



PEBL West Africa has led to changes in capacity, practice, and policy

Supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning in West Africa (PEBL WA) enabled academics and students across 12 universities in Ghana and Nigeria to build sustainable capacity for blended learning. It was designed in response to the growing demand for higher education in West Africa by improving the pedagogical skills of university faculty in blended learning. Additionally, it aimed to enhance regional collaboration and teaching quality by enabling the exchange of knowledge and learnings between universities across the region.

The evaluation of the programme using a collaborative outcomes reporting (COR) approach found that it had increased flexibility in Nigerian and Ghanaian higher education systems to expand capacity to meet increasing learning demands without eroding quality which was the programme's intended outcome. Trainings in blended learning pedagogies, quality assurance and the use of learning management systems were delivered to 3,000 lecturers and 4,000 students.

Additionally, there were attitudinal changes, enhanced capacity of lecturers and students, improved infrastructure, and the development of policies and institutionalisation of capacity building activities. There is clear evidence that the changes observed will be sustained which was demonstrated by the stories of change provided by partner and non-partner universities of the programme.



Partnership building

After the training, I can generate content for the courses I teach. I have been able to minimize my face-to-face encounters with my students. I have provided more content on their course pages and developed videos and other materials that make it easy for self-learning.” Teacher, Ghana

There were also clear improvements in institutional policies, practices, and infrastructure which supports the adoption of blended learning. This included the development of new blended learning strategies and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that blended learning courses met high-quality standards and maintained educational integrity as capacities expanded. As PEBL concludes in Ghana and Nigeria, our evaluation of the project has provided three key insights on blended learning:

Insight #1: PEBL has fostered a culture of digital education

The blended learning approach not only improved online learning facilitation but also increased student and academic staff confidence in using learning management systems and technology. This led to increased student engagement and motivation, thus promoting a culture of collaborative learning.





One participant highlighted the university's transition to online teaching with a mandatory requirement for lecturers to upload their lessons onto the Moodle platform and deliver the course through it. Simply focusing on streaming and recording technology was no longer an option for universities. Many were already forward thinking and were using their own learning management systems with varying degrees of expertise spread across the participating universities.

For some, the shift to online learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the PEBL WA programme, may have been a catalyst for this change, but a key enabler to this shift was the continuous support and commitment from university management, the development and implementation of supportive national policies by national regulators, and ongoing collaboration within the partner university network. IT and internet infrastructure were upgraded to meet the demands of blended learning and the opportunities it presented. In Ghana, students are increasingly enrolling in courses delivered through blended learning, highlighting the accessibility and convenience of this mode of education. A partner university participant cited the "noticeable yearning among academic and professional community members to fill the knowledge gap in technology and pedagogy. The programme ignited a thirst for continuous learning and improvement."





Insight #2: PEBL has transformed educational practices

Implementing blended learning requires student and academic staff to adapt to new teaching strategies leading to increased versatility and capability to integrate technology into teaching and learning, creating a generation with the skills to navigate a world where digital competence is increasingly important.

The training from PEBL WA has significantly influenced the ability of academic staff in partner universities to develop and deliver quality online and blended learning materials with a majority implementing blended learning approaches. The stories of change submitted by partner universities emphasised the scale and quality of the training.

The PEBL approach enhanced capabilities in blended learning facilitation and course design, enabling lecturers to move away from simply transferring notes online to embracing robust multimedia infrastructure, including the establishment of information and communications technology (ICT) centres within the universities. The training partners received on “using and designing open educational resources” was referred to as a “skill booster”. Staff were trained in repurposing the current face-to-face curriculum with courses repurposed into blended learning mode. “This awareness laid the groundwork for a paradigm shift in the way teaching and learning were perceived at the institution”, a participant from Nigeria noted.





The repurposed courses go through intensive quality assurance mechanisms which take a long time. As at the time of the project's evaluation, 6 out of 12 partner lecturers in Ghana indicated that their repurposed courses were yet to be approved by the quality assurance units of their institutions, highlighting the important role of quality assurance in blended learning. Some of the institutions were able to have their repurposed course modules approved by their education commission during the project with others still awaiting approval. The project also enabled the development of 15 quality assured, credit-bearing blended courses by the participating partner institutions which have been posted on OER Africa.

University lecturers in Nigeria also felt that PEBL activities had contributed substantially to the positive changes they witnessed in their institutions, and the increased capacity to develop and use blended learning materials. Some of the participating institutions had little knowledge of blended learning prior to PEBL but have since now adopted the approach with management of their institutions updating facilities to support blended learning. A key factor to this transformation is PEBL's network building activities which contributed to establishing a strong network. Implementation partners and partner university leads testified to the crucial role network building activities played, with some citing the initial challenges they experienced and how they solved them following interaction with other partner universities.

Insight #3: PEBL has led to development of blended learning policies

Most of the partner universities developed or are in the process of developing a blended learning policy or e-learning strategic plan in their various institutions. This is an indication of the wider acknowledgement and acceptance of its importance by university management, and an indication of an attempt to expand capacity to incorporate blended learning courses into their academic plans. The policies will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the sustainability of PEBL WA and underpin the positive changes introduced by the programme.



However, setting national standards, shaping educational policies that promote blended learning, and providing guidelines to ensure consistency across educational institutions, all fall under the jurisdiction of the national education councils. There are ongoing efforts to set out the appropriate blended and distance learning guidelines which will be completed following the end of the PEBL WA programme.

The national education councils' influence helps create a robust framework that supports integration of blended learning in educational systems. Notwithstanding the explicit delineation of the role that national education councils play, partner universities embarked on adopting blended learning policies to facilitate uptake and integration. This led to enhanced capabilities demonstrated by academic's abilities to create course modules and increased confidence in the use of technology in teaching and engaging with students and colleagues.



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