Providing opportunities for equality: Pacific islands students’ experiences and perception on the use of ICT and e-learning.

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ABSTRACT

While embracing the technological change and negotiating the changing demands of its diverse student needs, the University of the South Pacific (USP), is constantly engaging in various forms of curricula reforms to ensure that it best fits its context. USP needs to recognise the importance of meeting the needs of its culturally diverse student population and at the same time remain accountable to the needs of its member countries and donor partners. A recent move by USP to offer more of its courses through online and blended modes in order to reach out to regional students has been received with mixed reactions by both students and staff. As such, there is a need for more research to gauge the effectiveness and inclusiveness in terms of meeting the diverse needs of our regional students, particularly those studying through online, distance and flexible modes (DFL). This research paper presents the results of a small scale study that investigated the significance of this curriculum reform in terms of access and equity and how it is perceived by both Laucala and regional students. More specifically, the paper intends to highlight the perceptions of students in online learning and teaching of one of the four interdisciplinary courses. The course is currently offered to both Laucala and the regional students through a common curriculum content using an online mode. The paper presents a number of interesting results on students’ perceptions of e-learning and e-teaching at USP.

Keywords: curriculum reforms, e-learning, inclusiveness, distance and flexible learning, culturally diverse needs, regional hub, ICT