

# Enroll for that online course

MONDAY FEBRUARY 10 2020



The fact that pursuing an online programme is cheaper should be reason enough to consider it. Internet Photo

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By Promise Twinamukye

Michael Ssekadde Mwebesa's journey of online studying started in August 2018 when a friend sent him a list of scholarships for online courses.

After much thought, Mwebesa applied for three of the scholarships on the list. As luck would have it, one of his applications yielded positive results and he was admitted to study International law at the Atlantic International University.

## **Past experience**

“I used to share a house with a friend who was studying an online architecture course. I used to see him studying on his computer,” Mwebesa recalls. This gave him a vague idea of what it meant to study online.

## **Online courses**

Online courses or learning is education that takes place on the Internet.

www.igi-global.com describes online courses as a set of instructional experiences using the digital network for interaction, learning and dialogue; it does not require any face-to-face meetings in a physical location.

It is often referred to as “e-learning”. However, online learning is just one type of “distance learning” - the umbrella term for any learning that takes place across distance and not in a traditional classroom.

Mwebesa was determined to pursue the course despite and inspite of the challenges that he knew he would have to grapple with.

## **Internet connectivity and use**

Since Mwebesa preferred the comfort of his home or church where he frequented to a public café, he had to buy a monthly Internet bundle of nine gigabytes which would last for a month to enable him ‘attend’ the numerous 30-minute lectures.

However, access to the Internet is not the only challenge. In-depth knowledge on how to use and navigate the Internet for effective use is also a challenge.

Robert Sanday Alule, executive director of St Mary’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication in Kampala says a great number of youth are always eager to pursue

online studies but most are let down by their limited knowledge of computer applications.

“Yes, they are generation ‘Z’ but their knowledge is in using mobile phones and social media applications. We usually encourage them to master the use of Internet browsing on mobile phones and they find it beneficial,” Alule says.

He says the working class are the biggest clients he receives for online courses because apart from these programmes being convenient, this particular group of people appreciates the need to always upgrade their academic qualifications.

### **Mode of instruction**

The course content for online courses is usually identical to that of a traditional class. Some people think the work load is even more demanding than it is in a traditional class because a learner has to be self-motivated and directed.

Alule says just the traditional mode, the online model emphasizes an interactive learning environment, designed to stimulate dialogue between the instructors and students and among students themselves.

Whereas traditional classes require both the instructor and students to take active roles, (the instructor will often act as a facilitator, organising activities that engage students directly rather than relying too heavily on lectures and memorisation), online learning offers more lecture hours and less contact hours to the students.

Naturally, the traditional form of learning offers more contact hours for practical sessions and less lecture hours. But online courses bridge the gap through providing video tutorials for online students or carry out live streaming when it comes to practical

subjects for example newspaper and magazine design in journalism and mass communication, among others.” he says.

### **Requirements**

The minimum requirement for students to enroll for an online course is access to a computer, Internet, and the motivation to succeed in a non-traditional classroom.

However, Alule says that academic qualifications depend on the award the student applying intends to pursue, for example the National Council for Higher Education in Uganda requires that a diploma applicant must have a strong principal pass in his or her advanced level of secondary education together with five credits in ordinary level of education.

Those interested in bachelor’s degree programmes must have a minimum of two principal passes in the relevant subjects and five credits in ordinary level of education.

Those enrolled for master’s degrees must have a minimum of a second class upper of their bachelor’s degree.

### **Mode of examination**

Mr Alule shares that online students are examined depending on the examination policy of a particular institution. Students sit exams from where ever they are and get their results immediately after they submit the test of examination. The assessments are timed and mostly simulations or objective question types.

“At St Mary’s School of Journalism and mass communication, course work which is done online constitutes of 15 per cent of the final mark, course tests done online constitutes of 15 per cent of the final mark and end of semester exams constitute of 70

per cent of the final mark. However, this can be determined from time to time by the examination board,” Alule says.

### **Benefits**

Online studying provides an excellent method of course delivery unbound by time or location allowing for accessibility to instruction at anytime from anywhere.

“Unfortunately, some people often think online students are not smart enough for a traditional college or university and that they don’t get “real” degrees,” he says.

### **Convenience**

While traditional classes would mean having to leave home to move to an unknown place and incurring accommodation and travel costs, online studying enables you to study at your place and time of convenience. Forget about attending classes for hours, sitting in an uncomfortable chair, and suffering from back pain by the end of the day.

All lectures and needed materials are provided via online platforms, so you’ll easily access them from the comfort of your home. You will not take public transport to get to campus, you won’t have to spend money on fuel for your car, etc.

### **Resume boost**

It doesn’t matter where your career stands at this moment; an online programme will always look good on your resume. It will show potential employers that you are committed to learning, improving yourself and are eager to obtain more knowledge and skills. Hiring managers don’t see online degrees as inferior to traditional ones. A degree is a degree.

### **Self-paced learning**

When you start browsing through interesting online courses and programmes, you’ll

notice the self-paced label on most of them. What does this mean? Self-paced learning means that the students can start completing the targets at any time.

### **Lower costs**

The fact that pursuing an online programme is cheaper should be reason enough to consider it. Costs come minus accommodation, transport and other fees that cannot be avoided in traditional learning.

A number of universities across the world offer half and full scholarships to online students in order to promote these programmes and education and facilitate passion driven individuals to achieve their dreams.