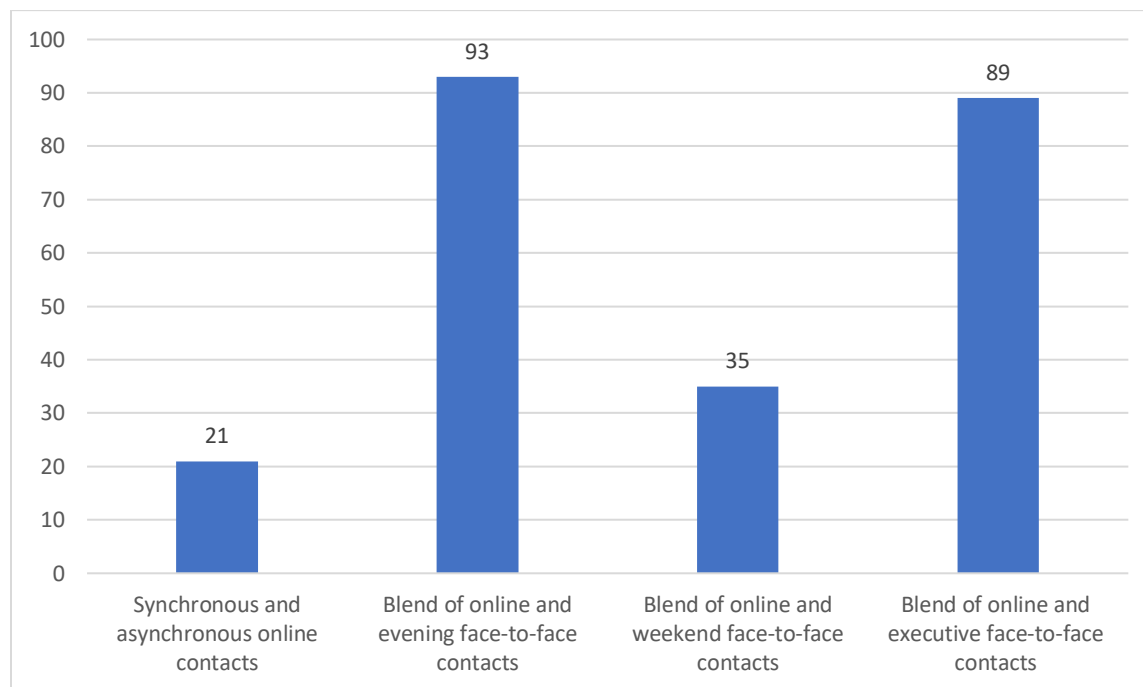


Figure 1. *Students' preferred delivery mode for the M. ED programme*

Only a few of the students indicated preference for synchronous and asynchronous (21%) and online and weekend face-to-face mode (35%) as indicated in Figure 1.

Discussion and conclusions

The study reported in this article investigated challenges of pursuing the M. ED programme by evening mode and its implications for blended learning implementation in higher education, considering Jordan University College in Morogoro as a case study. Findings have revealed that despite students' positive perceptions, there are four major challenges that hinder students from successfully pursuing the M. ED programme by evening mode at JUCo. The challenges include the lack of study leave from employers to enroll in the programme, unfriendly scheduling of the lectures i.e. from 16-20 hours weekly on campus, difficulty getting transport after 20:00 hours from JUCo to students' homes and related safety and fatigue / tiredness. According to students, such challenges hinder them from attending lectures regularly at JUCo as required by the M. ED programme.

As a result of the challenges, only a few of the students i.e. 29 (30.5%) were able to attend at least 16 - 18 lecture hours per week on campus at JUCo. This is a challenge which should be resolved

for successful students' pursuit of the M. ED programme by evening mode, attract more students and retain students in the programme at JUCo.

To address such a challenge, the study has established that majority of students prefer blended learning which blends online and evening face-to-face 93 (97.9%) and online and executive face-to-face 89 (93.7%) in order to further enhance learning flexibility of the programme.

These findings imply that blended learning have the potential in addressing challenges experienced by students when pursuing M. ED by evening mode at JUCo. This is because students perceive blended learning as a convenient mode which allows students who have job-responsibilities to also pursue M. ED through a blended learning. It also enhances learning flexibility which extends opportunity to higher education at national, regional and international level. According to Mokhtari *et al.* (2021), Mtebe *et al.* (2013), Dziuban, *et al.* (2018), Muthuprasad *et al.* (2021) and Namyssova *et al.* (2019) blended learning is a proper solution for addressing challenges associated with conventional delivery modes including evening mode, enhanced students' enrollment, learning flexibility, reduction of absenteeism in lectures and increasing students' active participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that higher learning institutions such as JUCo and others should consider conducting a comprehensive study to investigate the feasibility of implementing the M. ED programmes in blended learning delivery mode in their respective institutions. This is because findings from this study have revealed that students are generally positive about blended learning and are of the view that blended learning delivery have the potential of addressing challenges they experience in the traditional delivery modes.

Specifically, the study may seek to determine the availability of critical enabling conditions or factors for the successful implementation of blended learning in such institutions. Recommendations from such a study may be useful not only for such higher learning institutions but also for other higher learning institutions in Tanzania that are determined to transform higher education delivery through blended delivery mode.

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